FORUM ZA
SLOBODU
ODGOJA

Systemic Approach to Inclusive Learning

yes
please
thank
you

IMPRESSUM

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

'SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO INCLUSIVE LEARNING' IS A BOOKLET CREATED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT 'YES. PLEASE. THANK YOU.'

'Systemic approach to inclusive learning' is a booklet created within the project 'Yes. Please. Thank you'. The aim of the project was to learn about identity, belonging and inclusion through the systemic approach, experiential learning, inclusive attitude, body movement, dance, and embodied learning, as well as to learn how to apply it in working with youth.

Belonging to various systems shapes our identity, beliefs, choices in life, acceptance of ourselves and others, and reflects our behaviour in every new group or a system we join through life. It also greatly influences who we include and perceive as the 'one of us', and who we exclude and perceive as the 'others' based on our own inner sense which is learnt through belonging to various systems throughout our life. The feeling of not belonging also has a great impact on an individual.

In the context of this booklet emphasis is on belonging to a culture or a nation, and on how to use this potential to create an inclusive learning environment or a system in which belonging to different culture or a nation is something that unites the individual members of a group, and does not divide.

'This booklet gives insights into how to implement systemic approach to create an inclusive learning environment in which different nationalities and cultures meet to learn with and from each other. It applies to working with adults, and can be adapted to working with children as well. For simplicity, the word 'facilitator' is used which can also refer to professions like trainers, teachers, educator, youth workers, guides, and others who are in a way involved in group learning processes.

The content of the booklet is a fusion of: (1) previous experiences of working with the topic of belonging through KA2 strategic partnership 'Constellation'; (2) what participants of the project 'Yes. Please. Thank you.' brought with themselves to the training in Rijeka and their contribution; (3) author's experience in the implementation of systemic approach in personal and professional life; (4) influence and learning gained through participation in trainings based on systemic approach and its application in education and business; and (5) theoretical framework of teachers and authors: Bert Hellinger, Alemka Dauskardt, John Whittington, and Marianne Franke-Gricksch.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Project 'Yes. Please. Thank you.' is based on the systemic approach to inclusion of youth with multicultural origins, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The foundation of the project is the belief that social inclusion starts from conscious acceptance and inclusion of all of those who belong into a system an individual is a part of – family, work place, social group, nation, culture, etc. We are all a part of different systems and in a relationship with each other. Identity of an individual develops through belonging to different groups or systems, in relationship to different members who have an impact on us.It consisted of three phrases:

RESEARCH ABOUT OWN ROOTS

Selected participants were researching about their origins, members who belong to their families, significant events that shaped the history of their families, and members who were excluded, countries and lands their ancestors come originate from.

TRAINING COURSE IN CROATIA

Training course 'Yes. Please. Thank you' was an international training course implemented as a part of the project that brought together 28 youth workers and educators from Croatia, Portugal, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, Finland and Greece. Participants were learning about their own sense of belonging and identity as individuals, as members of a family, as partners, as members of a nation or a culture, etc. through experiential learning, systemic approach, embodied learning, body movement and dance in order to be able to apply this approach in their work with youth. Training course was facilitated by Marcela Velfl from Croatia and Nicolau Lavres from Portugal, originating from Sao Tome and Principe.

LOCAL DISSEMINATION

Participants of the training course organized dissemination activities in their local communities – with colleagues or the target groups they work with on daily basis.

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

'Participants of project were **youth workers, youth leaders and educators who work with youth of different ages**. They greatly contributed to the quality of the project and the content of this booklet with their participation and feedback. They work with young people who come from multicultural or migrant background, who have an experience of migration, who are socially excluded due to their health condition, or various economical or educational obstacles.

The added value that the group brought was that they are nationals of 8 countries which were partners in the project, however **many of them have multicultural and multinational background themselves.** Taking into account their origins and origins of their parents only, the following countries were represented in the training - Croatia, Portugal, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, Finland, Greece, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Russia, Slovakia, Sao Tome and Principe, Angola, Sweden and Australia.

Additionally, some of them had **the experience of living as foreigners in different cultures and countries** like Ireland, Germany, Thailand, Croatia, China, the Netherlands, Poland and the UK.

