



## **Work Package 9**

Communication, Dissemination, and Exploitation

### **Deliverable D9.2**

Guidelines to Use Participatory Methodologies

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## Project Information

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<b>PP</b>	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
<b>RE</b>	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
<b>CO</b>	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

## Overview of Partners

<b>PARTICIPANT ORGANISATION NAME</b>	<b>ACRONYM</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>
University of Münster	WWU	Germany
European Research Services GmbH	ERS	
Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning	DIE	
Autonomous University of Barcelona	UAB	Spain
University of Turku	UTU	Finland
University of Vienna	UNIVIE	Austria
University of Lisbon	ULisboa	Portugal
University of Porto	UPORTO	
University of Genoa	UNIGE	Italy
University of Urbino	UNIURB	
Codici Cooperativa Sociale Onlus	CODICI	
University of Plovdiv	PU	Bulgaria
University of Thessaloniki	AUTh	Greece

## Executive Summary

The European research project "Constructing Learning Outcomes in Europe: A Multi-Level Analysis of (Under-)Achievement in the Life Course" (CLEAR), funded by Horizon Europe, focused on understanding the factors that influence the educational outcomes of young people in eight European countries. To enrich the research with a plurality of perspectives and voices, the project integrated a Transversal Participatory Approach (TPA). This approach allowed for the co-design and co-creation of knowledge with a wide range of stakeholders, including young people, educators, policy makers, and representatives of associations.

This document, Deliverable D9.2, summarizes the experience gained in applying the TPA within the CLEAR project. The document is aimed at researchers who wish to effectively integrate participatory methodologies into their studies, offering a set of practical and conceptual guidelines. The drafting of these guidelines specifically drew upon the results and reflections from the National Participatory Document (D8.3), which highlighted how participatory activities are a crucial means to challenge dominant interpretations of social phenomena and to involve social actors as active partners in the co-construction of knowledge. The purpose is to demonstrate how empirical research can be enriched and validated through a constant dialogue with the social actors directly involved in the phenomena being analysed.

The document structures the participatory process into different phases, highlighting the main lessons learned throughout the project. Participatory activities must have clear and well-defined goals that go beyond a simple data collection exercise. It is fundamental to establish what knowledge one wants to co-produce and how it will integrate with the overall research objectives—a crucial step for building a foundation of trust and shared commitment.

Meticulous planning is essential, as an effective participatory process requires complementarity with the main research phases. For example, in the CLEAR project, the Innovation Forums were designed not only to present but also to validate the results of empirical research, translated into accessible language, and to gather further insights and perspectives.

The success of a participatory activity also depends on the choice of methods and tools that facilitate conversation and co-creation. The use of graphic kits, mind maps, and other visual techniques proved to be fundamental in overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers, promoting a more dynamic and inclusive dialogue among people with different backgrounds and ages. Concurrently, the document emphasizes the importance of expert facilitation, capable of managing group dynamics and ensuring that even less-heard voices, such as those of young students, have space to express themselves.

Finally, the participatory process does not end with the event itself. It is essential to plan a feedback phase for participants, sharing the results obtained and acknowledging their contribution. The document suggests that the final report, presented in a concise and easy-to-read format, becomes a tool for maintaining the connection with participants, valuing their participation as a mutualistic process of exchange.

In conclusion, the participatory activities within the CLEAR project have proven to be a powerful tool for enriching research and producing more meaningful and relevant knowledge. The direct involvement of stakeholders allowed for the identification of a need to move beyond standardized approaches to education and to promote learning environments that foster listening, trust, and peer support. This document provides an operational framework for successfully integrating participation into research projects, highlighting the importance of a rigorous methodological approach and an ethical commitment to the co-creation of knowledge.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Guidelines	4
2.1 Defining the purposes of the participatory activity	4
2.2 Designing the participatory process	6
2.2.1. Collaborative methodology to design participatory activities	7
2.2.2 Designing participatory events: key elements and practical considerations	11
2.3 Identifying participatory methods and techniques	17
2.4 Managing group dynamics	23
2.5 Setting	25
2.6 Communication and language issues	26
2.7 Ethics and data management	29
Recommended resources	33
3. Conversation Starters Toolkit	37
3.1 Introduction	37
3.2 Handbooks	37
3.2.1 Managing the opening session	38
3.2.2 Managing the core activity	40
Tool Handbook 1 - WP3_What if You Lived Elsewhere?	41
Tool Handbook 2 - WP4_What if You Were Them?	45
Tool handbook 3 - WP5_What If You Could Hear Their Voices?	49
Tool Handbook 4 - WP6_What If You Could Change the Educational System?	53
3.2.3 Managing the closing session and post-event process	59
Annexes	61
Annex 1 Local Work Plan	61
Annex 2 - Conversation starters graphic kit	63

## List of figures

Figure 1 - Participation Design Board	9
Figure 2 - General framework for the IF design	13
Figure 3 - Participatory Activity Travelogue template	15

Figure 4 - The World Café process	20
Figure 5 - Participants position a dot according to their personal experience	43
Figure 6 - Participants position the stickers according to their opinion	43
Figure 7 - Participants are engaged in the discussion around research findings (labels) and their perceptions (stickers)	44
Figure 8 - Participants write down some keywords on sticky notes	47
Figure 9 - Sharing of sticky notes in a final word cloud	47
Figure 10 - Introducing the excerpt from an interview conducted with a young person during the research	51
Figure 11 - A participant positioning bullets on the diagram	56
Figure 12 - Alternative format for collecting participants positioning on scenarios	57
Figure 13 - Results from participants assessment on the diagram is shown and commented	57
Figure 14 - Participants commenting on impacts in their contexts	58
Figure 15 - Preview of a concise report shared with participants	60

## 1. Introduction

The [CLEAR](#) (Constructing Learning Outcomes in Europe: A Multi-Level Analysis of (Under)Achievement in the Life Course) project focuses on understanding the complex dynamics that shape learning outcomes and underachievement among young people across Europe. It moves beyond one-dimensional, performance-based views to embrace a multidimensional theoretical and methodological framework, with a strong emphasis on integrating diverse stakeholder voices.

CLEAR's design incorporated an innovative participatory approach, the **Transversal Participatory Approach (TPA)**, coordinated under Work Package 8. This approach promoted and implemented various participative activities throughout the entire project, enabling diverse stakeholders—such as policymakers, experts, practitioners, teachers, and young people—to share and discuss their experiences and views on educational achievement and learning outcomes (for details on participative activities see D8.3 National Participatory Report). The TPA created opportunities for their active involvement at different stages of the research, from design to dissemination activities. The latter are coordinated under Work Package 9 (WP9), specifically the final participatory event carried out in each partner country (Innovation Forums). The impact assessment of Innovation Forums and their potentials and limits are detailed in Deliverable D8.3 National Participatory Report.

The Work Package 9 contributes to the project's overall objectives by focusing on Communication, Dissemination, and Exploitation. Its primary role is to ensure that the project's findings and knowledge are effectively shared with both academic and non-academic audiences. This includes translating research insights into implementable and practical strategies, disseminating them in more accessible formats to a wider community of researchers and practitioners. That is the aim to which this present document (D9.2) responds: it addresses the overall project objectives by **providing practical guidelines for using participatory methodologies, drawing directly from the experience of implementing the Transversal Participatory Approach (TPA) within the project.**

Deliverable D9.2 is a set of Guidelines to Use Participatory Methodologies that provides practical guidance and recommendations for designing and conducting some of the existing participatory activities in social research and has been tested within CLEAR. Its role is **to share the methodological knowledge gained from the project's use of a participatory approach**, which is grounded in the idea that knowledge can be co-produced with those who directly experience the issues being studied. The guidelines are intended **for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers** who are involved in collaborative projects, offering them tools to integrate strategies that actively engage diverse social actors throughout the research process. By doing so, D9.2 contributes to the project's goal of democratizing knowledge and ensuring that research is relevant and impactful.

These guidelines are grounded in the concrete experience of the European project CLEAR and in particular on the results and learnings drawn from the implementation of participatory



methods (reported in D8.3 National Participatory Report) and on the analysis developed within WP7 and detailed in D7.1 Comparative Analysis Report. In addition to that, these Guidelines are built on the team's expertise in research and facilitation, and reflect what we learned along the way - from successful practices and methodological innovations to the challenges, limits, and even mistakes that helped us think more critically. These guidelines are not a fixed model. They are a flexible resource shaped by collective learning. They aim to help researchers design participatory approaches that are effective, flexible, and grounded in inclusion, shared responsibility, and the potential for real change.

This document is grounded in the idea that research processes can be meaningfully strengthened by adopting participatory strategies that value the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of all actors involved- including the final beneficiaries of public policies. Participatory research is grounded in the idea that knowledge can be co-produced with those who directly experience the issues being studied. This approach actively involves individuals, groups, or communities who are often excluded from conventional research processes. It values experiential knowledge and collective reflection.

Based on literature and our experience at CLEAR, we argue that participatory methodologies are key tools to:

- Democratise knowledge by valuing different kinds of expertise beyond academic credentials;
- Improve the quality and relevance of research by grounding questions, methods, and interpretations in real-world contexts;
- Explicitly address power imbalances in traditional research relationships to build more reciprocal and mutually beneficial connections;
- Encourage reflexivity in participants, raising awareness and challenging dominant perspectives;
- Support the transformation of research findings into new and meaningful narratives that encourage dissemination and uptake;
- Increase the practical relevance and usability of research findings by fostering stronger ownership and engagement among participants.

The implementation of participatory methods in the CLEAR project has revealed both their potential and their limitations. On the one hand, the **potentialities** of a participatory approach are significant. It has proven to be an effective action for:

- **Enhancing contextual sensitivity and relevance:** By involving a wide range of stakeholders—including young people, professionals, and policymakers—the project was able to move beyond one-dimensional views of learning outcomes and capture the real-life complexities and nuances of (under)achievement.
- **Fostering a relational and dialogic analysis:** The use of visual and deliberative tools, such as the conversation starters used in Innovation Forums, created a space for open dialogue. This approach not only facilitated the co-construction of knowledge but also



fostered empathy among participants and with researchers, leading to a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives.

- **Generating actionable recommendations:** The direct engagement with stakeholders resulted in practical insights and recommendations that address shortcomings in existing data and educational policies, such as the need to move beyond educational models based on standardised metrics.

However, the implementation also highlighted key limitations and challenges that need to be considered:

- **Time and resource intensity:** The design and execution of participatory activities, as well as the subsequent analysis of qualitative data, are time and resource-intensive processes.
- **Complexity and coordination:** Integrating participatory activities across multiple countries and research work packages required extensive coordination and continuous adaptation. The process is dynamic and less predictable than conventional research methods.
- **Difficulty in ensuring full engagement:** While efforts were made to include diverse voices, ensuring that all participants feel equally empowered and that their contributions are fully captured can be challenging.

Taking a participatory approach means rethinking how research is done- from how data is collected and analysed, to how ethics are handled, and, most importantly, how power relations are redefined throughout the process of creating knowledge. Participation is not just about using the right methods - it is a way of working that shapes all stages of the research process: from setting objectives, to designing tools, to making sense of and sharing the results.

Seen this way, participation is best understood as a multi-dimensional practice that plays out across three closely linked areas: structured processes guided by a clear and shared strategy; spaces for non-ordinary local dialogue that support inclusive and creative exchange; and a set of proven methods and tools used with purpose and care.

Bringing these three dimensions together in a clear and connected way is essential. Even the most effective participatory tools will not make a real difference unless they are part of a well-defined and intentional strategy. At the same time, running participatory processes and dialogue events calls for specific methodological skills - along with the ability to create spaces where everyone feels genuinely included. Participatory processes can only be truly sustainable and transformative when strategic vision, organisational capacity, and technical expertise come together in a balanced way.

Further suggestions and recommendations on the use of participatory methods drawn from CLEAR experience are largely developed in the following pages.



## 2. Guidelines

### 2.1 Defining the purposes of the participatory activity

When planning a research project that includes participatory approaches, it is important to start by clearly identifying why participants are being involved. These reasons might be related to improving knowledge (epistemological), shaping methods, ensuring ethical standards, solving practical issues, building skills and creating lasting change. **Being clear about the purpose is essential** to ensure the process is trusted, is effective, and can be sustained over time. Unlike traditional research, where aims are often set by researchers or funders, participatory approaches place value on **identifying objectives together**. This shared process helps build stronger relationships, supports more balanced roles, and leads to outcomes that matter to everyone involved. This principle applies regardless of the level of participation, which can vary depending on the context (see Participatory Design Board in section 2.2)

Being clear about the objectives from the start helps create common **ground between researchers and participants**. It also supports open conversations about expectations, motivations, and any limits. This step is key to avoiding misunderstandings or misalignment that could affect trust and shared commitment among stakeholders. Having clear objectives is essential for **transparent communication with participants**. Participants should always be informed about why they are being involved in participatory activities, what the activities will focus on, and how their contribution can realistically influence the research outcomes. Open and honest information sharing should be the foundation of the relationship between participants and researchers- even when the relationship is temporary. This helps prevent participation from becoming empty rhetoric that doesn't lead to genuine empowerment of local actors.

When **participatory research processes involve young people**, being clear about the objectives becomes even more important -and calls for careful attention to communication, ethics, and relationships. Young people, especially minors or those from marginalised backgrounds, often face an imbalance of power with adults or researchers. This can affect their ability to fully understand the project's aims, consider the implications, and actively negotiate their role. In this context, transparency about objectives means more than simply sharing one-way information. It needs to be a two-way, accessible, and ongoing process - one that respects how young people express themselves, their timing, and their needs. It is important to clearly define what 'participation' means within the project: the specific research objectives, the areas where stakeholders can influence decisions, and the aspects that remain under adult jurisdiction, without sounding patronising. A lack of clarity around these boundaries can lead to unrealistic expectations, followed by disappointment or disengagement. This, in turn, can undermine trust- both in the process and in the institutions involved.



Clear objectives are essential to ensure both **methodological consistency and ethical transparency throughout the research process**. As it will be discussed in the next section (2.2), setting and clarifying objectives is not simply a step confined to the design phase- it is a dynamic process that can be revisited over time in response to changing contexts or emerging priorities.

Key recommendations for ensuring clarity of objectives when using a participatory approach in research:

- **Be clear about the purposes.** Before starting any participatory process, it is important for the research team to clearly articulate - both internally and externally - why participation is being included. This means being specific about whether the goal is to improve research quality by bringing in diverse perspectives, to empower stakeholders, to inform policy, to build local capacity, or a combination of these. A clear purpose acts as a guiding thread, helping ensure that methods and resources aligned with the intended outcomes and that participation is meaningful, not tokenistic.
- **Ensure contextual appropriateness.** Beyond aligning objectives with the research topic, it is vital to verify their suitability within the specific context where the participation will take place. It means critically assessing both the external environment and internal capacities. This encompasses a nuanced understanding of local cultural norms, existing power dynamics, and established community structures. At the same time, researchers need to reflect on their own resources - such as facilitation skills, available time, familiarity with participatory methodologies, and funding. Equally important is understanding stakeholders involved: their past experience with participatory processes, what motivates them to engage, what might prevent their participation, and the networks they are already part of.
- **Communicate transparently.** Open and honest communication about the purpose of an engagement is essential when involving participants. It is important to explain objectives using accessible language and appropriate formats- without overpromising or suggesting levels of influence that cannot realistically be delivered. Being transparent about the scope of involvement, decision-making boundaries, and how participants' input will be used is key to building and maintaining trust. This clarity helps avoid disappointment or disengagement throughout the process
- **Align participation levels with objectives.** It is important to recognise that different objectives require different levels of stakeholder participation. In some cases, providing information or seeking input through consultation is sufficient to meet the objectives. In others, deeper collaboration- or even participant-led research - might be needed (see Participatory Design Board in section 2.2). Aligning the level of involvement with the intended purpose ensures optimal use of resources and satisfies participants' expectations regarding their influence. This leads to more effective, mutual and beneficial engagement.

- **Ensure the proper closure of participatory processes.** It is necessary to give attention to feedback, storytelling, and sharing outcomes with participants and other involved parties. This phase should be considered as integral to the process as the earlier stages (see also 2.2 and Figure 11). Allocate dedicated time and resources to the conclusion of the participatory process, and planning specific actions and methods for this phase from the outset, when the overall process is being defined and designed.

When participatory purposes are clearly defined and thoughtfully implemented, research processes can produce not only robust knowledge, but also meaningful engagement, strengthened capacities, and positive social impact.

The following sections explore how the design process and chosen methodologies help balance ambitious objectives and practical feasibility by adapting methods to serve core purposes within specific contexts.

## 2.2 Designing the participatory process

When designing any participatory approach, it is essential to **define clear objectives** for the participatory activities and develop specific **research questions** to guide them. This is an important step in any participatory process, regardless of its complexity or whether it is integrated into research. It involves choosing the level **of participation** – from minimal involvement (such as sharing information) to full partnership (like participant-led research). It establishes clear boundaries for each activity, supporting a more effective and focused implementation. Finally, it enables the design of activities that are well aligned with the participants involved, available time, expectations, and intended outputs.

As mentioned earlier, defining the objectives of participatory activities is the starting point of the methodology. It is important to keep in mind that these objectives may have the necessity to be refined, elaborated, or revised. This happens as participatory activities take shape, through continuous dialogue with the research team, participants, and other actors involved. This continuous dialogue allows research teams to select the **appropriate level of participation** and to assess **the feasibility of participatory activities**. Feasibility should be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Available resources and competencies within research teams.** This goes beyond economic resources and the working hours available throughout the process. It is equally important to assess the skills of the working group, especially the presence or absence of expertise in participatory activities, facilitation, community engagement, and similar areas. This ensures the team has the right skills to implement and manage these processes effectively.
- **The methodological orientation of different research components.** Participatory approaches should complement, rather than contradict, the core aims and



epistemological foundations of the research. This requires careful consideration of how participatory methods can add value to data collection and generation, analysis, and interpretation within the broader research framework, while ensuring methodological coherence.

- **The possibility of accessing relevant networks and target groups to effectively engage participants.** In this sense, it is essential to be able to identify and connect with established organisations and existing platforms that can facilitate outreach to target groups. Understanding the context - along with a clear recruitment strategy - is key to ensuring inclusive and meaningful participation.

Another critical, yet often overlooked, aspect of any participatory process is the need for a systematic closure. This involves a dedicated phase for **presenting and discussing the outcomes of the participatory activities** with the individuals who actively participated, as well as with other relevant stakeholders. This final phase should be considered as vital to the research process as the initial design stage.

Effective closure mechanisms are essential for several reasons. First, they validate participants' contributions by acknowledging their time, effort, and insights- helping to build trust and reciprocity. Second, by sharing findings directly, participants gain clarity on how their input was used and what impact it had on the project's direction or outcomes. This transparency supports ongoing engagement and accountability. Third, the feedback loop in this phase offers to refine findings, validate interpretations, and identify new questions or areas for future work, turning the closure into a further learning opportunity.

To ensure this phase is effective, it is important to allocate dedicated time and resources, and to plan specific actions and modalities from the very beginning -during the initial design of the participatory activities. This proactive planning ensures that feedback sessions are not treated as an afterthought, but recognised as a core part of the participatory approach, adding value for everyone.

### **2.2.1. Collaborative methodology to design participatory activities**

To create space for a continuous, evolving process - one that can be redefined and adapted to changing purposes, actors, contexts and resources- a participatory design process can rely on a **collaborative methodology** that brings together multiple perspectives. The aim is to facilitate dialogue, to reach an agreement, and clarify both objectives and levels of participation. This methodology might include: **comprehensive consultation activities, asynchronous and systematic collection of information, ongoing support and comparative inputs.**

- **Comprehensive consultation activities** should involve relevant researchers and research teams. Implementing participatory approaches requires specific skills that traditional research teams may need to develop. A useful starting point is:



- organising capacity-building sessions to build a shared understanding of what participation means in the specific research context;
- developing a common understanding of participatory methodology;
- facilitating discussion and brainstorming on how to integrate participatory activities across different components of the research.

Such consultation sessions among researchers are useful not only for drawing on partners' creativity in designing meaningful participatory activities, but also for assessing their feasibility and long-term sustainability (see previous section 2.1).

- **Asynchronous and systematic collection of information** with the **creation of frameworks and tools** that allow for contextual adaptation while maintaining methodological integrity. Structured tools can be especially valuable in facilitating collaborative design processes. For example, in the CLEAR project, a Participation Design Board was implemented as a visual tool to organise participatory activities across the project lifecycle, while also recognising practical constraints (see section below for further details on the Participation Design Board and its use).
- **Ongoing support and comparative inputs** from actors with expertise in participatory methods are key to provide guidance throughout all phases of design and implementation. This approach typically requires having someone within the research team experienced in participatory methods or investing in external support. This expertise is essential for developing strategies that are appropriate to the specific context, participation objectives, and the characteristics of the people involved.

As mentioned above, effective collaborative methodologies of designing participatory activities rely on the asynchronous and systematic collection of information, supported by frameworks and tools that allow for contextual adaptation while maintaining methodological integrity.

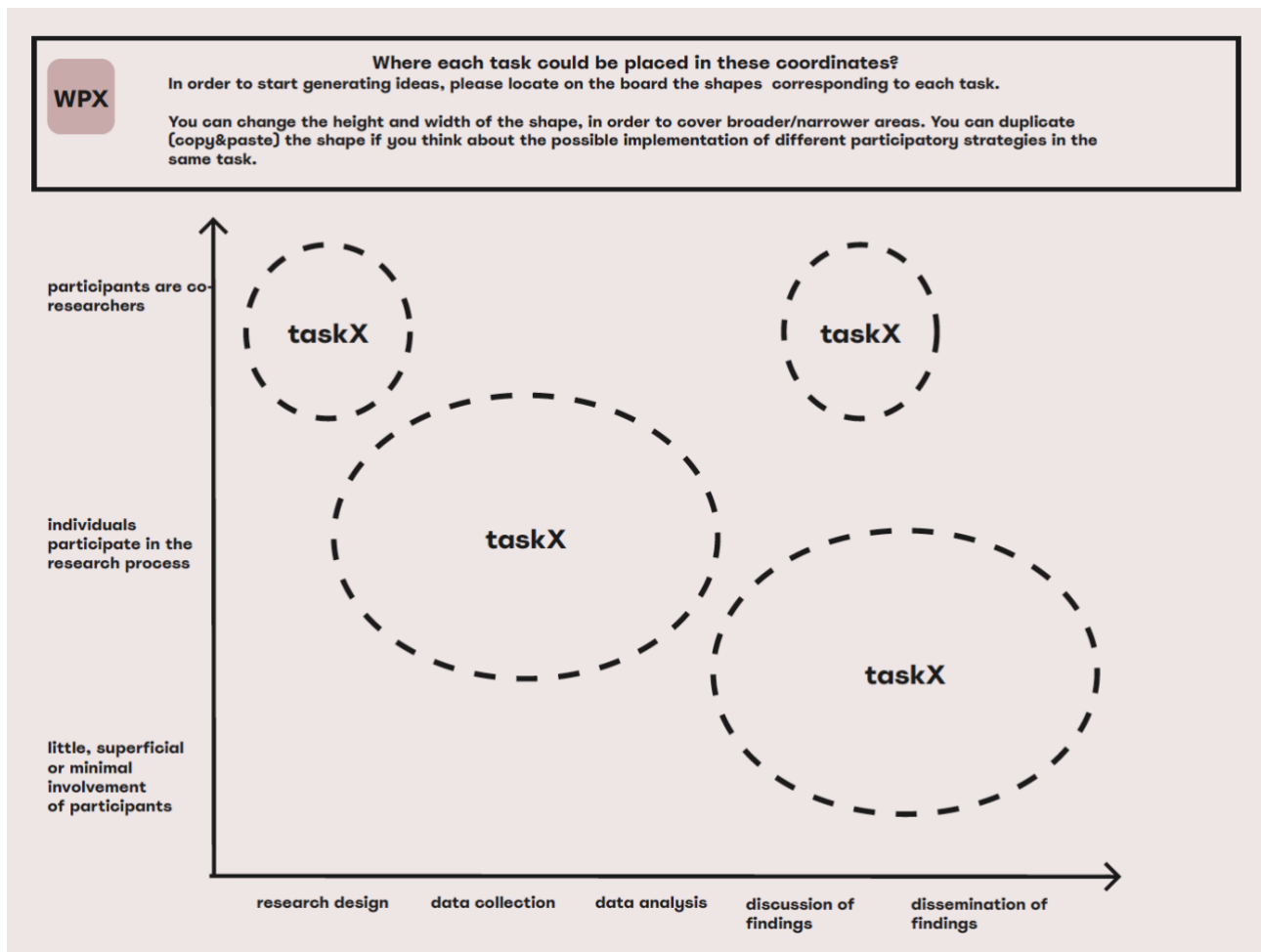
In CLEAR, the implementation of structured tools proved especially valuable in streamlining collaborative design processes. In particular, the **Participation Design Board** was developed and applied as a key visual tool to facilitate the organisation of participatory activities across each Work Package and throughout the project lifecycle, while effectively addressing various practical constraints.

The Participation Design Board is an interactive platform that helps **visualise and organise participatory activities** in relation to different research tasks and phases. As shown in figure 1, it employs a Cartesian coordinate system to map:

- Different degrees of participants' engagement along the vertical axis (ranging from minimal involvement to full co-researcher status);
- Sequential research stages along the horizontal axis (design, data collection, analysis, findings discussion, and dissemination).



Figure 1 - Participation Design Board



Source: D8.1 Strategy Paper for Transversal Participatory Approach

Along its axes, the tool allowed participatory activities to be positioned in relation to the different research tasks and stages of the WPs. This type of visual tool helped research teams identify opportunities for meaningful participation throughout the project lifecycle, while also encouraging reflexive thinking around practical constraints. Several questions were raised, such as: are we able to engage all target groups and involve them fully in the process? Are the financial resources adequate? Are the required connections in place? Is it crucial to initiate the participatory process from the earliest stages of research design? At which stage of the research can participation have the greatest impact? What limitations emerge when envisioning the integration of participatory elements across the different project Work Packages?

The Participation Design Board included dedicated space for articulating the rationale behind participatory choices, expressing concerns, and identifying potential implementation challenges. It prompted each research team to formulate practical responses to specific questions such as:

- Try to justify/explain the choices made or assumed in placing tasks and WPs along the Cartesian axes on the board:
  - Why did you choose to place the task in that area?
  - What kind of method could be implemented?
  - Who is going to be involved? Refer to target groups and their characteristics
  - Which strategies could be used to find and engage target groups?
- Leave comments, concerns, and questions to be addressed in the capacity building sessions or in the one-to-one support
- Elaborate a little on the decision to exclude participatory activities from the WP.

Each participatory design process should include iterative refinement through ongoing dialogue. With this in mind, the initial collaborative sessions for brainstorming and designing participatory activities within each WP were followed by a more systematic and detailed phase. This refinement was supported by a standardised document called “**Concept Note for the integration of Participatory Activities (PA)**” (referred to as the **Concept Notes**), used across all WPs. These notes helped document key decisions and the specific characteristics of each participatory activity, ensuring consistency within the established framework and fostering a shared common understanding.

The Concept Notes include twelve sections:

1. Name of the WP
2. Core team
3. Task selected for PA
4. Objectives and added value of PA
5. Objectives and added value of PA
6. People to be involved in PA
7. Chosen level of participation and in which step of the research
8. Output/impact of the PA (on the same WP, on other WPs or on the overall project structure)
9. Partners and countries involved
10. Team involved
11. Timeline estimated (starting M-ending M, duration)
12. Resources requested (extra-Consortium professionals, material, logistical...)
13. Elements/Questions to be defined

Regular review and sharing of the Concept Notes across the partnership ensured consistently clear and defined objectives for the participatory activities and their concrete implementation. This process allowed verification at each stage of activity execution, ensuring coherence between the initial conceptualisation and actual implementation, while noting any deviations. It also provided an overall view of participatory activities across Work Packages and throughout the different project phases.



## 2.2.2 Designing participatory events: key elements and practical considerations

Participatory events or activities, such as forums or workshops, require particularly thoughtful and robust design. This process must consider the purposes of the participatory activity and the specific objectives of the event itself. This is essential not only to achieve these aims but also to calibrate them carefully. This calibration takes into account the available resources and the concrete characteristics of the context in which the participatory event will be implemented.

To effectively integrate these diverse aspects, several **key elements** should be considered when conceptualising and designing a participatory event. Practical examples of how to apply these key elements can be found in the organisation of the Innovation Forums (IFs) within the CLEAR project, which will be discussed later in this section.

Some of these key elements include:

- **Conceptual framework:** Develop a clear conceptual model that outlines the purpose, structure, and expected outcomes of participatory events.
- **Common objectives:** Identify essential characteristics and objectives that all events should share, while allowing room for adaptation to different contexts.
- **Contextual flexibility:** Design and organise events in ways that best suit the capacities of the implementing teams and the specific contexts.
- **Practical guidance:** Provide specific suggestions and reflections to support teams in applying the full conceptual model.
- **Individualised support:** Offer tailored support to teams implementing participatory events.

Moreover, **several practical considerations** should be taken into account when designing participatory events:

- **Scale and management:** opt for contextual adaptation by designing events that are appropriately scaled and tailored to local contexts, rather than implementing standardised models. Consider the appropriate number of participants in relation to available facilitators. Smaller, well-facilitated events often prove more effective than larger gatherings with limited support.
- **Financial Resources:** Take into account the number of hours available for the dedicated planning and effective management of participatory activities.
- **Facilitation Capacity:** Ensure adequate staffing and provide facilitators with appropriate training in advance. The role of facilitator is an essential component of a participative process. The term “facilitator” refers to the person who guides and supports participatory activities. The facilitator’s role is to create an inclusive environment, help participants express their views, and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute. Other terms are sometimes used to describe a similar role,

depending on the context. For example, moderator, animator, or guide can all refer to someone who performs a comparable function in participatory research settings. Since additional training or external support may be needed, consider the presence of non-traditional methodological skills within research teams.

- **Integration with Existing Engagement:** Consider integrating participatory sessions within spaces where target groups are already active, rather than creating entirely new settings. Assess the social capital available to research teams by identifying and engaging with established networks. Using these connections can significantly enhance both outreach and the overall effectiveness of participatory initiatives (mentioned in section 2.1)
- **Participant Selection:** Establish clear criteria for participant selection that prioritise inclusive representation and strategies to engage hard-to-reach stakeholders.
- **Power Dynamics:** create inclusive and supportive environments for all participants, with particular attention to vulnerable groups and contexts characterised by significant power asymmetries (see section 2.4).
- **Venue Selection:** Choose venues that ensure accessibility and comfort, while taking resource constraints into account. Academic settings can be appropriate alternatives if designed to minimise intimidation (see section 2.5).

**Innovation Forums (IFs)** in CLEAR were **participatory events** conducted during the final phases of the project life cycle by each national team. Their purpose was to create deliberative spaces where group discussions were facilitated to ensure the full participation of different stakeholders, enabling everyone to express themselves in their own language and to adhere as closely as possible to the ideal of genuine dialogue across perspectives (for further details on IFs objectives, see D8.2 pp 1-6). The experience of the CLEAR project's Innovation Forums offers valuable insights into effective design principles for similar participatory events. The IFs shared common objectives, aiming to engage the project's three main target groups: young people, policymakers, and education professionals. Moreover, the IFs served as concrete examples of how participatory events can be conceptualised, designed, and executed. This requires careful consideration of the specific characteristics of the local context in which they take place, as well as the economic and human resources available to organisers. This presents a dual challenge: how can a shared conceptual framework be maintained while allowing for practical implementation that is both diversified and contextually coherent? In the CLEAR project, this was addressed by:

- Planned general reflection sessions to ensure the entire partnership was aligned on the project's purpose, objectives, and overall framework. These sessions occurred both during project meetings and through the development of a general framework for IF design, called the 'Octopus' (see section below).
- Circulated operational guidelines and tools for the logistical organisation of the IFs, primarily via the Local Work Plans (see section below).

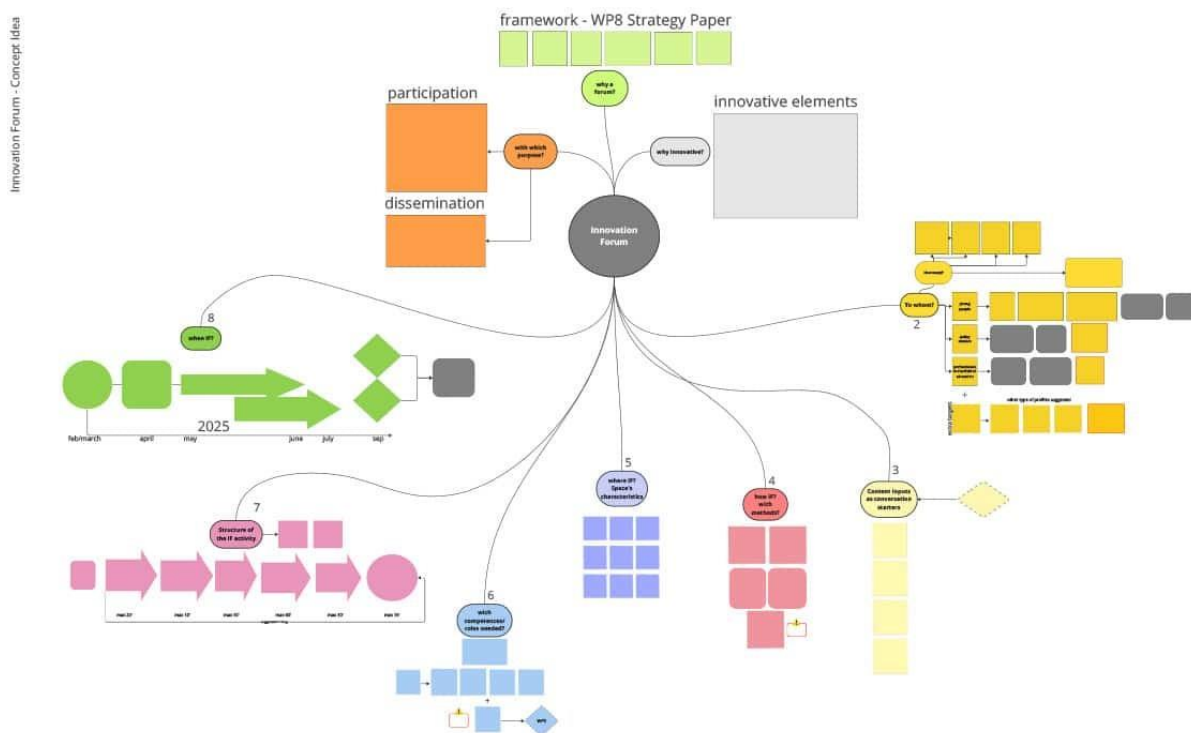


- Provided individualised support from the WP8 team to address specific questions or challenges.

The **conceptual framework** of the IF, shared with all partners and nicknamed the “Octopus”, is designed to provide a flexible model that allows adaptation of the IFs to local resources, including availability of time, human resources, and specific contextual features. It includes both methodological recommendations and practical guidelines to ensure that all partners have a consistent understanding when organising the IFs. As shown in Figure 2, which presents this visual tool, the conceptual framework is organised into multiple sections covering essential aspects, each accompanied by questions. Specifically:

- The core features and goals of the event: aims, innovativeness, participatory methodologies and approaches
- Target groups: which groups should be involved, and how many?
- Methods and techniques for designing and conducting the activities
- Competences and abilities of the facilitators and researchers involved in managing the event
- Content inputs and conversation starters
- Space and setting characteristics
- Structure of the event and general timetable

Figure 2 - General framework for the IF design



Source: D8.1 Strategy Paper for Transversal Participatory Approach



The development of a conceptual model that was common to all partners and contained the essential elements to be considered allowed each national partner to make decisions on every specific section. These decisions were based on their available human resources and operational capacities. In this way, the final design of the IFs was also adapted to diverse cultural, economic, and organisational contexts.

Once the conceptual framework was shared with the entire partnership and validated, the gradual refinement leading to the final version of the local Innovation Forum was supported through one-to-one assistance from the WP8 team (each local team had a designated WP8 contact) as well as internal brainstorming and exchanges within each national team. During this internal process, national teams relied on a **Local Work Plan** (see Annex 1) that was progressively updated as decisions became finalised. This Local Work Plan incorporates sections from the General framework, presented in a practical and pragmatic manner. Its purpose is to stimulate brainstorming, identify outstanding issues, and facilitate consultation with the WP8 focal point and coordination in case of uncertainties.