This booklet consists of several sections, and it includes the following: information about the project; input about systemic approach and systemic principles; the impact of belonging, belonging to a nation, culture or a land; key ingredients for creating an inclusive learning environment based on systemic principles; closing words and the list of resources and references.
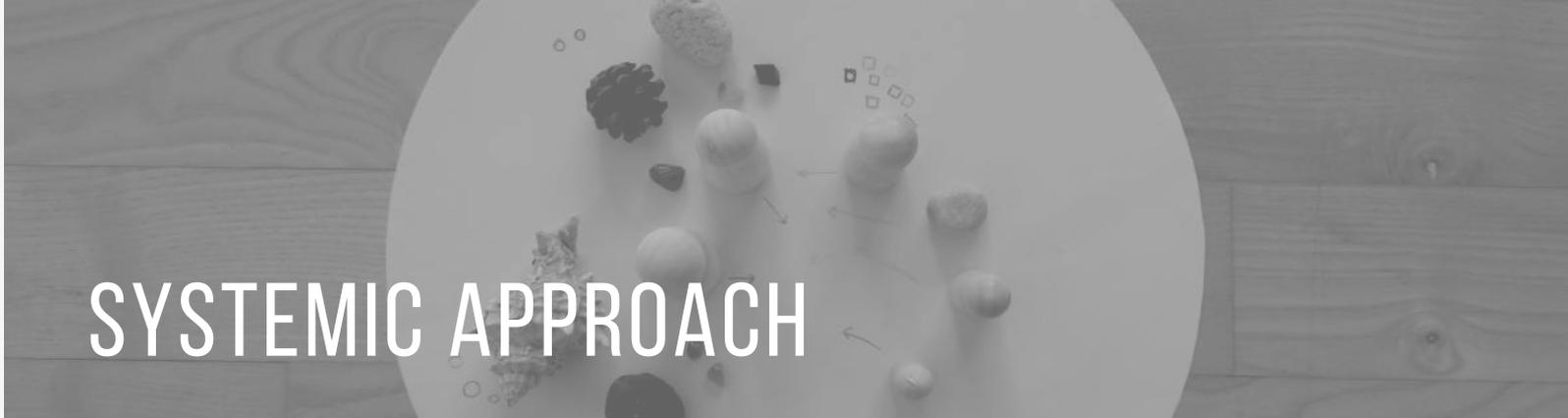
SYSTEMIC APPROACH

EVERYTHING EXISTS IN RELATIONSHIP TO SOMETHING ELSE, EXISTS AS PART OF A SYSTEM OR A GROUP - STARS, PLANETS, CONTINENTS, COUNTRIES, NATURE, ANIMALS, PLANTS, HUMANS. EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED IN A WAY, IS IN CONSTANT INTERACTION, AND HAS IMPACT ON ONE ANOTHER. ONE EVENT WITHIN A SYSTEM HAS AN IMPACT ON THE WHOLE SYSTEM, AS WELL AS DO SYSTEMS HAVE IMPACT ON EACH OTHER.

In systemic approach, **the integrity of the whole system has priority over individual members, and is informed by an understanding of the organizing principles which are at work in systems** (Whittington, 2016). Working in this way requires a special p**erception of seeing an individual as a part of a system.** This enables us to understand the context and reasons why someone is the way it is. When something does not make sense, it is only a message that we do not see the context in which it fits in. In the context of this booklet we refer to human systems (such as family, organizational, social groups) and collective systems (such as nationality or culture).

Inclusion is at the core of the systemic approach - inclusion of everyone and everything that belongs regardless of our opinions, beliefs, judgements or differences. For a learning process to flow and empower the learners, it is important to take into consideration several systemic principles and attitudes.

.As facilitators of a learning process, it is essential that **we firstly see ourselves as a part of a system, and include everything** that belongs to our system – family members, event that shaped previous generations, those who migrated, everyone and everything that is missing, etc. The next steps it that we see those we work with as a part of another system, and that we **consciously include and say 'yes' to everything they bring with themselves as a sign of acceptance and acknowledgement.**.

The key ingredients for creating an inclusive learning environment include having an understanding of the impact that belonging has on individuals, putting in practice several systemic principles, setting of the learning process, special perception and attitude, supporting and helping in an empowering way, acting beyond judgement, maintaining neutrality, being present to hold space and a human-to-human approach.

SYSTEMIC PRINCIPLES

Systems seem to have hidden forces that sustain them as a whole, and maintain the coherence of the whole system. They behave like magnets – they are invisible, and we cannot see the magnetic field at work, but we can see the effect it has (Whittington, 2016). In order for systems to be in balance, to flourish and expand, it is necessary to be in alignment with the following systemic principles:

THE PRINCIPLE OF BELONGING / PLACE

Every member of a system has an equal right to belong to a system – a unique and a respected place. When someone or something is excluded, missing, forgotten or disrespected, a system finds a way how to re-member what has been excluded, and puts a pressure on another member to behave or to live their life in a specific way, until the contribution of the excluded ones in acknowledged.