The sections of the Local Work Plan are presented below as open-ended questions, allowing each team to deliberate and make decisions in the way they considered best, while requesting clarity and accuracy in reporting those decisions:

- Venue: place, location, setting
- Date: expected days, month
- Time and duration
- Expected participants: numbers estimated and profile
- Agenda: first ideas about the format and main activities
- Communication strategy: main communication activities to be implemented
- Strategic allies: people and organisations that could support IF promotion and implementation
- Possible connections with other local events, processes, initiatives or projects
- CLEAR involved team: people, roles, responsibilities
- Resources needed: devices, materials, and other
- IF documentation: how to document the event including video, photo, audio recording, etc.
- Ethical issues: specific procedures, templates, etc.
- Written materials for participants: to be provided before, during or after IF
- Other relevant issues or ideas

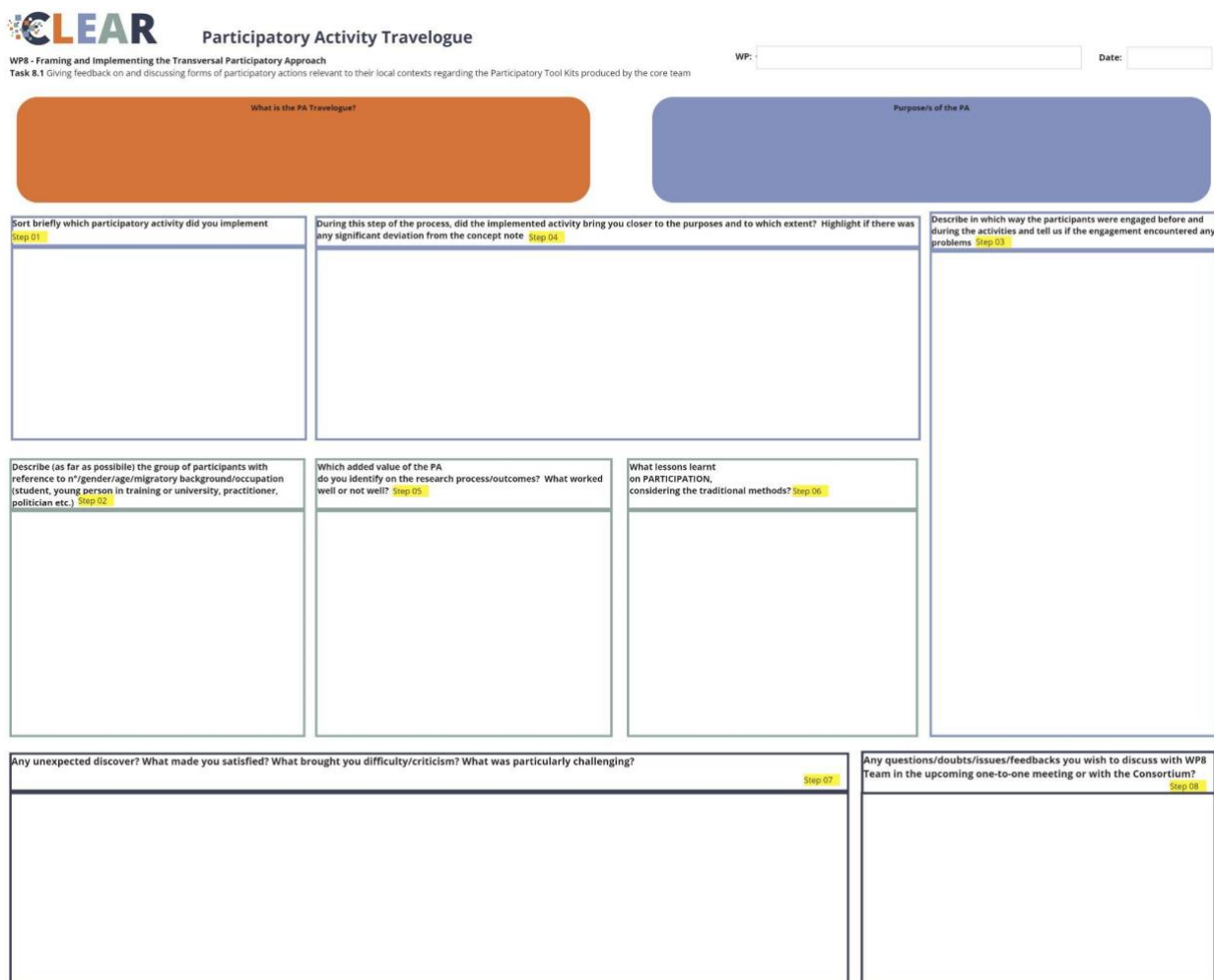
As mentioned earlier in 2.1, the closing phase of a participatory process involves providing feedback to participants on what occurred and what emerged from the process itself. In the case of CLEAR, this restitution was managed at the conclusion of the IFs in the form of a report prepared by each national team. After each IF, during which materials were collected and

methods of work and emerging themes were tracked, a concise report was prepared to be sent to participants (see Figure 15).

Moreover, in CLEAR, an **internal reporting system** was established with the objective of informing the Consortium about the conduct of participatory activities and providing a brief evaluation of them.

For the Participatory Activities (PAs) within the Work Packages (WPs), a **Participatory activity Travelogue** was structured (see Figure 3). The travelogue was designed so that each core team could synthesize, at the conclusion of the participatory activities, key elements divided into step-by-step sections:

Figure 3 - Participatory Activity Travelogue template



**CLEAR** Participatory Activity Travelogue

WP8 - Framing and Implementing the Transversal Participatory Approach  
Task 8.1 Giving feedback on and discussing forms of participatory actions relevant to their local contexts regarding the Participatory Tool Kits produced by the core team

WP:  Date:

**What is the PA Travelogue?**

**Purposes of the PA**

<p>Sort briefly which participatory activity did you implement <small>Step 01</small></p>	<p>During this step of the process, did the implemented activity bring you closer to the purposes and to which extent? Highlight if there was any significant deviation from the concept note <small>Step 04</small></p>	<p>Describe in which way the participants were engaged before and during the activities and tell us if the engagement encountered any problems <small>Step 03</small></p>
<p>Describe (as far as possible) the group of participants with reference to n°/gender/age/migratory background/occupation (student, young person in training or university, practitioner, politician etc.) <small>Step 02</small></p>	<p>Which added value of the PA do you identify on the research process/outcomes? What worked well or not well? <small>Step 05</small></p>	<p>What lessons learnt on PARTICIPATION, considering the traditional methods? <small>Step 06</small></p>
<p>Any unexpected discover? What made you satisfied? What brought you difficulty/criticism? What was particularly challenging? <small>Step 07</small></p>		<p>Any questions/doubts/issues/feedbacks you wish to discuss with WP8 Team in the upcoming one-to-one meeting or with the Consortium? <small>Step 08</small></p>

Source: D8.1 Strategy Paper for Transversal Participatory Approach

1. Sort briefly which participatory activity did you implement

2. Describe (as far as possible) the group of participants with reference to n°/gender/age/migratory background/occupation (student, young people, person in training or university, practitioner, politician etc.)
3. Describe in which way the participants were engaged before and during the activities and tell us if the engagement encountered any problems
4. During this step of the process, did the implemented activity bring you closer to the purposes and to which extent? Highlight if there was any significant deviation from the concept note
5. Which added value of the PA do you identify on the research process/outcomes? What worked well or not well?
6. What lessons learnt on participation, considering the traditional methods?
7. Any unexpected discovery? What made you satisfied? What brought you difficulty/criticism? What was particularly challenging?
8. Any questions/doubts/issues/feedbacks you wish to discuss with WP8 Team in the upcoming one-to-one meeting or with the Consortium?

Conversely, for the IFs, a **Local Report** scheme was established, which followed the structure of the Local Work Plan with some specific additions and differences:

#### 1. **Preparation of the Innovation Forum**

- Date
- Place/venue where it took place: Specify the reasons for its selection; specify whether it was a private or public space
- Duration
- Engagement process: Explain the rationale for the invitations and the main targets, channels used for communication, difficulties faced in preparing; which was the selection process of the participants and how they were contacted

#### 2. **Implementation of the Innovation Forum**

- Participants: Number of policy makers; professionals/experts, youths, other groups; specify their gender
- Ethics & Data Management: How were the participants informed about the project's privacy policy? What ethical, legal, and/or moral concerns have been raised by the participants or the researchers? How was the informed consent for the visual materials collected, stored, and processed? Was any personal information collected? If so, how was it processed and protected? If pictures have been made, who owns the authorship?
- Process: Agenda of the IF; who steered the forum; how it was documented
- Main topics discussed: Specify the main objectives of the IF (with particular reference to the research outputs brought to feed the discussion); specify which results from CLEAR research were (re)elaborated (and how) to feed the

discussion in the IF; translate the main objectives into guiding questions considered for the discussion

- Methods applied for opening/steering the discussion
- Were participants divided into different working groups? If so, based on which criteria?
- Impressions from the IF: Present potential ethical issues raised, the general tone of the discussions, difficulties faced in implementing

### 3. Innovation Forum Outcomes and Follow-up

- Feedback from participants
- Innovation aspects: Which research question guiding future research on the CLEAR main topics can be drawn from the IF? Which suggestions/recommendations targeting policymakers at your local/national level can be drawn from the IF?
- IF communication follow-up and planned dissemination actions: Describe how the IF experience was disseminated; provide links to online news, social media posts; were the participants given any further information (handouts) and/or invitation to follow-up studies and/or project events (e.g., Final Conference)?

## 2.3 Identifying participatory methods and techniques

The successful implementation of any participatory approach critically depends on **the careful selection and application of appropriate methods and techniques**. Like the other steps discussed during the design phase (see section 2.1), this foundational step requires a thorough understanding of the **specific objectives of the participatory activity**, the **characteristics of the target participants**, and the **available resources**, skills and **expertise** within the research team.

**Skilled facilitators play a crucial role** throughout this phase of identifying and applying methods, as they are essential in creating safe spaces, navigating power dynamics, and ensuring balanced contribution from all participants. Ultimately, choosing the appropriate participatory methods involves aligning the intended outcomes with the most suitable tools and techniques, while remaining sensitive to the context and the needs of participants.

In CLEAR the main element of continuity in the identification of participatory techniques -across different levels and types of activities throughout the project – was the commitment to *de-objectifying* the contributions of those involved at different stages of the research process. This approach aimed to promote the role of participants as active subjects in the research, enabling them to shape research tools, strategies for their application, and/or the interpretation and dissemination of results (see D8.1 Strategy Paper for Transversal Participatory Approach for details).



Moreover, a transversal objective in guiding the selection of participatory methods and techniques throughout CLEAR's activities was to **bridge the gap between researchers** -along with their academic approaches-**and other stakeholders**. This included not only young people, potentially in vulnerable situations, but also individuals accustomed to different forms of expression and reasoning, such as education professionals operating in diverse contexts. This overarching aim, together with the need to identify methods and techniques that were easy to learn and apply- especially for academic staff less familiar with creative methodologies, shaped partner decisions across various implementation contexts, including project meetings, participatory activities within Work Packages, and Innovation Forums.

The landscape of participatory methods is vast and varied, ranging from structured deliberative formats to more creative and interactive techniques. They are all fundamentally designed to foster open dialogue and facilitate the co-creation of knowledge. Effective participatory methodologies prioritise dynamic engagement of participants over traditional academic approaches. In the CLEAR project, particular emphasis was placed on adopting collaborative and interactive approaches that deliberately moved away from conventional academic modes, making dialogue more dynamic and accessible.

The main common features of these methods include the **dynamic use of space for debate**, the **capacity to stimulate discussion** among diverse stakeholders, and the **creation of adequate settings that encourage participation**- especially by young people who may not be familiar with collective deliberation.

In CLEAR, the overall strategy underscored the critical importance of **methodological flexibility**, allowing participatory elements to be thoughtfully tailored to the unique contextual realities and evolving research objectives of each distinct activity within the project. This ensured that the techniques used were not generic, but intentionally selected and effective for the particular engagement at hand - as illustrated in following examples.

**Key techniques** that can be employed in participatory activities include:

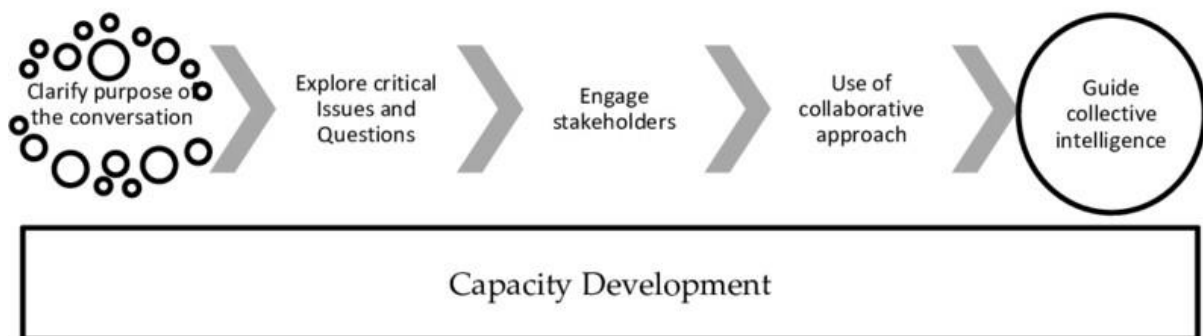
- **Rapport-building techniques:** Methods and tools designed to break the ice and build trust within the group and among participants. They help new groups become familiar with each other in an informal and engaging way. Sharing experiences and personal introductions fosters a comfortable environment, which is crucial for open discussion. Such activities are often fundamental in the initial stages of any participatory activity to ensure participants feel connected and ready to engage in more complex discussions. In CLEAR, several examples of rapport- building and ice-breaking techniques were used, such as:
  - **Yarn Toss** technique (also called **Web of Connectedness or Common Thread technique**). This technique involves participants introducing themselves by sharing something personal or related to their connection to the activity while

holding a piece of a ball of yarn. They then gently toss the ball to another person, who repeats the process. This participatory ice-breaker visually represents and fosters connections within the group. It can be used as a powerful metaphor for the relationships and interdependencies among participants, reinforcing a sense of unity and cohesion. In the CLEAR Participatory Activity of WP5, this technique was used as an ice-breaker where each person holding the yarn ball introduced themselves by stating their name, the specific local intervention area they were associated with, and the institution they represented. The technique was employed to encourage participation by giving everyone a turn and a tangible connection to the group; even shy participants are encouraged to engage. It also fostered connections in an informal environment, helping participants to familiarise themselves with one another.

- **Ice-breaking activities based on personal experiences.** These activities are based on participants' ability to share specific biographical experiences. In CLEAR, this approach was designed and implemented in at least two distinct forms:
  - During one of the capacity-building sessions at the Consortium meeting, partners engaged in random paired conversations. Participants moved around the room, approaching another person to share a personal experience. The starting point for these discussions was a set of randomly distributed questions. After one person responded, the other would reciprocate. The questions explored various biographical dimensions—ranging from schooling and educational or professional paths to other aspects of life. Crucially, all questions were framed to give participants discretion over the depth and seriousness of their responses.
  - During the IF in Thessaloniki (Greece), this technique was used to involve participants to engage and reflect on their educational journeys. They were invited to distill their personal experiences into three significant words or evocative images. These were then anonymously shared on a communal "Narrative Wall." The exercise proved effective in activating personal reflection, acknowledging the diversity of learning biographies, fostering emotional engagement, and creating the right atmosphere to facilitate further discussion.
- **Structured or semi-structured dialogue formats:** These are participatory techniques that guide conversations through defined rules and stages, fostering focused and equitable exchanges among participants. They aim to ensure that all voices are heard and that discussions remain productive, working toward specific outcomes or shared understanding. One of the most widely used and adaptable examples is The World Café method, which has also been adopted in several participatory activities within CLEAR.

- o **The World Café Method** (see Figure 4) is a highly interactive approach that involves small groups of participants rotating between tables to engage in discussions on specific topics, and finally sharing the main outputs of these discussions in a plenary session. The World Café process has been described by Koen, Du Plessis & Koen (2015)<sup>1</sup> as an effective, qualitative data collection technique that combines interviews, drawings, and narratives, allowing time for reflection on what group members have shared about a certain topic, thereby fostering cross-fertilisation of knowledge through a collaborative approach. In fact, the World Café method creates an informal café-like atmosphere where participants discuss central questions in small groups. One host remains at each table to summarise previous conversations for new participants, facilitating cross-fertilisation of ideas across groups. This approach is particularly effective when:
  - o Working with adults from diverse professional roles within similar fields
  - o Aiming to create spaces for dialogue where participants can express opinions based on personal experiences
  - o Researchers need to gather contributions around research results, prioritising a collective understanding of complex issues and fostering a multi-perspective discussion.

Figure 4 - The World Café process



Source: Cupido & Norodien-Fataar, 2018, p. 19

- **Evidence-Based Stimuli.** In this case, the technique relies on using research results as discussion starters and powerful stimuli, transforming complex data into accessible conversation points that encourage critical thinking and the sharing of diverse viewpoints among different actors. To this end, the evidence-based stimuli are usually

<sup>1</sup> Koen, M. P., Du Plessis, E., & Koen, V. (2015). Data analysis: The World Café. In M. De Chesnay (Ed.), Research using data analysis: Qualitative designs and methods in nursing (pp. 181–196). Springer Publishing Company.

redesigned and adapted from research results to be comprehensible to non-researchers and those unfamiliar with the project. Their presentation and discussion within the group always require a facilitator with a deep understanding of the underlying research. This technique allows for:

- **Directly grounding discussions in empirical research findings**, thereby validating and consolidating these outcomes.
- **Utilising empirical results as a starting point to explore underexplored areas**, gather diverse perspectives (e.g., insights from young people on topics previously discussed only with adults), diversify the approaches used to address a subject, and collect new terminology.

In the CLEAR project this technique was conducted at first by the WP4 core team. The Participatory activities designed in the WP4 focused on engaging stakeholders through **tailored prompts** derived directly from research. The core team distilled essential evidence, learnings, and open questions from WP4 research data, and later on transformed these evidences into conversation starters and prompts for engaging in discussions with a broader range of stakeholders and citizens and stimulating meaningful dialogue. These conversation starters employed hypothetical or scenario-based prompts, such as "imagine if" or "imagine a person" scenarios and were used within more traditional approaches, such as focus groups. Some national groups creatively adapted these conversation starters into immersive workshop-style sessions.

Thereafter, this group of techniques was extensively used during CLEAR IFs and relied on the **strategic integration of various visual and textual materials derived from research findings**. The core team of WP8 created a capacity-building tool for academic and independent researchers aimed at actively engaging young people, education professionals, researchers, and policymakers within a collaborative research framework (see 3. Conversation Starters Toolkit). The IFs strategically leveraged these Conversation Starters as discussion stimuli with participants. This included using **excerpts from qualitative interviews with young people** (WP5) as conversation starters, presenting **visual materials from quantitative analyses** (WP3), discussing **textual scenarios from institutional analysis** (WP4), and interpreting **graphic outputs from expert surveys** (WP6). This practice ensured that participatory dialogues were directly informed by the project's evolving research and effectively catalysed meaningful dialogue across diverse stakeholder groups. In this approach, more specific techniques can be employed to manage further discussions. For instance, in some local IFs, analogic instant polls and dot voting were used to interact with evidence-based stimuli in the form of statements or questions. These served as effective decision-making and prioritisation tools, particularly useful for facilitating participants' discussions on complex topics (such as educational policy scenarios) and validating research results.

For further details on Conversation Starters and related handbooks, see paragraph 3. Conversation Starters Toolkit, pp.37-60.



## Strengths of the method and techniques used in CLEAR participatory activities (PAs, IFs)

- **Innovative and dynamic approach:** The PAs and the IFs adopted a creative and participatory approach that departed from the traditional modes used in academia, fostering a more dynamic and accessible dialogue environment. This encouraged open and stimulating discussion, allowing the **engagement of diverse target groups** (policymakers, education professionals, and young people) in the debate, particularly during the IFs. The success in triggering lively debates was consistently observed, reflecting participants' strong willingness to engage.
- **Flexibility and contextual adaptability:** The Transversal Participatory Approach and the common conceptual framework of the IFs ("Octopus"), along with the support from the WP8 Core Team, allowed for strong adaptability to diverse cultural, economic, and organisational contexts. National teams could tailor the approach based on their specific human resources and operational capacities, ensuring local relevance. Tools were evaluated by research teams as effective and adaptable to specific local contexts.
- **Fostering an enabling and favourable setting:** The use of ice-breakers and careful facilitation helped to establish safe and encouraging spaces for all participants. Participants generally reported high levels of comfort and happiness, often expressing a desire for more frequent similar events.
- **Strategic use of research materials:** Employing materials directly derived from the project's research (e.g., visual data from WP3, textual scenarios from WP4, interview excerpts from WP5, expert survey graphics from WP6; see paragraph 3. Conversation Starters Toolkit, pp.36-60) as discussion stimuli grounded the dialogue in concrete evidence. This facilitated the co-reworking of research outcomes by participants. The latter expressed significant satisfaction with the relevance of the prompts to their personal situations, highlighting the success of this strategy.
- **Focus on dialogue and co-creation:** The applied methodologies actively encouraged open dialogue, critical thinking, and the sharing of diverse viewpoints, contributing to the discussion, reframing, and elaboration of research findings. This process led to significant insights into research questions and contributed valuable input for further research and policy recommendations. Participants frequently reported a strong sense of being heard and feeling empowered, providing positive feedback on their experience.
- **Methodological and organisational support:** The provision of capacity-building sessions, operational guidelines, and comprehensive methodological materials by the WP8 Core Team (particularly Codici) enhanced the local teams' capabilities in designing, organising and facilitating the PAs and the IFs.

## Limitations and Challenges of the method and techniques used in CLEAR participatory activities

- **Resource intensiveness:** While adaptability was a strength, designing and implementing participatory events of this scale - especially with interactive methodologies- can demand significant human resources, time, and financial investment, posing a challenge for teams with limited capacities.
- **Complexity of participation management:** Engaging and sustaining the involvement of highly diverse target groups (e.g., young people and policymakers) can present considerable challenges in terms of group dynamics, managing expectations, and navigating different communication styles. Ensuring all participants feel fully engaged and that their voices are equitably heard can be complex.
- **Balancing structure and flexibility:** Although the common framework provided guidance, maintaining methodological integrity across the project while allowing for necessary contextual adaptation required careful management and continuous dialogue.
- **Achieving comprehensive representativeness:** Despite dedicated engagement strategies, achieving full representativeness of all relevant voices remains an inherent challenge in many participatory processes.

## 2.4 Managing group dynamics

Participatory activities often involve engaging groups in structured dialogue sessions. In such contexts, managing group dynamics means understanding and guiding the complex system of interactions among participants, aiming to ensure a safe space while fostering active listening, collaboration, and mutual learning.

Two critical dimensions need particular attention: the relationships among participants and the interactions between participants and the facilitator.

To encourage **positive and productive relationships among participants**, it is crucial to focus on several key aspects:

- The creation of a safe and supportive relational space that is welcoming, non-judgmental, ensures confidentiality and respects the dignity of every participant. Participants should establish a shared agreement or a set of guiding principles, including a consensus on behavioural norms considered necessary by the group. A shared commitment to active and empathic listening that fully values the experiences and insights of all participants, while ensuring a balanced dynamic between speaking and listening.
- A specific focus on power dynamics and addressing disparities in participants' ability to influence the conversation. Individuals vary in their comfort levels and skills when participating in discussions on complex topics. Therefore, it is crucial to actively address these disparities, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to be heard and contribute to shaping the dialogue. In this context, the facilitator is responsible for rebalancing the

flow of words and ideas - for example, by drawing attention to overlooked perspectives or encouraging quieter participants to contribute.

- The recognition of diversity and divergence as opportunities for deeper understanding. The aim of participatory activities is not to generate consensus around the research process. The goal is to build trust in the idea that dialogue, critical thinking, and methodological doubt enable a community to gain greater insight into the issues under discussion. Even conflict, when expressed respectfully and constructively, can serve as a valuable catalyst for knowledge and change.

A second critical dimension concerns **the relationship between participants and the facilitator**. The facilitator plays a key role in designing and managing participatory activities. While occupying a distinct position from the other participants, the facilitator is responsible for ensuring that the participatory event proceeds in a sustainable manner and benefits all involved.

The facilitator's role is not to offer personal or professional opinions on the topics discussed, but to create a safe space where all participants feel free to express themselves and engage positively with each other. The facilitator may share aspects of their own experience or perspectives, but only when doing so helps to encourage active engagement from all participants. The facilitator must maintain a stance of impartiality—ideally, equally supportive proximity—toward all participants, refraining from personal or professional judgment about what is shared, and respecting the mutual commitment to reciprocal listening and the co-creation of expanded and improved knowledge.

To foster a positive relationship between the facilitator and participants, it is essential for the facilitator to have:

- A **comprehensive understanding of the research process**, enabling them to situate the participatory activity within a broader context of knowledge and transformation;
- A **deep awareness of their role** and the specific skills it requires, which may differ significantly from those needed in other areas of research, project implementation, or practice;
- A **strong self-awareness of their own experiences and worldview**, particularly in relation to the topics under discussion, allowing them to recognise and appropriately address sensitive issues as they arise.

In some cases, researchers involved in the project play a crucial role in participatory activities. Their knowledge contributions can be highly valuable, as can their in-depth understanding of research, project implementation, and policy processes. In such contexts, it is essential to clarify in advance whether researchers will act as facilitators—adopting a neutral and impartial position—or participate as expert contributors alongside other participants. Both roles offer valuable potential. However, it is essential to avoid any uncertainty or ambiguity about each person's role and stance during the process.



To support effective group dynamics, **dialogue sessions can be structured as multi-phase processes**. Each phase requires specific care and attention:

- The **introductory phase** is especially important when participatory activities involve heterogeneous groups. During this phase, it is essential to recap the key information regarding the meaning and objectives of the activities. It is also important to clearly explain how the insights from the conversation will be used. Participants should be invited to introduce themselves, and a welcoming atmosphere should be created—possibly through ice-breaking activities designed for this purpose.
- The **central phase** constitutes the core of the participatory activity. It focuses on gathering insights and helping interpretative frameworks emerge around complex topics. In this stage, participants can express themselves and listen to one another. It is recommended to structure multiple rounds of conversation and include sufficient breaks to keep the process sustainable. Throughout the process, the facilitator should ensure the discussion remains constructive and inclusive for all participants—not only the research team.
- The **concluding phase** is crucial to situate the activity within the broader project context. During this phase, it is helpful to: offer a clear synthesis of the main points discussed (wrap-up); explain the next steps of the project in detail; invite participants to share reflections and feedback on the experience; and express gratitude to all, highlighting the value of participation in supporting societal transformation.

An example of a dialogue structure is also suggested in the Conversation Starters toolkit (see section 3.3, pp.37-60).

## 2.5 Setting

In participatory activities, the careful selection and design of the setting are essential. The setting is more than just a physical space where activities take place; it also includes material and symbolic elements, such as temporal, social, cultural and institutional dimensions. These elements significantly shape the participatory experience, as the setting as a whole influences group dynamic, meaningful interaction, and the co-creation of knowledge.

Setting configuration can either facilitate or limit authentic dialogue, the expression of diverse viewpoints, and the activation of collaborative dynamics. For example, a setting perceived as formal may discourage participation of marginalized individuals. In contrast, a setting designed to be inclusive and horizontal encourages the emergence of situated knowledge and the development of trusting relationships.

The setting influences not only what is said but also how and by whom it is expressed, which in turn affects the quality of the data collected and its interpretation.

In this context, intentionally shaping the setting requires a reflective and critical approach to the co-creation of knowledge. The deliberate design of the setting in participatory activities is



not a secondary element but a fundamental aspect of both the methodological rigor and the ethical-political integrity of social research.

When designing an inclusive setting, it is important to consider several key aspects:

- Ensure physical and logistical **accessibility** by providing clear directions to the location, designated spaces for care and specific needs, and accessibility for individuals with motor and sensory disabilities.
- Paying attention to participants' **physical and sensory well-being** by considering several practical considerations. These include appropriate lighting, ventilation, and a comfortable temperature to minimise discomfort or fatigue. It also means ensuring space for movement, seating that meets diverse needs, and reducing background noise and other sensory distractions, such as odours or unexpected disturbances.
- Thoughtful management of **time and energy**, which includes scheduling that aligns with participants' availability, respecting agreed-upon timings, and balancing group sessions with individual moments and breaks.
- A welcoming environment and **positive relational climate**, which are supported by an informal, warm, and hospitable atmosphere, sensitivity to each participant's needs, and ongoing attention to ensure that no one feels excluded or isolated.
- Opportunities for reflection and **continuous feedback**, which include participatory evaluation moments and openness to critique are essential for rethinking and improving the setting.

Choosing an appropriate **location** is a key aspect of creating an inclusive setting. Experience shows that workgroups do not always have access to fully suitable and functional spaces. When this is the case, it becomes important to revisit the objectives, techniques, and workgroups to identify reasonable and sustainable alternatives for carrying out participatory activities. If changing the location is not possible, common solutions include reducing the number of participants, shortening the duration of activities, adapting facilitation techniques, or working in smaller groups and across multiple phases. It is essential to avoid imposing unrealistic conditions or creating unsustainable situations.

## 2.6 Communication and language issues

In participatory activities, communication is not just a neutral or purely instrumental aspect; it is one of the key channels through which relationships are built, meanings are negotiated, and knowledge is co-produced. Paying attention to the quality and inclusivity of communication is essential for ensuring meaningful participation and for making processes genuinely fair, accessible, and transformative.

An inclusive approach to communication helps reduce inequalities and recognises the value of different languages, forms of knowledge, and lived experiences. Using language that is accessible, respectful, and reflective builds trust, encourages dialogue, and creates space for

meaningful collaboration. This approach calls for awareness, preparation, and flexibility from the research and facilitation team - along with a readiness to adapt tools, timelines, and attitudes to meet the unique needs of each group.

An inclusive approach to communication and language can be understood through several important dimensions:

- **Addressing language barriers.** In workshops where participants have different language skills, it is crucial to adopt clear strategies to address language barriers and support accessible communication for everyone. Language is not only a means of expression, but also a deeply relational and identity-shaping element that influences a person's ability to actively participate in the co-creation of knowledge. If not actively addressed, language-related barriers can lead to unequal participation, limit the expression of diverse perspectives, and complicate mutual understanding. To ensure equity and inclusion, it is crucial to provide linguistic and cultural mediation services, offer materials in multiple languages, and the design of communication-inclusive activities.
- **Using clear and accessible language.** It is essential to adapt language to the group, considering participants' social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. In most cases, it is possible and recommended to avoid technical jargon or academic language by using simple, accessible terms. Examples, metaphors, and analogies can help foster shared understanding among participants. When working with young people, it is important to simplify language without oversimplifying the message or using a tone that may feel condescending., as this can undermine the depth and complexity of the ideas being conveyed.
- **Avoiding stigmatising language.** Language can reinforce existing inequalities in society and collaborative settings. Particular attention must be paid to word choices, to use gender-inclusive, culturally sensitive, and socially equitable expressions. In some languages and contexts, this task can be particularly challenging, especially where gender-neutral terminology is less common or not widely available. Even in these cases, facilitators can intentionally promote inclusivity and clearly communicate this commitment to the group, fostering creative and effective solutions.
- **Carefully preparing materials and visual supports.** Thoughtfully designed materials and supports foster accessibility, inclusivity, and the overall effectiveness of participatory processes. Well-crafted communication tools—whether visual, textual, digital, or symbolic—help create an environment where participants can orient themselves, understand the purpose of the activities, and actively contribute to knowledge co-production. Clear, diverse, and culturally responsive materials can help reduce cognitive and linguistic barriers, support different learning styles, and encourage participation across a range of experiences, skills, and needs. Moreover, appropriate tools facilitate interaction and dialogue, promoting transparency and fairness in interpretation and decision-making processes. The visual outputs developed within the

CLEAR project (see the Conversation Starters Toolkit, pp.36-60) provide useful examples in this regard.

- **Fostering inclusive group dynamics.** Finally, an inclusive approach to language and communication requires careful attention to facilitation style, participation methods, and to the management of group dynamics. As discussed in previous sections, it is crucial to create a safe space, establish shared behavioural norms, encourage active and respectful listening, pay attention to non-verbal cues, and use techniques that ensure an equitable distribution of speaking time. Facilitators should recognise and actively address communication imbalances while affirming the value of every contribution.

Inclusive communication and language are not achieved solely through explicit guidelines or rules. Most importantly, they stem from a reflective and self-aware approach- one that transforms language into a means of mutual recognition and a pathway to democratising knowledge. In participatory research processes, **a facilitator's language is never neutral:** it carries world views, values, and power dynamics that can significantly influence the communicative environment. For this reason, a central part of the facilitator's role is the ongoing practice of critical reflexivity about their communicative approach. Facilitators need to be able to adapt their language to the context, listen attentively to participants' ways of expressing themselves, and foster a communicative style that is respectful, clear, inclusive, and welcoming. This involves a willingness to question habitual communication patterns and to welcome critical feedback as an opportunity for learning and growth.

Within CLEAR, the co-creation of visual outputs for the Innovation Forums acted as a testing ground for the communication guidelines described above. The outputs aimed to be both representative of the research findings and accessible to a wider audience, so that they could act as effective conversation starters. Four work package (WP) teams were involved, each following a distinct process:

- **WP3** developed two data visualisations based on the main findings of their quantitative research. Specifically, the report identified four European macro-regions that differ in terms of the opportunities available to young people. The team therefore decided to produce two outputs: one addressing individual perceptions and another offering a more descriptive overview of the regional characteristics.
- **WP4** translated key findings from their qualitative report — a series of interviews with policymakers in the field of education — into three fictional stories. These stories were created to encourage discussions about biases and stereotypes related to young people.
- **WP5** coordinated by Codici and the national teams, selected one meaningful quote per country from the interviews conducted with young people.

- **WP6** produced a data visualisation highlighting one of the main findings from their survey of education experts, with the aim of fostering the debate on the future of education systems.

In particular, the process within WP5 presented challenges from both ethical and communication perspectives. It required a careful balance between protecting interviewees' anonymity and addressing sensitive issues that could be emotionally impactful for the Innovation Forums' audiences. Additionally, the translation process involved several steps: the quotes were first translated into English, then selected by Codici, and finally reviewed and re-translated by the national teams. This highlighted the importance of not underestimating the challenges of translation within international consortia, as meaning can easily be lost or shifted.

## 2.7 Ethics and data management

The TPA is based on the principle of doing research “with, rather than on, participants” (Bussu & Lalani, 2020, p. 2)<sup>2</sup>. Choosing this kind of research approach invites a critical reflection on traditional ethical requirements - such as informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and ownership of the research (Löfman et al., 2004<sup>3</sup>; Renold et al., 2008<sup>4</sup>; Banks et al., 2013<sup>5</sup>; Lomax, 2015<sup>6</sup>; Mannay et al., 2017<sup>7</sup>). It requires going beyond simply accepting the formal ethical principles of the Helsinki Declaration, and instead calls for deeper, context-sensitive ethical engagement. In CLEAR we have outlined our ethical, moral and legal approach to research in the Deliverable D3.1 Working Paper on Ethical Issues. However, we believe it is essential to carefully consider the ethical dimensions and data management responsibilities that arise from using participatory methods in research.

### Ethical Considerations in participatory methods

#### a) Redefining Roles: From Subjects to Co-Researchers

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<sup>2</sup> Bussu, S., & Lalani, M. (2020). Engaging with care: Ethical issues in participatory research. *Qualitative Research*, 21(5), 667–685.

<sup>3</sup> Löfman, P., Pelkonen, M., & Pietilä, A.-M. (2004). Ethical issues in participatory action research. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 18(3), 333–340.

<sup>4</sup> Renold, E., Holland, S., Ross, N. J., & Hillman, A. (2008). 'Becoming participant': Problematizing 'informed consent' in participatory research with young people in care. *Qualitative Social Work*, 7(4), 427–447.

<sup>5</sup> Banks, S., Armstrong, A., Carter, K., Graham, H., Hayward, P., Henry, A., Holland, T., Holmes, C., Lee, A., McNulty, A., Moore, N., Nayling, N., Stokoe, A., & Strachan, A. (2013). Everyday ethics in community-based participatory research. *Contemporary Social Science*, 8(3), 263–277.

<sup>6</sup> Lomax, H. (2015). Seen and heard? Ethics and agency in participatory visual research with children, young people and families. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 4(3), 493–502.

<sup>7</sup> Mannay, D., Staples, E., & Edwards, V. (2017). Visual methodologies, sand and psychoanalysis: Employing creative participatory techniques to explore the educational experiences of mature students and children in care. *Visual Studies*, 32(4), 345–358.

Genuine participation starts with a shifting perspective: people involved in research - even in short or specific activities- are not passive “subjects,” but **active co-researchers**. This means:

- **Recognising non-academic knowledge:** it means valuing participants' experiences and insights as equally important to the expertise of formally trained researchers.
- **Transparency about the limits of participation:** it is essential to clearly communicate what participants can influence, along with any constraints - such as those related to methods, institutions, or funding.

**b) Shared decision-making:** it means involving participants - wherever possible, and especially when engaged from the early stages of a participatory process - in shaping research questions, selecting methods, and interpreting findings together.

### **Informed Consent as an Ongoing Process**

In participatory contexts, informed consent is more than a formal requirement. It should be seen as an ongoing, monitored and -where appropriate-negotiated process throughout the research:

- Ensure that information is clear, accessible and responsive to participants' linguistic and cultural contexts (see also Section 2.6: Communication and language issues).
- Revisit consent whenever research goals, methods, or data use evolve over time.
- Make sure that participation is genuinely voluntary and not influenced by indirect pressure, social dynamics, or relational dependencies.
- When planning a participatory activity, it is important to allocate a specific time and a comfortable space for participants to read and sign the Informed consent documents. Having a researcher available during this moment can support participants and help address any questions or concerns they might have. If participants need to sign an attendance form, be careful to limit the amount and type of personal data collected. Clearly explain how the attendance list will be used and why.

### **c) Recognition and Reciprocity**

Participatory research requires different levels of commitment from participants, depending on their role -from consultants to co-researchers. Because of this, it is essential to ensure:

- Accessible ways to share feedback and results: public presentations, visual materials, community events, and non-academic formats should be prioritised. In this direction, an example of visual materials is well illustrated in section 3, the Conversation Starters Toolkit.
- Symbolic and/or material recognition of participants' contributions-whether through credit (if they wish), compensation, or by giving communities tangible use of the research outputs. In CLEAR, for example, participants have received a report summarising the contributions and insights from the Innovation Forums. This documentation is intended to be useful, considering their role as stakeholders or, in some cases, policy makers in the

educational system (see also section 3.2.3, Managing the closing session and post-event process, p. 59).

- Care to avoid unrealistic expectations: be clear from the start about what the project can - and cannot - deliver in terms of impact or return.

## Data Management in participatory methods

### a) Co-Creation of Data

Participatory research often involves the collective production of data, using **creative, dialogic, and non-traditional methods** - such as storytelling, community mapping, diaries, and photo or video-based projects). In CLEAR, both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected using standard methods, including dataset analysis, surveys and interviews. Although the Conversation Starters were not co-developed with participants, they were actively involved in selecting the content and validating its clarity and accessibility.