When everyone is in a place that belongs to them, both the system and the individuals will be feel free, be successful, flourish and expand. When individuals inside of a system are suffering, burning out, feeling powerless, fighting for freedom and autonomy, system is sending a message that there is someone excluded, missing, disrespected, or denied their place. Exclusion is often unconscious and unintentional, it happens through various circumstances, loss, grief, tragedies.

THE PRINCIPLE OF TIME / ORDER

In order for all the members in a system to have equal time to develop and flourish, the principle of time / order needs to be acknowledged. What comes first has a natural precedence over what follows. Systems often fall out of balance and become toxic when, for example, those who come after or last take a place of being the first ones – either in a family, work environment or any other system.

Disrespecting the principle of time has an impact and consequences on individual members and a system as a whole. For example, an individual who are not in their place according to the Time when they joined a system, can suffer from failure in life and work or burnout. Most of the times this also happens unconsciously, and it is just a pattern which is repeating from generation to generation, group to a group, until the underlying dynamic is resolved.

THE PRINCIPLE OF EXCHAGE / BALANCE

Systems require an exchange of giving and taking to stay in balance and for relationships to grow. Exchange does not only imply material goods, it implies exchange of acknowledgement, praise, feedback.

An exchange between equals implies the balance in giving and taking. When we receive something, we feel the need to balance it and to give something in return. This enables a relationship to stay in balance, and to continue to be alive. Those who give too much withdraw from a relationship and become a 'troubled' ones. Those who receive too much also withdraw with a feeling of being unable to give anything back.

In certain relationships it is difficult to give back when we receive something, for example, what we receive from our parents, country where we were born, or teachers. In that case, we take what we received and pass it on. Most of the attempts to give something back in these cases will usually result in failure.

Patterns we have regarding giving and taking in life usually come from our families of origin. We attract relationships or are attracted to belong to systems which enable us to be in the same dynamic like the one we have/had in our families.

THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-INTERFERENCE

We take what is ours, and leave to others what is theirs without interfering into their learning process. We know our place and our function in the process, and we stay in our own 'bubble'. This principle is put in place through neutrality of the facilitator and each participant. It prioritized the system and individual learners.

If any of these principles is not in order, the system will find its own way how to balance itself out, and will have an impact on the whole group and individual members.

THE IMPACT OF BELONGING

As humans we are in relationships with different people, we belong to different systems (family, community, country, culture, ethnic group, language group, partnership, organizations, social groups, etc.), and we also form systems by ourselves and in interaction with others (we start families, businesses, projects, social groups, form communities, etc.)

Everyone is born somewhere, and already by birth we automatically belong to a nation, a country, a culture, and a family. Even when we feel like we do not belong, by being born into a specific system we belong in it by default, and they become our family-of-origin, country-of-origin, etc. Origins and the feeling of belonging or not belonging have an impact on us as individuals. What happened in the past cannot be changed. However, it might influence who we are in the present moment and who we become in our future.

From the systemic perspective, **the need to belong is considered to be the strongest need** we as humans have. **Each group or a system has its own 'rules' of belonging,** and we very soon learn them in order to keep our place in a group, and to continue belongong. Those 'rules' are often unspoken, and most of the time we feel when we behave in accordance with them, and when we are out of accordance. **When in accordance with the 'rules' of a system we belong to, we feel innocent and good because our belonging is secured. When we are out of accordance with the 'rules' of a system we belong to, we feel guilty because whatever we do, think or feel is in opposition with the 'rules' of the group' and our belonging is put at risk.**

It is important to emphasize that **those 'rules' do not have any moral value**, they are **simply rules of belonging to a group**, and it is very likely that one same person will behave differently in presence of members of different systems if he / she belongs to groups which have different 'rules' of belonging. **We adjust our behaviour according to the expectations of each group to secure our belonging to that group.** Whenever we feel guilty for breaking those 'rules', we do whatever is in our power to clean our conscience and secure our belonging.

Those 'rules' of different system have an impact on our identity and behaviour. We quickly learn who we are as a part of a certain group, how we need to behave, how to dress up, how to treat each other, who and what is perceived as 'good' and who is perceived as 'bad'. Through that **we decide who is 'one of us', and who belongs to the 'others', who is included and whom we exclude.** Those 'rules' are a result of all the individuals and events who have belonged to a certain systems, and they form so called **'conscience' groups. 'Conscience'** ensures that a group remains together as a whole, and pushes away everyone who has a different 'conscience'.