However, this process presents specific challenges:

- **Understanding where data comes from and the context in which it was generated is vital:** it includes who produced it, how it was collected, and under what conditions.
- Researchers should **discuss with participants how data will be interpreted and used**, recognising that materials can hold emotional, symbolic, or political meaning. In CLEAR, one of the Conversation Starters features selected excerpts from interviews with young adults to encourage conversations about education systems (see Tool handbook 3 - What if you could hear their voices?, p. 49). The young interviewees were fully informed about how their interview material would be used and all personal information was removed during the graphic editing stage.
- The **context in which data is produced should be documented**, as participatory data can lose its meaning if taken out of context. All Conversation Starters presented here (see page p.36-60) clearly state the source of the data used.

### b) Anonymity, Privacy, and Control Over Data

Participation does not remove the need for data protection—in fact, it often makes it more complex:

- When working with sensitive data - such as information about health, migration, or conflict- it is important to assess risks of indirect identification, including through photos or quotes.
- Researchers should set clear agreements on who can access the data, where it will be stored, and for how long. Co-designing data protocols helps build trust and accountability.
- When co-creating project outputs based on qualitative data, such as interviews or personal stories, special attention must be given to protecting anonymity. In CLEAR, designing the Conversation Starter based on WP5 quotes presented challenges from both ethical and communication perspectives. It required carefully balancing the need to protect

interviewees' anonymity with the responsibility to handle sensitive issues that could affect and distress the Innovation Forums' audiences.

- Still, not all participants wish to remain anonymous. Some may prefer to be publicly acknowledged -for example, activists, artists, community leaders. This choice should be informed, voluntary, and reversible.

### **c) Storage, Access, and Reuse**

After data collection, data management involves further decisions:

- Use secure and transparent storage systems- preferably digital- that comply with data protection principles and relevant regulations.
- Consider making data openly accessible- but only with participants' informed consent, and after discussing potential risks related to re-use or misinterpretation.
- If requested, allow participants to withdraw or delete their data, respecting their right to decide how their contributions are preserved or removed. This is particularly important when publishing photos or videos taken during project activities.

## Recommended resources

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## **Web Portals and Online Resources about Participatory Methods**

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### 3. Conversation Starters Toolkit

#### 3.1 Introduction

The Conversation Starters Toolkit comprises resources specifically designed to **facilitate reflection and dialogue on learning environments and outcomes**, engaging non-academic stakeholders through participatory activities.

The toolkit is based on the idea that acknowledging and comparing diverse perspectives **fosters deeper, more solid knowledge**. It also enables negotiation and collaboration processes that can contribute to both incremental and transformative social change.

This toolkit originates from the participatory activities carried out within the CLEAR project and builds upon both quantitative and qualitative research conducted throughout the project. Each set of tools has its own origin and purpose. Yet they all share a common goal: to foster knowledge and mutual understanding within local contexts, encouraging all stakeholders to **shift perspectives** and **make space for generative dialogue**.

The toolkit is designed as **a capacity-building tool for academic and independent researchers** aiming to actively engage young people, education professionals, researchers and policymakers within a collaborative research framework. Additionally, it can be easily adapted to engage a wide range of stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.

Aligned with this approach, all the tools in this set can be used flexibly, adapting to the specific contextual needs and objectives defined by those facilitating a participatory process. The toolkit offers a range of suggestions and practical examples based on its conception, development, and testing throughout CLEAR.

The visual and graphic design of these tools has been created to be clear, inclusive, and accessible to everyone, whether young or adults, education experts or not. Federica Delprino, the graphic designer, developed the designs in collaboration with Codici.

In the following pages, **four handbooks** offer instructions and practical suggestions on how to use the Conversation Starters developed through CLEAR's participatory activities. Additionally, the complete **graphic toolset** is illustrated as a preview in Annex 2 (English version). Additional language versions of the graphic toolset are available on the CLEAR website (<https://clear-horizon.eu/>).

#### 3.2 Handbooks

These four Conversation Starters are designed as tools to facilitate dialogue and exchange between people on the themes explored in CLEAR research. These tools are intended for use within a participatory process that has clearly defined objectives, an appropriate setting, and established guidelines for conducting and facilitating activities. Their use is aligned with the recommendations outlined in all the previous sections of these Guidelines.



Specifically, the tools were applied during the implementation of the 11 Innovation Forum, a participatory activity tested in eight partner countries. The process involved 220 participants, including young people, professionals from both formal and non-formal education, and policymakers working in the fields of education and youth policy. Based on this experience, we have developed a series of handbooks that share key insights and practical suggestions. These instructions are closely linked to the CLEAR experience and are not intended to be applied to other contexts or conditions that are significantly different from those explored within the project.

All Innovation Forums followed a similar structure, consisting of a shared framework to open and close each event, and one or more core discussion activities involving participants, facilitated by the Conversation Starters Toolkit.

In general, a participatory event, understood as a multi-phase process (see 2.4 Managing group dynamics), should include:

1. an opening session
2. a core activity session
3. a closing session

### **3.2.1 Managing the opening session**

Below is an example of an opening session, as tested in CLEAR's Innovation Forum, including suggestions on what to do and say.

An opening session should include:

1. Participant Registration: set up a dedicated registration desk with a sign-in sheet and provide blank copies of the required Image Release Form for participants to fill in. Ensure that at least one staff member is available to assist with registration and form filling. If your core activity involves dividing participants into groups, you can manage this during registration, assigning the participant to a specific group through a label system (colour-based, image-based or naming-based).
2. Opening session, usually held in plenary. Keep it brief and focus on providing essential information:
  - Start with some welcoming words and mention the title of the event.
  - Introduce the staff (names and their roles in the event). Do not forget to also mention the people in charge of the backstage activities of the event.
  - Mention the location and the reasons for choosing it. This may be relevant to the event's context.

- Provide a brief project or research presentation (a slideshow of 5 to 8 slides is suggested but it can be longer depending on the event's objectives and participants' level of expertise). Explain the participatory approach of the event, the research design, and what the project or research has carried out and discovered. Clearly state the aim of the event and the expected outcomes.
- Present the agenda of the day and its timing.
- Provide additional briefing if needed, such as practical information (Wi-Fi, toilets, WIFI, coffee break area, etc.) and safety regulations.
- Give a brief explanation on how you will work and the criteria for dividing participants into groups. Ask if anyone has any doubts or questions about the information and instructions provided.
- Finally, invite people to join the next session, which will focus on the core activities.

In the introduction phase, it is also important to allow participants to introduce themselves to others. several aspects. How this is done depends on several aspects that should be considered in the design of the event- such as participants' age and profile, the level of formality, and any anonymity requirements. Make sure that any ice-breaking activity you choose helps participants feel comfortable taking part.

Within CLEAR participatory activities, for example, we designed an ice-breaker tailored to specific project topics. Here we share one that we tested within CLEAR - specifically designed as an ice-breaker tailored to project topics.

To encourage participants to introduce themselves, a few thematic inputs can be selected based on the research or project topics and turned into biographical questions about participants' personal educational experiences. Here are some examples of ice-breaking questions used in small groups: *What is the most useful thing you learned in school? And the least useful?; Which teacher do you recall with affection and why?; What's the best advice you've ever been given when you were a student?*

Each participant in the group takes a few minutes to share their answer, choosing the question they prefer. Remind participants that they are free to choose what to share and what to keep private. Make it clear that no judgments will be made, and emphasise the importance of listening respectfully to one other. Having facilitators participate in the ice-breaker by offering their own answers can help to create a friendly and participatory atmosphere.

Concerning **group division criteria**, the choice of how to divide participants strongly depends on the aims of the activity. Specifically speaking about participative methods, we underlined the importance of giving space for exchanging points of view between people with different profiles, so that their different expertise can meet. In those cases, creating mixed groups by profile (for example, gathering teachers and students, or professionals and policymakers) is an excellent choice to be able to generate a comparison between different visions and different sensitivities, while being careful to avoid potentially problematic matches due to power dynamics.

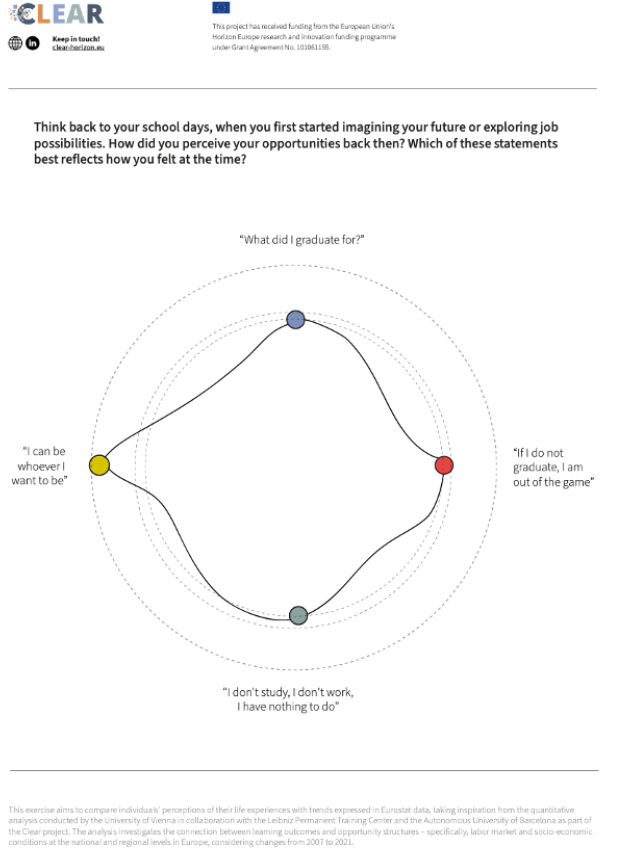
Nevertheless, knowing participants' profiles or backgrounds in advance is not always possible. If a pre-registration system is not feasible, group division may be managed using a random criterion. Still, once groups are formed, it is worth checking for a good level of variety and representativeness of expertise and background within each group. In cases where there is a large age gap between participants (e.g. young people and senior professionals), it is very important to evaluate whether the mixed groups are acceptable for the younger participants or whether they might feel uncomfortable. In such cases, allowing participants to form their own groups or adjusting group composition based on the preferences of younger participants - while still enabling opportunities for exchange - can help reinforce their sense of acceptance within the event.

### **3.2.2 Managing the core activity**

In the following section, we offer a set of suggestions on how to start and develop a meaningful and generative discussion with participants. These are supported by four conversation starter tools designed within CLEAR and its participatory activities, based on the main results of the four research work packages. A **practical handbook** has been created for each conversation starter to support potential users, including academics, researchers, and practitioners.

Each handbook provides key information about the tool, including a visual preview, a brief description, its objectives, the topics it can help address, suggested ways to use it, and recommended timing for implementation.

## Tool Handbook 1 - WP3\_What if You Lived Elsewhere?

Basic Info on the Tool	Preview of the Tool <sup>8</sup>
<p><b>Title:</b> <i>What if you lived elsewhere?</i> Comparing individual and structural opportunities for young people across EU regions using research data</p> <p><b>References to Clear Deliverables and Research Process:</b> Graphic output based on Clear - WP3 - Quantitative analysis of learning outcomes</p> <p><b>Toolset elements:</b> A poster with graphic processing, 4 coloured sticker layers to be placed on top of the poster.</p> <p>The output is available in Catalan, English, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.</p>	

### Short description of the tool

This tool was inspired by the quantitative analysis conducted in WP3 of Clear by the University of Vienna in collaboration with the Leibniz Permanent Training Center and the Autonomous University of Barcelona. The analysis conducted within CLEAR investigates the connection between learning outcomes and opportunity structures – specifically, labour market and socio-economic conditions at the national and regional levels in Europe, considering changes from 2007 to 2021.

This tool represents territorial opportunities across European regions. CLEAR research identified four categories, based on the type of job and the highest educational qualification that girls and boys living in the specified regional areas may aspire to. The categories were derived from the research but have been refined into four phrases (called labels) that reflect plausible statements made by people.

<sup>8</sup> For the complete graphics see Annex 2 - Conversation starters graphic kit p. 63.

In the first stage, the four labels are placed on a graph without levels (see Annex 2 Conversation Starters - WP3\_What if You Lived Elsewhere?). Participants are asked to use their knowledge and experience to indicate where they rank themselves based on their personal experience, and where they believe their region - or a specific region - ranks. In a second stage, levels derived from research data can be added to test participants' suggestions.

### **For what purpose can it be used?**

- To develop the quantitative research process by deepening reflection on selected topics such as spatial inequalities and regional or generational diversity;
- to promote the exchange of ideas among people with different roles and perspectives on research topics;
- to enhance each participant's personal and professional perspective.

### **Which topics are addressed by the tool?**

- Different perspectives on the relationship between level and degree of education and access to the labour market;
- The relationship between personal perception and evidence from data and research;
- The centrality of both diachronic and synchronic dimensions;
- Multiple factors that determine the relationship between education, training and the labour market;
- Coherence or mismatch between educational systems and the labour market.

The two main questions that the tool addresses are:

1. What is the role of intermediate contextual factors, i.e., those concentric circles that play - or should play - a mediating function between the structural and the micro / family context?
2. What role play mediators - primarily teachers - play in acknowledging and addressing vulnerabilities and the effects of unequal starting conditions? Do they serve an equalising or multiplying function?

### **Possible uses and suggested timing**

Below is an example of a workshop outline tested in CLEAR, designed for a two-hour group session with five to ten participants, plus one facilitator and one note-taker.



- (5 minutes) Start with a general introduction about the CLEAR project and present the meeting's focus and objectives;
- (10 minutes) Introduce a discussion prompt and give participants a few minutes to gather their ideas and experiences (you can provide sticky notes for them to write down keywords);
- (40 minutes) Ask participants to introduce themselves and position on the label that best matches their personal experience, using a sticky note or a dot.

**Figure 5 - Participants position a dot according to their personal experience**



- (30 minutes) Present the sticky levels, asking participants to place their stickers on the label that best describes what they think is the general condition of the region where the activity is being conducted.

**Figure 6 - Participants position the stickers according to their opinion**




- (20 minutes) Following the conversation, briefly present the cross-sectional findings from WP3 and other relevant WPs, and engage in discussion.

Figure 7 - Participants are engaged in the discussion around research findings (labels) and their perceptions (stickers)



- (5 minutes) Final comments, meeting feedback, and closing thanks.

## Tool Handbook 2 - WP4\_What if You Were Them?

Basic Info on the Tool	Preview of the Tool <sup>9</sup>
<p><b>Title:</b> <i>What if you were them?</i></p> <p>Exploring multiple career paths through imaginative stories.</p> <p><b>References to CLEAR Deliverables and Research Process:</b></p> <p>Graphic output drawn from WP4 - Institutional analysis, policy review and assessment</p> <p>D4.1 International Policy Review Report D4.4 Policy Brief addressing poor learning outcomes</p> <p><b>Toolset Elements:</b></p> <p>The 3 graphic outputs all consist of :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A header with institutional logos;</li> <li>• A main section including a short biography with two guiding questions;</li> <li>• A footer explaining the creative process behind the output.</li> </ul> <p>The graphic output is available in Catalan, English, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.</p> <p>The graphic output is designed for versatile use across different formats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A3 poster – for display on walls</li> <li>• A5/postcard – for easy distribution to participants</li> <li>• A4 sheet – allowing participants to take notes or write down thoughts during discussions</li> </ul>	 <p>The preview shows three examples of the tool's graphic output. Each example includes the CLEAR logo, the 'Keep in touch!' contact information, and a funding notice from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation funding programme. The first example features a young person who didn't finish secondary school and has had intermittent jobs, with the question 'Who might this person be? What steps could they take?'. The second example features two friends who grew up together but ended up in different places, with the question 'What led them down such different paths?'. The third example features a young person with a migration background working informally in the culinary sector, with the question 'What steps might they take? What challenges could they encounter along the way?'.</p>

<sup>9</sup> For the complete graphics see Annex 2 - Conversation starters graphic kit p. 63.

### **Short description of the tool**

The three selected stories are based on interviews with experts and students conducted by the WP4 core team as part of the CLEAR research project. They highlight key findings from the WP4 report, specifically:

- The emphasis on soft skills
- The significance of spatial injustice
- The impact of school evaluation on students' career paths, considering an intersectional perspective.

These materials present plausible scenarios and pose open-ended questions to encourage reflection, critical thinking and group discussion. Stories and situations are presented concisely, revealing some information while leaving many aspects and details undefined. Participants are asked to use their knowledge and imagination to complete the story and answer certain questions about the paths of the different characters presented.

### **For what purpose can it be used?**

- To integrate WP4 research findings, deepening reflection on selected topics such as spatial inequalities;
- To promote the exchange of ideas among people with different roles and perspectives on research topics;
- To enhance each participant's personal and professional perspective.

### **Which topics are addressed by the tool?**

- Different definitions and perspectives on inequality;
- Challenges in considering and enhancing learners' diversity;
- Centrality of the spatial dimension;
- Ranking of knowledge and skills in different educational contexts;
- Multi-stakeholder governance and the challenges of coordinating different interventions;
- Evaluation of programs and policies;
- Coherence between educational systems and the labour market.

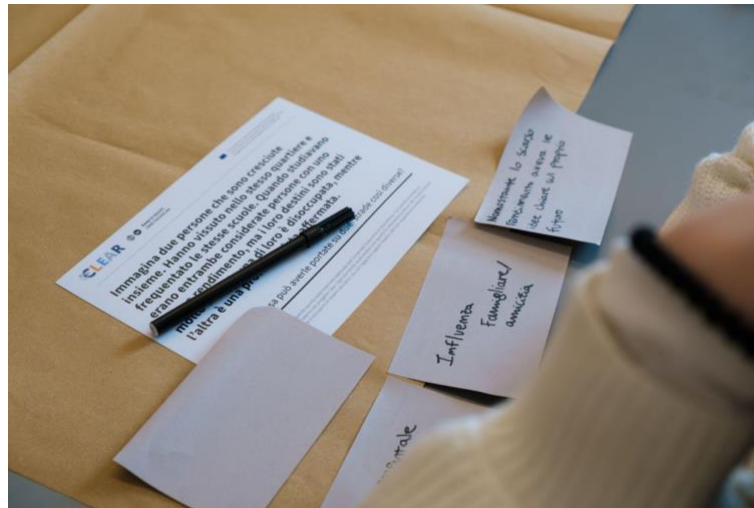
### **Possible options of use and suggested timing**

Below is an example of a workshop outline tested in CLEAR, designed for a two-hour group session with five to ten participants, plus one facilitator and one note-taker.



- (5 minutes) Introduce the facilitators/researchers, present the general aim and focus of the meeting, and briefly summarise the CLEAR project experience;
- (10 minutes) Introduce a discussion prompt and give participants a few minutes to gather their ideas and experiences (you can give them sticky notes to write down some keyword);

Figure 8 - Participants write down some keywords on sticky notes



- (40 minutes) Ask participants to share their ideas and keywords in a first round of discussion;
- (15 minutes) After the conversation, briefly present cross-sectional research findings
- (30 minutes) Ask participants to share their ideas and keywords in a second round of discussion;
- (15 minutes) Ask participants to select 2/3 important keywords that inspire how educational systems function, then create a final word cloud together using sticky notes;

Figure 9 - Sharing of sticky notes in a final word cloud



- (5 minutes) Final comments, feedback on the meeting and closing thanks.