By belonging to a 'conscience' group, we develop our own **personal 'conscience' which acts as an inner reference point that tells us if we are acting in or out of accordance with our system of origin.** Many conflicts in the world emerge as a result of belonging to different 'conscience' groups. When we stay inside of our group, we feel good and safe, when we step out of it, and are confronted with a different 'conscience', and confusion and inner conflicts start. In those cases we perceive and treat the 'others' in accordance with the 'rules' of our 'conscience' group. This is a sign of loyalty. **Belonging to a system develops loyalty to a group, to the way of being, to principles, to beliefs, to culture, to religion, and to many other things.** We go throughout life without being aware of these loyalties. This loyalty feel safe and meaningful, and we live our life with a 'good' conscience. 'Conscience' ensures that a system remains whole and protects itself from the outside influences. However, what we learned from systemic approach is that **no growth or development can happen while we remain inside of the boundaries of our primary systems, and while we are loyal to those principles, beliefs and behaviours. A system that remains closed, and does not allow any influences from the outside which would cause changes, will sooner or later stop to exist.**

Many also feel like they do not belong, either to a family, or to a nation, or any social groups. The more we feel that we do not belong to our family or origin, or the nation, or the culture, the more loyal we become to those 'conscience' groups and unconsciously behave exactly like them. We are loyal to them even if we have never met our family-of-origins or if we moved away from the country-of-origin as children. In that case, when we do not know where our origins are, confusion of identity emerges, and we search for belonging in different social or national groups throughout life. Belonging then becomes a burden and unhealthy because nothing can compensate for what we missed in the first place.

To belong in a healthy way, we need to acknowledge our roots, accept the circumstances under which we received our life, give respect to all the members who belong to the same systems, and see ourselves as a part of a greater whole. When we belong in a healthy way to our systems-of-origin, we feel free to choose and to walk our own path with respect and acknowledgement for where we originate from. So, acknowledging our origins does not mean that we will be like that in the future. It is actually quite the opposite. By **not** acknowledging it, we become exactly like them because of the unconscious loyalty. If we acknowledge everything the way it is, we have more chances to develop ourselves in a different way.

To develop, grow and expand we have to 'betray' the 'conscience' groups we belonged to and feel guilty in relationship to the former 'rules' of belonging. When we acknowledge what we received, give it a place, we are free to leave it where it belongs, and to move on to the next step in our life – to belong to or to form a new system with a different set of 'rules'.

BELONGING TO A COUNTRY,
A LAND OR A CULTURE

For the purpose of this booklet, we will focus on belonging to collective systems - a country, a land or a culture. Nowadays more than ever, our world has become multicultural – having many cultures or groups who co-exist within the boundaries of a country, a territory or a piece of land. It is also becoming more and more intercultural with all those cultures and groups interacting with each other, exchanging, learning, connecting and developing deeper relationships. Still there are many cases of groups with different cultural and national backgrounds who migrated to a specific territory or to a country who do not interact or exchange with anyone else who belongs to a different group.

There are many subgroups within the same country who do not interact, do not feel like belonging to a certain nation, land or territory. For simplicity, the concept '**migrant**' is used to represent individuals who moved from one national or cultural system to another for a shorter or longer period of time, by choice or as a necessity. Those cultural or national subgroups often become minorities in a society, and exist at the margins of a society. Their integration is a very challenging attempt. The question is why that is so difficult. **Why do they stay at the margins and why is it so difficult to engage them and include them into society?**

National and cultural systems we are born in, and in which we grow up, have an impact on our identity. Through belonging we learn the way of being, norms of behaviour, the unspoken 'rules', what is 'good' and what is 'bad', how to speak, how to dress up, what to believe in, who is a friend and who is an enemy, how to eat, what to eat, how we express (or not express) our thought, feelings or opinions, how we work with others, how we do business, etc. Many of those things are what divides us in the world, divides us from other human beings and from the environment we live in. Most of these come to us through our families-of-origins which are under the influence of certain national or cultural norms. **And without even being aware of it, we become loyal to it, and we take it with us in our 'luggage' everywhere we travel or migrate to.**

When people migrate (due to their own choice, or as a necessity), they usually end up in two categories which have some of the following characteristics:

1) those who integrate successfully into a new system – they usually:

- learn the language of the country they migrate to;
- find a well-paid job that is providing for their financial and social security;
- become successful in the new environment;
- connect with the other members of a society, attend social events, participate in the life of the community;
- acquire a new set of group 'rules', change values if needed, adapt their behaviour to a new context, etc.