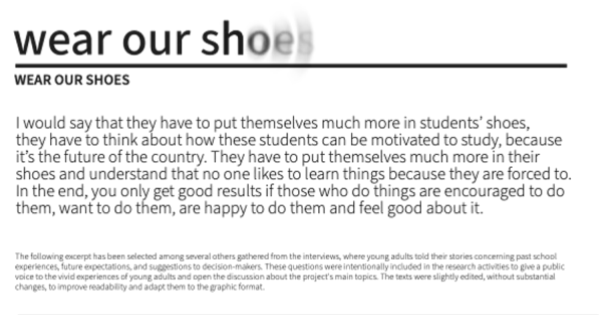



Moreover, in a workshop, a stimulating discussion with participants could also be raised with **alternative prompts:**

- *Imagine a person who was a brilliant student, praised by teachers for their interpersonal skills. Now, they're unemployed. What might have happened?*
- *Imagine a person trained as a surgeon who now works as a professional caregiver. Why did they make this career shift?*
- *Imagine a person with limited language skills works only irregularly. Now, they aspire to become a social worker. What path might they follow?*
- *Picture someone with a university degree in agricultural sciences who now wants to shift careers and become a social worker. What steps might they take, and what challenges could they face along the way?*

All these prompts are referred to CLEAR WP4 findings, but were not selected for the final graphical toolset.



## Tool handbook 3 - WP5\_What If You Could Hear Their Voices?

Basic Info On the Tool	Preview of the Tool <sup>10</sup>
<p><b>Title:</b> <i>What if you could hear their voices?</i> Excerpts from research interviews with young adults to spark discussions about education systems</p> <p><b>References to Clear Deliverables and Research Process:</b> Graphic output WP5 - Qualitative Research with Young People</p> <p>References to CLEAR Deliverables: D5.2 National Qualitative Report</p>	<p>What would you say to those in charge of taking decisions?</p>  <p><b>WEAR OUR SHOES</b></p> <p>I would say that they have to put themselves much more in students' shoes, they have to think about how these students can be motivated to study, because it's the future of the country. They have to put themselves much more in their shoes and understand that no one likes to learn things because they are forced to. In the end, you only get good results if those who do things are encouraged to do them, want to do them, are happy to do them and feel good about it.</p> <p><small>The following excerpt has been selected among several others gathered from the interviews, where young adults told their stories concerning past school experiences, future expectations, and suggestions to decision-makers. These questions were intentionally included in the research activities to give a public voice to the vivid experiences of young adults and open the discussion about the project's main topics. The texts were slightly edited, without substantial changes, to improve readability and adapt them to the graphic format.</small></p> <p>   This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation funding programme under Grant Agreement No. 101011355.</p>
<p><b>Toolset elements:</b> The poster is structured into four levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first level features an excerpt from the interview transcript related to the advice that students would like to give to decision-makers.</li> <li>• The second level contains a statement in large, bold characters with a blurred effect, resembling a claim or a strong recommendation.</li> <li>• The third level includes the actual quote, reporting the interviewee's words and their thoughts on what should be done.</li> <li>• The fourth level, with smaller text positioned at the bottom of the page, provides information about the project and the interviews conducted.</li> </ul> <p>The graphic output is designed for versatile use across different formats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A3 poster – for display on walls</li> <li>• A5 postcard – for easy distribution to participants</li> <li>• A4 sheet – allowing participants to take notes or write down thoughts during discussions</li> </ul> <p>The output is available in Catalan, English, Finnish, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.</p>	

<sup>10</sup> For the complete graphics see Annex 2 - Conversation starters graphic kit p. 63

### **Short description of the tool**

This tool presents an excerpt from an interview conducted with a young person during the research, focusing on the connection between relationships and motivation in educational contexts.

Interview outlines and guidelines have been validated with selected groups of street-level professionals in Finland, Portugal, and Bulgaria (WP5 core teams). The final guidelines included a series of questions specifically aimed at clearly and directly eliciting the perspectives of young people on certain specific topics.

The responses were included in the research process with the specific aim of publicly giving voice to the lived experiences and opinions of young adults, as well as stimulating debate on the main project topics.

Starting from the verbatim transcription, the texts have been slightly edited, without substantial changes, to facilitate reading and graphic adaptation.

### **For what purpose can it be used?**

- To deepen reflection on the project's themes, especially inclusive learning environments;
- To highlight learners' perspectives;
- To recognise and appreciate the different perspectives in the field;
- To promote self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to take on others' perspectives.

### **Which topics are addressed by the tool?**

- Learners' perceptions and experiences of inclusion in learning environments;
- Learners' perceptions and experiences about justice and injustice in learning environments;
- The importance of interpersonal relationships, listening, and empathy in learning environments;
- Feelings of "constraint" and "freedom" and the role of motivation in educational relationships and environments;
- Recognition and appreciation of diversity in educational environments;
- Spatial inequalities;
- The connection between educational contexts and the future of our societies, including young people's ideas about how to reform the educational system.

### **Possible uses and suggested timing**

Below is an example of a workshop outline tested in the CLEAR discussion session on inclusive learning environments, inspired by the words of young people and the personal experiences and views of the participants. This workshop is designed for a two-hour group session with five to ten participants, one facilitator, and one note-takers.



- (5 minutes) Start with a general update on the CLEAR project and present the meeting's focus and objectives.
- (5 minutes) Introduce this poster and other interview quotes. The materials can be displayed on the walls to encourage participants to move around and engage with them, or arranged in smaller printed formats on the table where participants sit, allowing them to share and read the materials.

**Figure 10 - Introducing the excerpt from an interview conducted with a young person during the research**



- (15 minutes) give participants some time to gather their ideas and experiences (you can give them sticky notes or paper to note down keywords). Then, give this instruction: "Carefully read these words from the interviews and reflect on your personal experiences of growth, education, and training. Identify a particularly positive episode regarding your relationship with the education and training system. Write a title for this episode on a sticky note."
- (40 minutes) Ask participants to share their experiences and ideas in the first round of discussion.
- (15 minutes) Following the conversation, a researcher can briefly present WP5 findings and other relevant research results.
- (5 minutes) Instruction from the facilitator: "After listening to your colleagues' stories and considering CLEAR findings, identify three key elements for building fully inclusive learning environments."
- (30 minutes) Ask participants to share their ideas and keywords in a second round of discussion and create together a final concept map about inclusive learning environments.
- (5 minutes) Final comments from the facilitator, feedback on the meeting, and closing thanks.

A list of **alternative quotes** from the project to use instead of those tested in CLEAR:

- “I don’t really know what to tell those who decide policies and services. They should understand the little ones, the ones who would be walking under them, their subordinates. For the teacher, the students, for the employer, the employees, and so on. Because everyone is different, some people are calm, some are stubborn, some neutral. They should understand the way they walk, they talk, and their reactions. It’s a good thing to understand, because you could learn and know the right way to talk with those people.”
- “The future is us, and we are not being valued by the policymakers. We need to give value to ourselves by our own strength. We tend to be oppressed by the system. Instead, we need to go against the current one, intelligently and with the right means. I am not a person who has studied a lot, I am a bit politically ignorant as well, so I am not speaking out. If you want the opportunities, if you seek them, the opportunities are there, but it all depends on you and your will.”
- “To those who decide policies and services, I would say, apart from changing their mind about young people, start trusting people more. Even, for example, foreigners, showing a little more respect, perhaps. I don’t know, it seems like they don’t understand young people’s potential.”
- “To those who are responsible for deciding about school, I would say that I know for a fact that all young people think of the Italian school system as a very backwards system. Perhaps we could introduce in school workshops on, for instance, sexual education, because it remains taboo, or even on environmental issues. In my opinion, it could be interesting, it could make you open your mind a little.”
- “In my opinion, school must be accessible to everyone. A boy who has family difficulties, but he is a very good boy with excellent grades, should have the opportunity to study, too. Even books or school supplies in my opinion should not be something that a child or a family has to pay for among a thousand of other expenses. Because in the end training is important and therefore it has to be made accessible, a family should not have to pay €400 for books every year.”
- “Teachers have to consider all the students equally, but if someone has problems they should still support them and help them, because it’s not easy for everyone. So, in my opinion they should give a lot of help to people who are struggling, who have problems like mine. They must be helped, they must always be on the same level as others. All students are the same, but perhaps they should have more consideration for those people who have problems and help them.”

All these prompts refer to WP5 findings but were not selected for the main graphic output.



## Tool Handbook 4 - WP6\_What If You Could Change the Educational System?

Basic Info On the Tool	Preview of the Tool <sup>11</sup>
<p><b>Title:</b> <i>What if you could change the educational system?</i></p> <p>Analysing likely and desirable scenarios with experts, policymakers, and young adults</p> <p><b>References to CLEAR Deliverables and research process:</b> Graphic output drawn from WP6. The content originates from the experts' survey conducted by the WP6 core team as part of the CLEAR research project.</p> <p>Deliverable D6.1 Experts' Survey on Policy Coordination</p>	<p>Experts from different parts of Europe were asked to define how likely and desirable certain scenarios related to education are. Here are some of their responses:</p> <p>Decision-makers will pay more attention to test scores and other ways to measure learning</p> <p>Students will be sorted more often based on how well they do in tests or assessments</p> <p>The idea of merit and excellence as it becomes more important in education policy</p> <p>Legend: Likelihood (Yellow) Desirability (Blue)</p> <p>general</p> <p><small>The CLEAR Horizon project explores 'near learning outcomes' developed through 'in-between' actions and activities, examining factors of individual, institutional, social, structural, and relational levels. The Expert Survey on Policy Coordination analyses how these factors play out in policy debates across Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Over 400 shared ideas and their insights, 'forecasting' future scenarios and highlighting potential conflicts. This analysis is used to inform the development of the analysis of 'future and likelihood of merit'.</small></p>

<sup>11</sup> For the complete graphics see Annex 2 - Conversation starters graphic kit p. 63.



**Toolset elements:**

The toolset includes:

- A. A poster with an empty diagram labelled with three scenarios
- B. A poster with a graph showing average responses on the likelihood of these scenarios
- C. A poster with a graph showing average responses on the desirability of these scenarios
- D. A poster with a graph combining likelihood and desirability (as shown at the beginning of the document).
- E. Separate layers (likelihood and desirability) available as add-ons to the main poster.

All posters contain:

- A header with the institutional logo
- A main section including a short biography and two guiding questions
- A footer explaining the sources of the content.

The graphic output is designed for versatile use across different formats:

- A2 poster – for display on walls
- A3 poster – for display on walls or tables, suitable for small groups
- A4 sheet – allowing participants to take notes or write down thoughts during discussions

The output is available in Catalan, English, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

**Short description of the tool**

The tool is a graph that represents the likelihood and desirability of three different scenarios through two coloured layers, based on experts' responses to the survey questionnaire.

The general picture of the likelihood and desirability of these three scenarios can be divided into three separate shapes: the empty shape showing the three scenarios; the yellow shape showing the average responses on the likelihood of each scenario; and the blue shape showing the average responses on the desirability of each scenario.

The focus is particularly on the likelihood and desirability of three different scenarios:

1. Statistical measurement of learning outcomes will become more important in policy-making arenas
2. Measurement of learning outcomes will be used more frequently to sort and categorise learners (into achievement categories)
3. Merit and excellence will become more important in the policy debate

These scenarios have been rephrased to be more accessible as follows:



- Decision-makers will pay more attention to test scores and other ways to measure learning
- Students will be sorted more often based on how well they perform in tests or assessments
- The idea of merit and excellence will become more important in education policy

The selection was based on the fact that these scenarios showed the largest gap between likelihood and desirability. This gap highlights a possible future area of discussion and divergence of points of view.

### **For what purpose can it be used?**

- To discuss the probability and desirability of different future scenarios related to (statistical) measurement of learning outcomes, the role of merit and excellence, and their consequences for educational systems and individual careers;
- To present the general trends regarding these scenarios as identified by WP6 research with experts.
- To promote the exchange of ideas among people with different roles and perspectives on the research topics;
- To enhance the personal and professional perspectives of each participant regarding the future scenarios.

### **Which topics are addressed by the tool?**

This tool is designed to start a group discussion about future scenarios concerning the role of statistical measurement of learning outcomes, as well as the evaluation and construction of merit and excellence. On one hand, the toolset can be used to foster discussion about future decisions in the educational policy arena. On the other hand, regardless of experts' opinions, it can be used to:

- Share CLEAR research results and the general trend on future educational scenarios with different groups, while also incorporating and comparing other perspectives (i.e. young people) alongside the experts' opinions.
- Gather information on different groups' representations and opinions about (statistical) measurement of learning outcomes, merit, and excellence, based on their lived, everyday experiences.
- Consider the possible consequences of these scenarios on individual lives at different levels.
- Foster discussion on possible long-term adjustments and/or changes to address the undesirability of these scenarios.

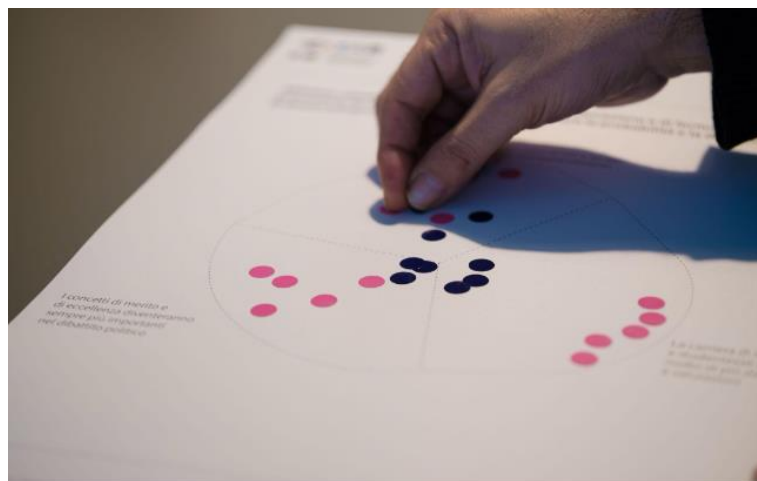
### **Possible uses and suggested timing**

Below is an example outline of a workshop tested in CLEAR, designed for a 90-minute group session with five to ten participants, one facilitator, and one note-taker.



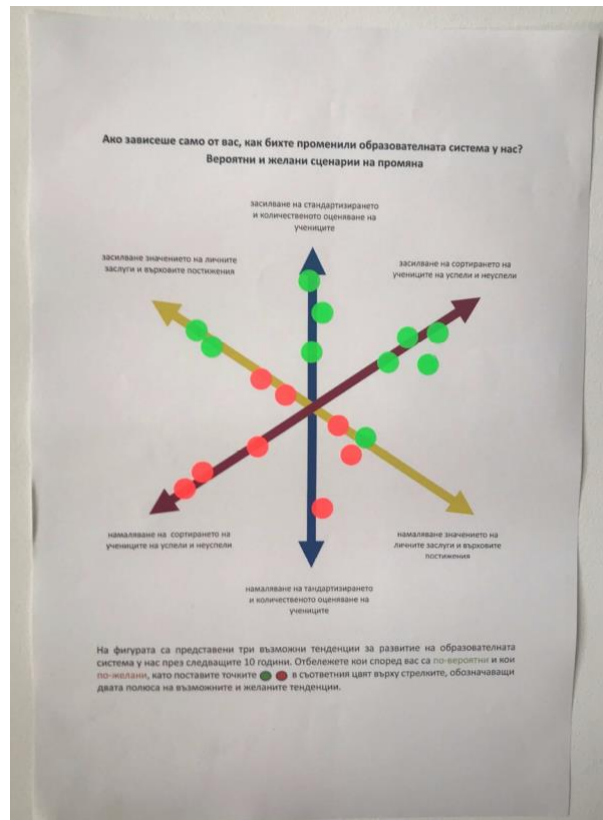
- (5 minutes) Start with a general update on the project/research and present the meeting focus and objectives.
- (5 minutes) Introduce poster (A). The poster (in A2 or A3) can be displayed on the walls to encourage participants to move around and engage with it, or it can be placed on the table where participants sit.
- (5 minutes) Ask participants to express their opinions about the likelihood and desirability of the three scenarios using coloured stickers: the closer to the centre, the more likely/desirable the scenario; the further from the centre, the less likely/desirable the scenario.

**Figure 11 - A participant positioning bullets on the diagram**



An alternative version presents different scenarios in which participants are invited to assess their plausibility and desirability using a visualisation with arrows. Respondents can place dots along each arrow to indicate the degree of desirability (more desired or undesired), and likelihood (more probable or improbable).

Figure 12 - Alternative format for collecting participants positioning on scenarios



- (10 minutes) With the group's general picture displayed, participants are asked to comment on their position and what they see.

Figure 13 - Results from participants assessment on the diagram is shown and commented



- (5 minutes) Introduce poster (C) by displaying its A2 version on the walls and circulate an A4 version. Explain the poster. Then, check and comment on any similarities or differences between the participants' opinions on future scenarios and the CLEAR results. Give participants a few minutes to gather their ideas and experiences by following this instruction:



Looking at each of the three scenarios, how do you feel about it? What impact and consequences will it have on you and the context in which you live, study, and/or work?. Provide them with sticky notes or paper to write down some keywords.

Figure 14 - Participants commenting on impacts in their contexts



- (30 minutes) Ask participants to share their experiences and ideas in a first round of discussion. The facilitator can't briefly comment on emerging points, referring to WP6 findings and other relevant research results. Participants may then engage in further discussion.
- (5 minutes) Facilitator's instruction: *After listening to your colleagues' stories and considering CLEAR findings, please indicate up to three adjustments you think could make the three scenarios more desirable.*
- (5 minutes) Facilitator's final comments, feedback about the meeting, and closing thanks.

A shorter workshop can also be proposed, designed for a 75-minute group session with five to ten participants, one facilitator and one note-taker.

- (5 minutes) Start with a general update on the CLEAR project and present the meeting focus and objectives.
- (10 minutes) Introduce poster (C) by displaying its A2 version on the walls and circulating an A4 version among participants. Explain the poster and give participants time to look at it and ask questions for clarifications.
- (10) Give participants time to gather their ideas and experiences by following this instruction: *Looking at each of the three scenarios, how do you feel about it? What impact and consequences might it have on you and the context in which you live, study, and/or work? Provide them with sticky notes or paper to note down their thoughts.*

- (30 minutes) Ask participants to share their experiences and ideas in an initial round of sharing. Individual positions are not commented on; Instead, the overall orientation is reviewed, possibly with brief comment on WP6 findings and other relevant research results.
- (5 minutes) Facilitator's instructions: After listening to your colleagues' stories and considering the CLEAR findings, indicate up to three adjustments you think could make the three scenarios more desirable.
- (10 minutes) Ask participants to share their thoughts and proposals.
- (5 minutes) Facilitator's final comments, meeting feedback, and closing thanks.

The workshop examples also work with two people guiding the activity per group: one as facilitator and the other as researcher. If there is only one person per group, it is recommended to find a workaround for note-taking, such as asking participants to write down their thoughts on paper or sticky notes.

### 3.2.3 Managing the closing session and post-event process

When the core activities are concluded, invite everyone to join the plenary again. If needed, allow a few more minutes for groups to finish their discussions. Also, make sure all groups have finalised their tasks.

During the closing session, we suggest:

- Thank the participants for their work in the subgroups, explicitly acknowledging their valuable contribution to the research.
- Remind everyone that a summary report of the event will be shared. While this summary will be circulated afterwards, it is still useful for each subgroup to briefly share a few ideas from the work done— not a full report-back, but some key points — during the plenary. Keep this sharing focused and concise. This moment can be facilitated either by a researcher/facilitator or by a participant who has volunteered as a spokesperson.
- Propose a final round of reflections, with feedback-oriented questions such as *How did today go for you, especially compared to your expectations? or What suggestions would you give to others organising similar participatory events?*
- Thank all participants again, as well as the location provider (if present).
- If possible, create space for an informal moment with participants, such as an aperitivo or a coffee break. These informal moments are valuable for gathering additional feedback and strengthening relationships.

In a participatory process, the post-event phase is just as important as the implementation of the event itself. Depending on the design and objectives of the participatory process, different actions can be carried out after an event or an activity.



In the CLEAR experience, a wide range of contributions and materials have been gathered from participants during all the Innovation Forums, with the aim of informing further research and shaping policy recommendations. Recognising participation as a mutualistic process, it is important to give something back to the participants - a return for what they shared during the event. This feedback should be brief, clear, and easy to read. Participants might also appreciate receiving photos from the event. Sending the report is also a good opportunity to thank them again for their time and keep in touch.

In the following figures, you'll find a preview of the Genoa Innovation Forum report that was shared with participants, shown both in desktop and mobile versions.

Figure 15 - Preview of a concise report shared



## Annexes

### Annex 1 Local Work Plan

#### CLEAR Innovation Forum – Local work plan

Country	Partner organization
<b>IF venue</b> (place, location, setting)	
<b>IF date</b> (expected days/month)	
<b>IF time and duration</b>	Starting around... Finishing around... Day of the week...
<b>IF expected participants</b> (numbers estimated and profile)	Nr. Xx policy maker, such as... Nr. Xx professionals, such as... Nr. Xx young people...  <i>Were they already involved in the research process? How?</i>
<b>IF agenda</b> (first ideas about the format and main activities)	
<b>IF communication strategy</b> (main communication activities to be implemented)	
<b>Strategic allies</b> (people and organizations that could support IF promotion and implementation)	
<b>Possible connections</b> (with other local events, processes, initiatives or projects)	
<b>CLEAR involved team</b> (people, roles, responsibilities)	
<b>Resources needed</b> (devices, materials, other)	

<b>IF documentation</b> (how to document the event: video, photo, audio recording...)	
<b>Ethical issues</b> (specific procedures, templates, other...)	
<b>Written materials for participants</b> (to be provided to participants before, during or after IF)	
<b>Other relevant issues or ideas</b>	
<b>Other doubts or concerns</b>	



## **Annex 2 - Conversation starters graphic kit**

### **Conversation Starters\_English**

**WP3\_What if you lived elsewhere?**

**WP4\_What if you where them?**

**WP5\_What if you could hear their voice?**

**WP6\_What if you could change educational system?**



# Conversation Starters\_English

WP3\_What if you lived elsewhere\_EN

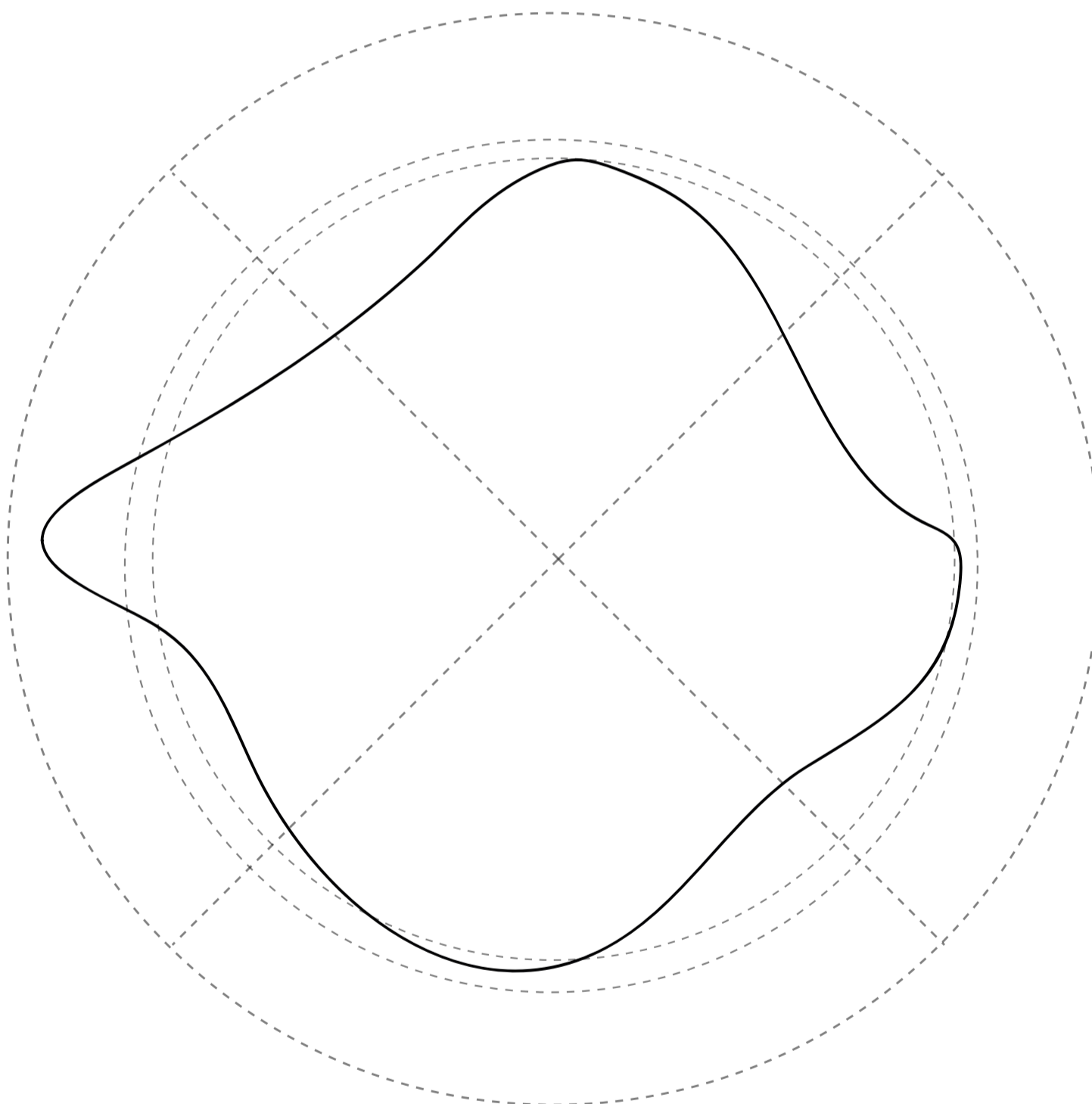


Think back to your school days, when you first started imagining your future or exploring job possibilities. How did you perceive your opportunities back then? Which of these statements best reflects how you felt at the time?

“What did I graduate for?”

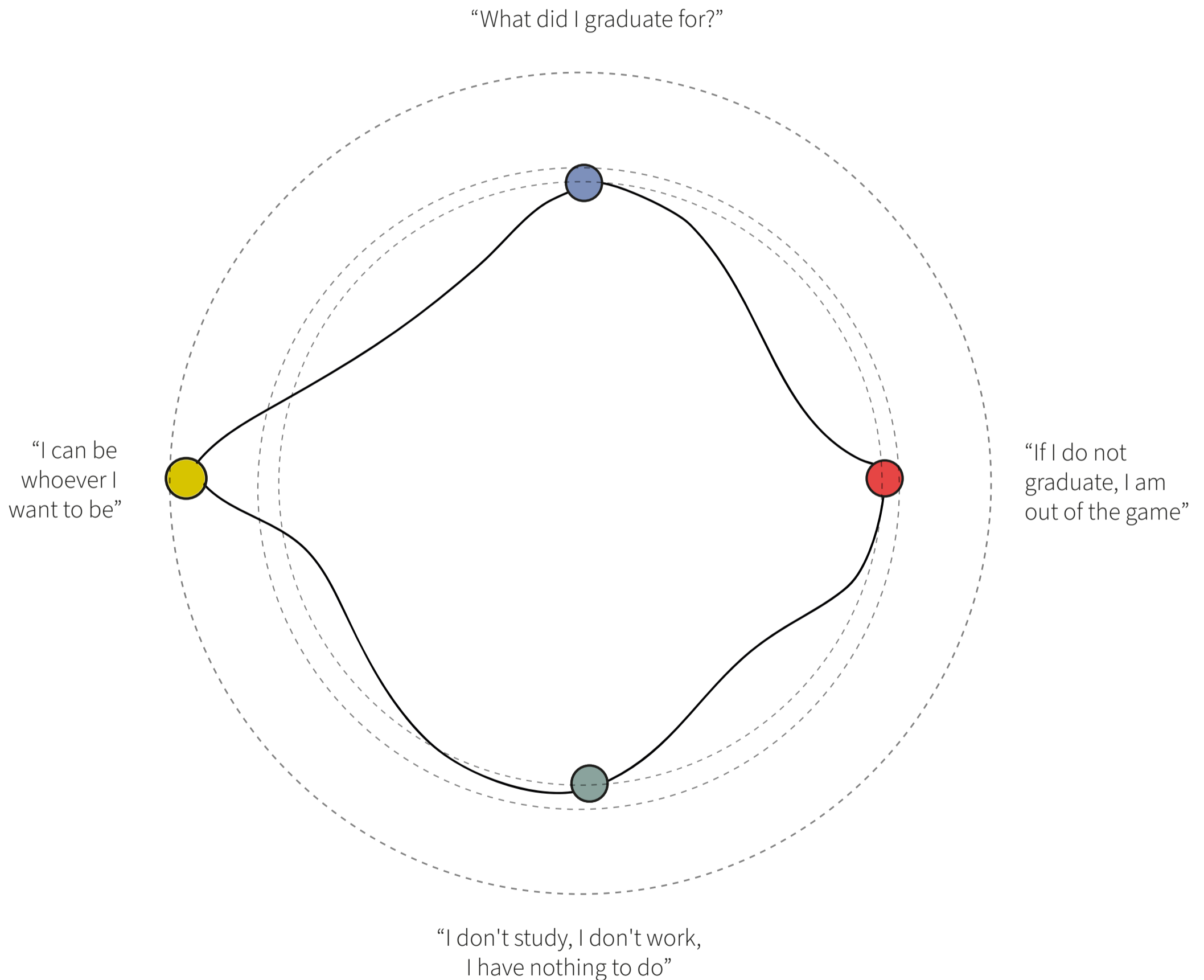
“I can be whoever I want to be”

“If I do not graduate, I am out of the game”



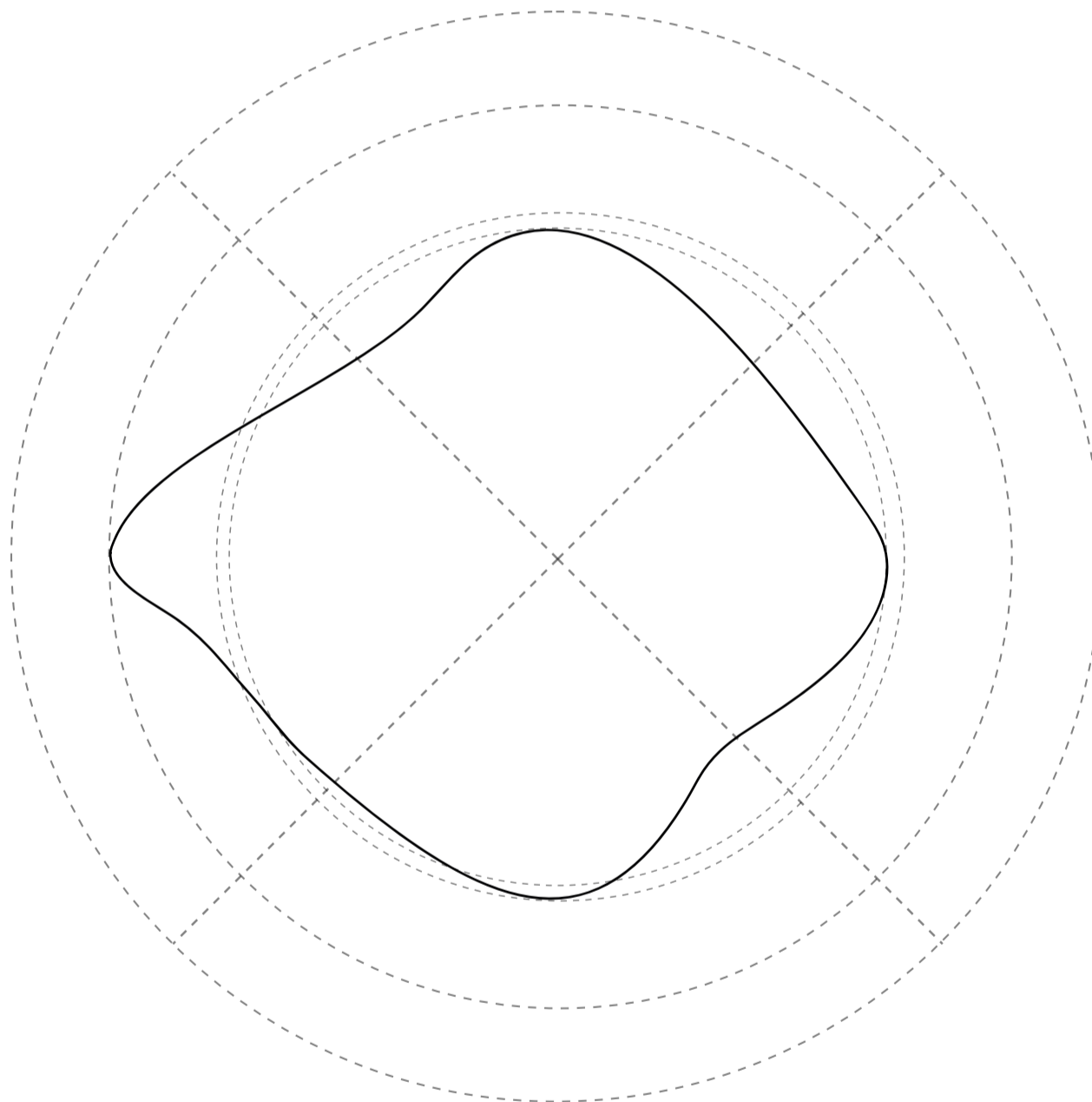
“I don't study, I don't work,  
I have nothing to do”

Think back to your school days, when you first started imagining your future or exploring job possibilities. How did you perceive your opportunities back then? Which of these statements best reflects how you felt at the time?



**Territories matter. EU regions strongly differ regarding educational attainment, labour market outcomes, and socio-economic conditions. The research identifies four types of regions, which differ mainly according to the training and employment opportunities they offer to young people. Does any of these sentences resonate with you?**

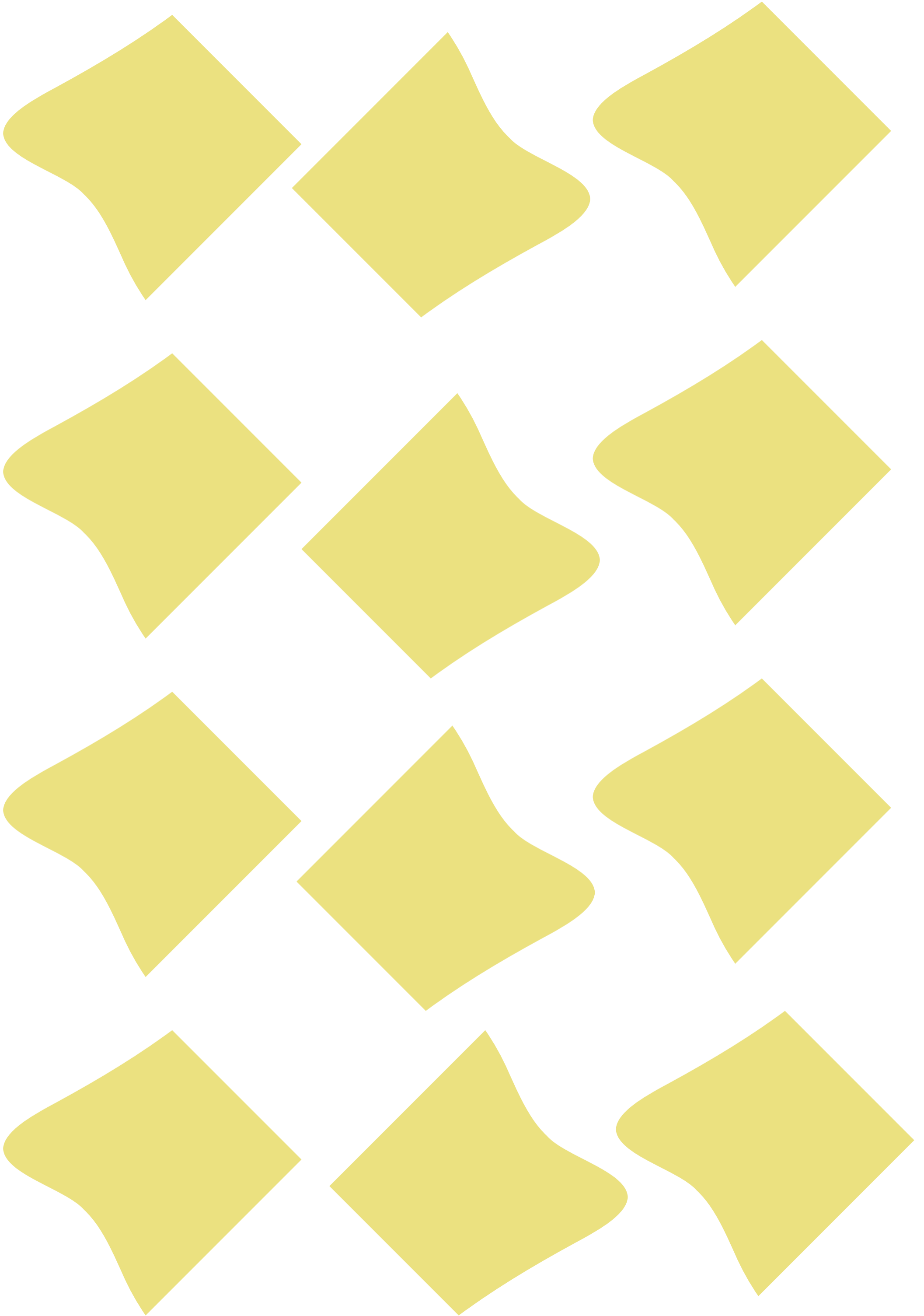
Rising education, yet jobs remain scarce for the youth

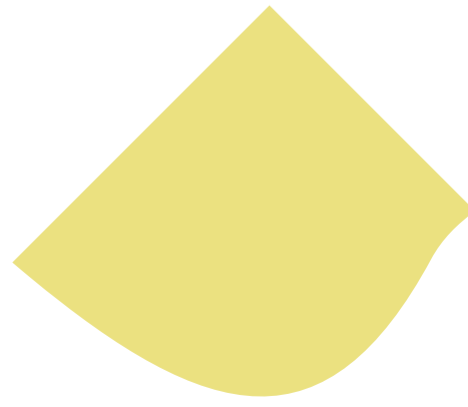
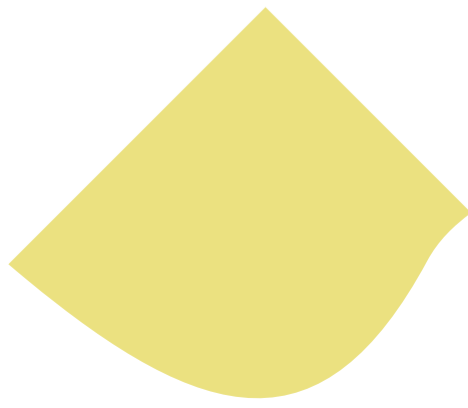
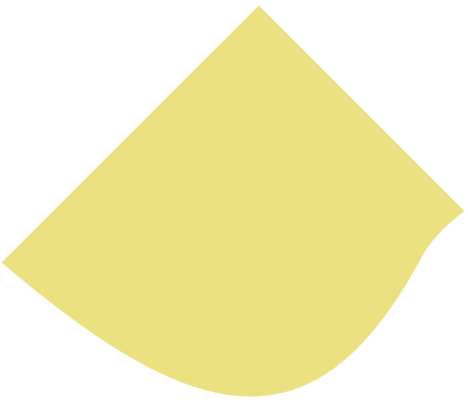
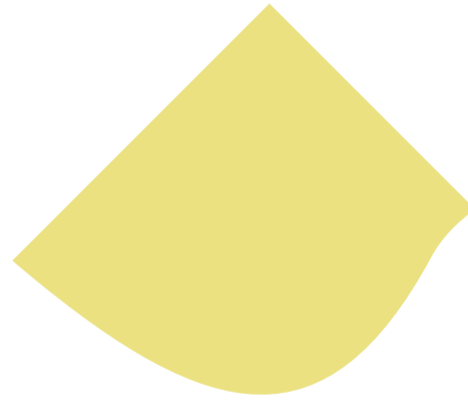
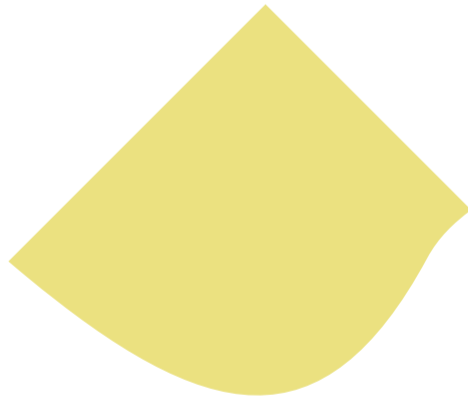
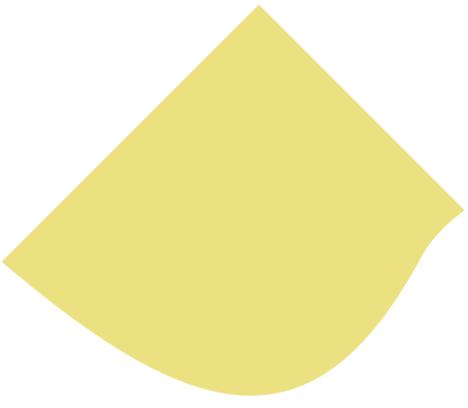
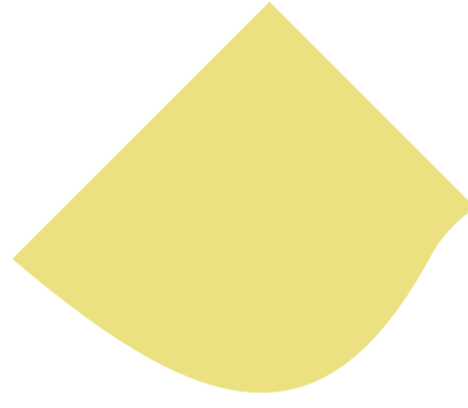
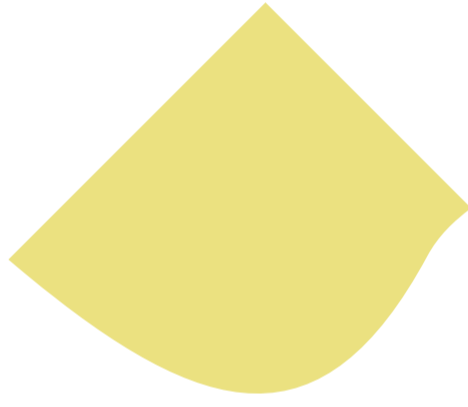
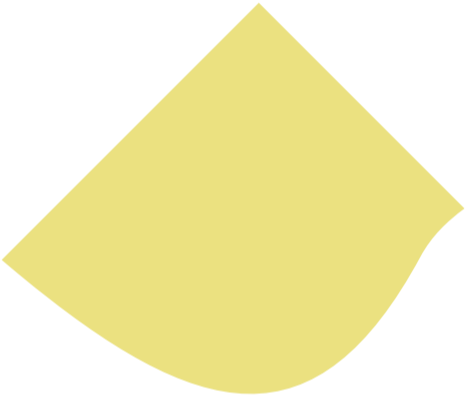
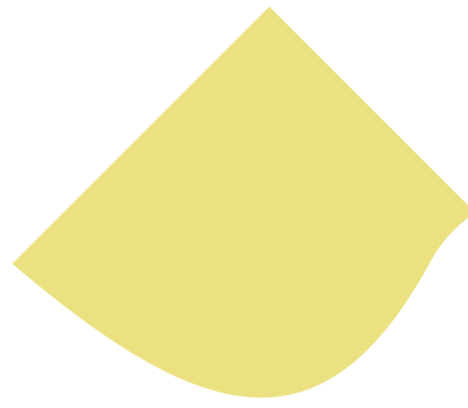
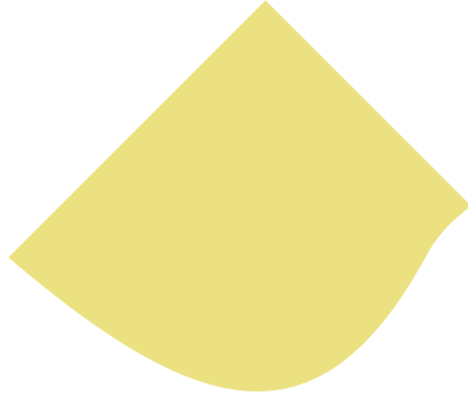
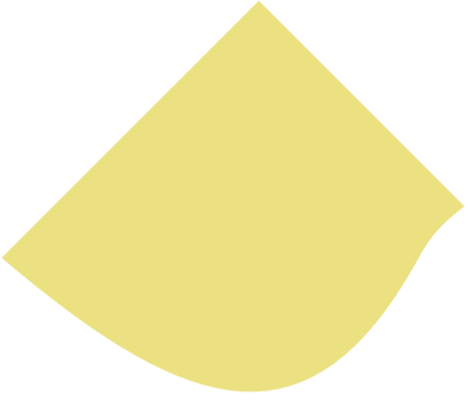
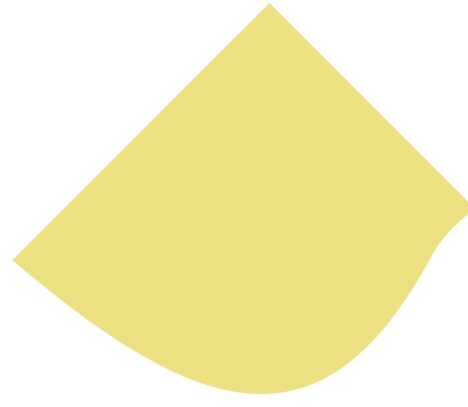
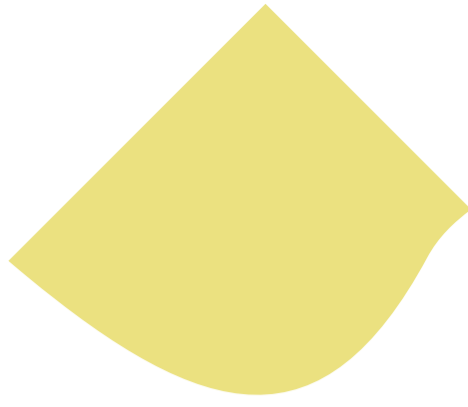
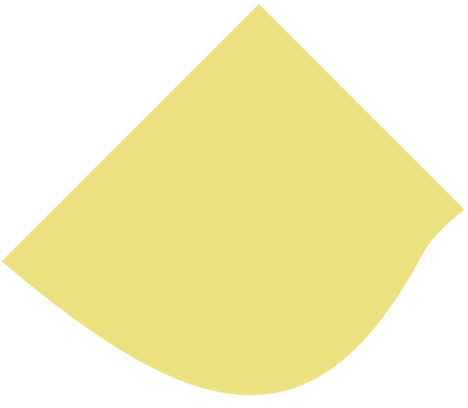


Skilled youth meet a world of growing career potential

More degrees, more doors opening for young professionals

Fewer qualifications, limited paths to promising jobs





# Conversation Starters\_English

WP4\_What if you where them\_EN



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**Imagine a young person who didn't finish secondary school and has had intermittent jobs since then. Now, they're eager to return to their studies to advance in their career.**

**Who might this person be?  
What steps could they take?**

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**Imagine two friends who grew up together, went to the same schools, and lived in the same neighborhood. Both were once labeled underachievers, yet they ended up in very different places: one is unemployed, while the other is a successful professional.**

**What led them down such different paths?**

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**Imagine a young person with a migration background who works informally in the culinary sector of their new country. They hold a degree in administration from their home country and aspire to become a social worker.**

**What steps might they take?  
What challenges could they encounter along the way?**

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# Conversation Starters\_English

WP5\_What if you could hear their voice\_EN



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What would you say to those in charge of taking decisions?

# wear our shoes

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## WEAR OUR SHOES

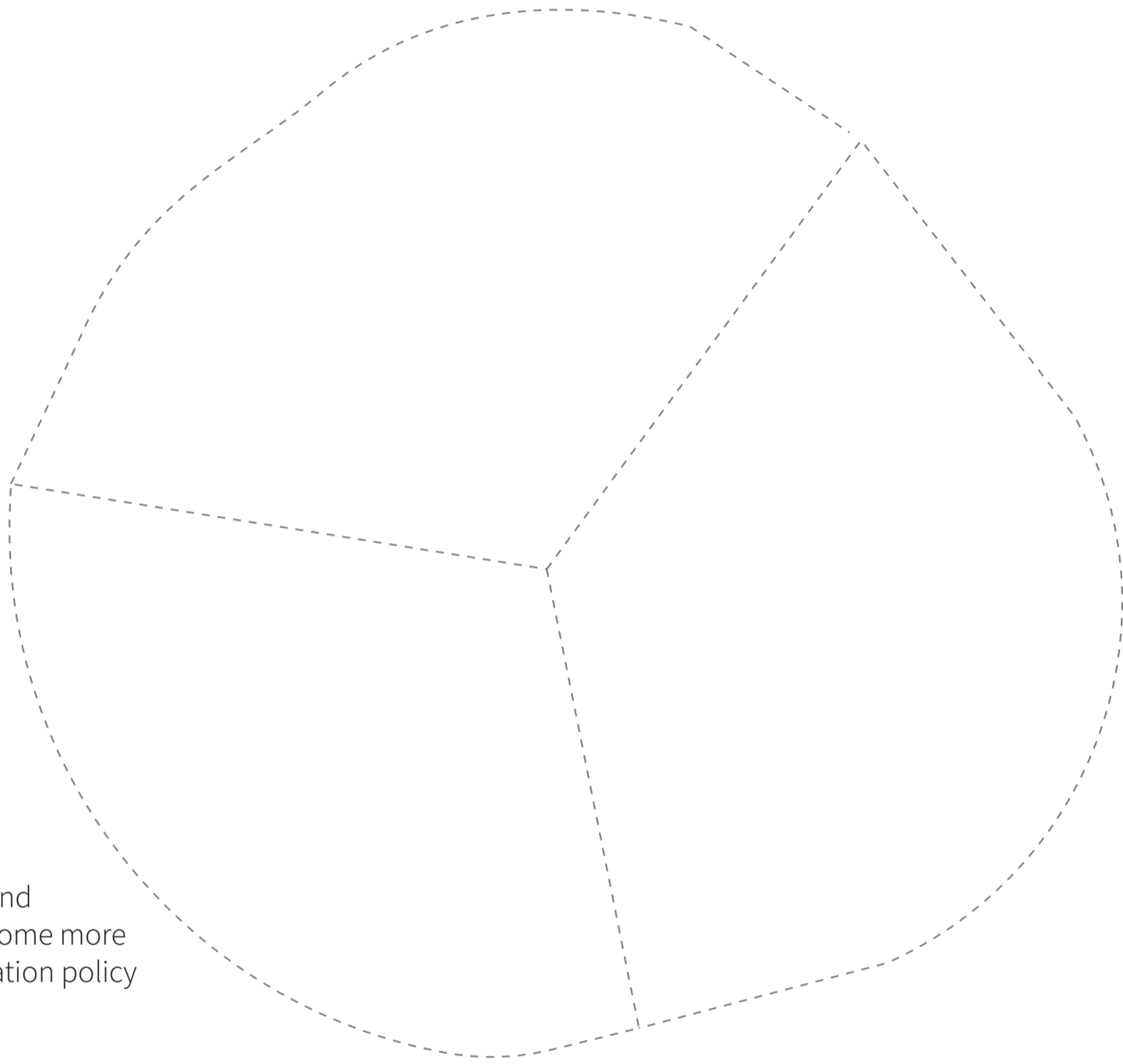
I would say that they have to put themselves much more in students' shoes, they have to think about how these students can be motivated to study, because it's the future of the country. They have to put themselves much more in their shoes and understand that no one likes to learn things because they are forced to. In the end, you only get good results if those who do things are encouraged to do them, want to do them, are happy to do them and feel good about it.

# Conversation Starters\_English

WP6\_What if you could change educational system\_EN



Decision-makers will pay more attention to test scores and other ways to measure learning

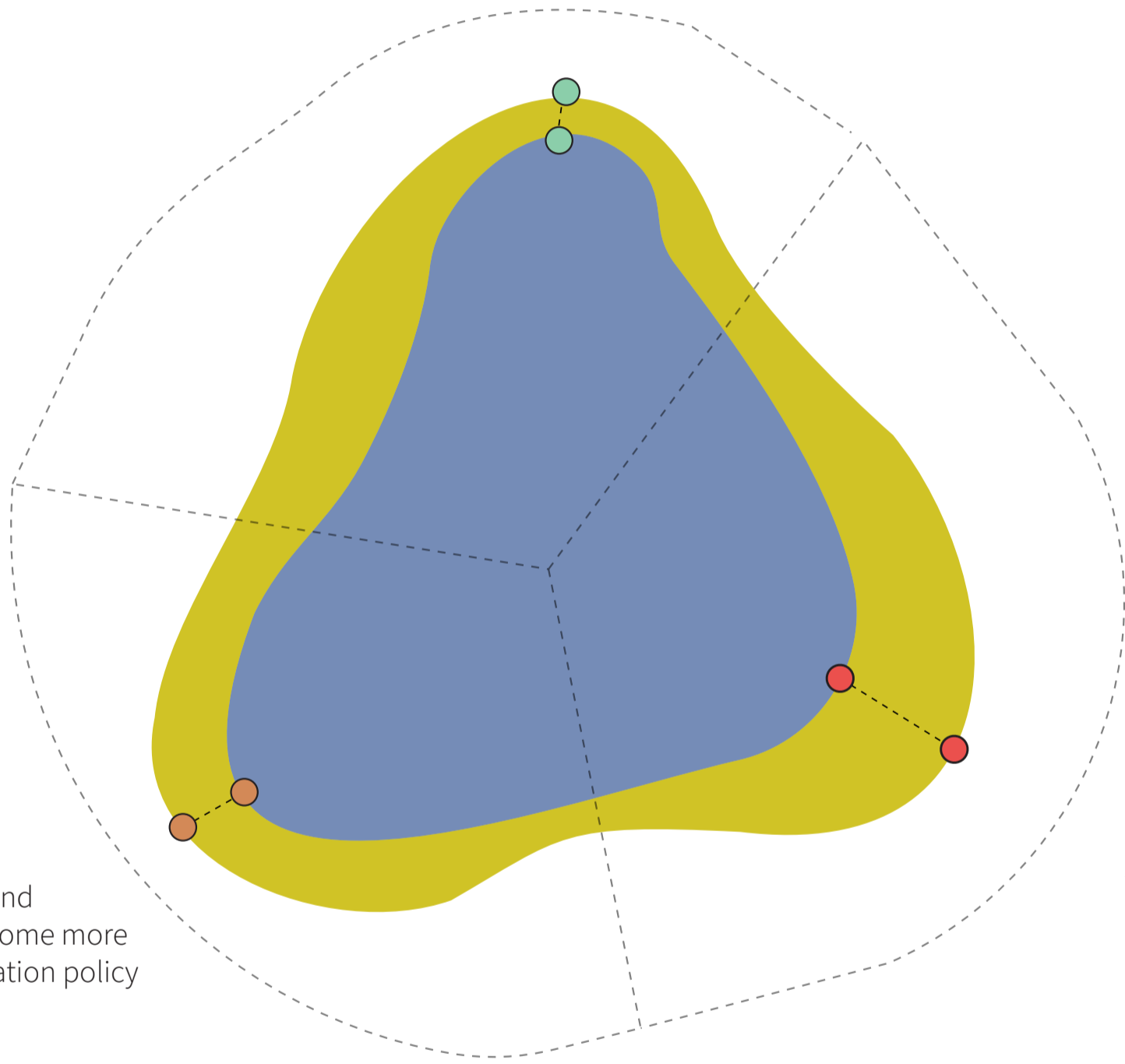


The idea of merit and excellence will become more important in education policy

Students will be sorted more often based on how well they do in tests or assessments

Experts from different parts of Europe were asked to define how likely and desirable certain scenarios related to education are. Here are some of their responses:

Decision-makers will pay more attention to test scores and other ways to measure learning



The idea of merit and excellence will become more important in education policy

Students will be sorted more often based on how well they do in tests or assessments

■ Likelihood  
■ Desiderability

general