2) those who do not integrate and stay at the margins of the society – they usually

- become a minority group in the country they migrate to;
- cannot find a suitable job and become financially independent;
- do not speak the language of the country they live in;
- depend on social security system of the country;
- easily get into trouble with laws and get involved into criminal activities;
- drop out of school;
- get physically and mentally sick;
- become unsuccessful in the new environment, etc.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO GROUPS FROM THE SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE?

The difference between the two categories is that migrants in the first **break the loyalty to the family or nation of their origin. When they migrate, they leave behind the existing cultural norms, beliefs, behaviour, way of dressing up,** etc. From the systemic perspective, **the key ingredient for successful integration in a new system is leaving the previous with respect and acknowledgement for what we received, remembering our roots with respect, and leaving everything behind.** Such a move usually triggers out a feeling of betrayal and guilt. If a person is able to live with that guilt and move on anyway, they will be able to integrate in a new system successfully.

In the second category we have those who do not integrate in the system they arrive to, sometimes even for generations. **Those individuals stay deeply loyal to their families and countries of origin. They bring with themselves all of it – traditions, language, cultural norms, beliefs, living habits, behaviour, etc. They continue to live in the subcultures together with the people of the same nationality and become a minority.** It is important to understand that there are many things that are happening under the surface. This loyalty is often unconscious, and can exist due to different reasons. Maybe there were some tragic events in the family or country, and a group stays together to protect themselves from something similar happening again, to be able to survive in the world. Maybe they escaped from a war or a political situation, maybe they migrated because of the promise of a better life. All of those events shape systems, and have consequences on all the individual members. Breaking loyalty to integrate in a new system in such cases is usually a mission impossible.

Inclusion and integration into a society cannot be forced, even if we understand what might be the reasons for successful and unsuccessful inclusion. The same is in learning processes. What each individual can do to act inclusively is to look at everyone with respect and tell them (silently or aloud) sentences such as:

<div align="center">

I see you.

I hear you.

You are one of us.

You belong here.

</div>

Those sentences send a message that they are seen and acknowledge their existence within a system.

"I learned to think more about the influence of the system that I belong to, also whom I am excluding, who is excluded in my family, and which consequences it can bring."

participant of the training course
Yes. Please. Thank you.

"I learned that I can co-exist in system as an individual and a part of a collective."

participant of the training course
Yes. Please. Thank you.
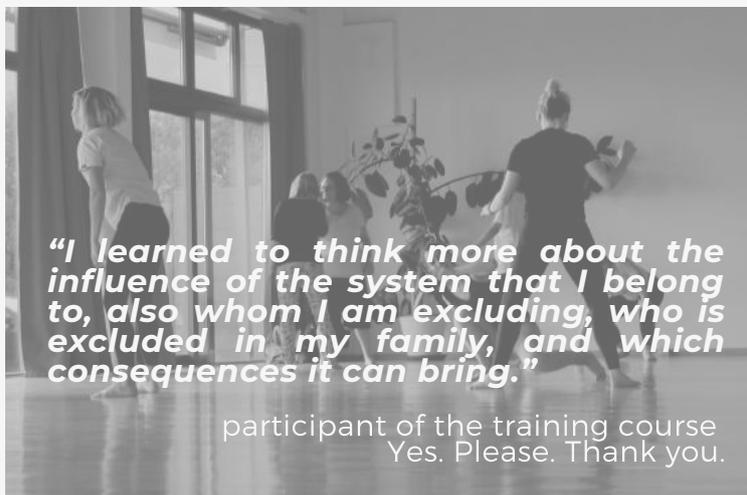
KEY INGREDIENTS FOR INCLUSIVE LEARNING

In an environment where different cultures or nations meet together to share, exchange, experience, grow, develop, or learn from and with each other, it is important to address how to create a context which includes everyone equally with all the differences they bring with themselves into the same context – the differences in beliefs, values, cultural norms, education, experiences, culture, religion, perceptions of what is good or bad, or how something should or shouldn't be done. When individuals meet, they bring their own systems with themselves into a group, and a group on its own becomes a new system which includes all the individual members. Group dynamics develops from the constant interactions of all the members within the new group / system.

The questions we as facilitators can ask ourselves while preparing the ground for inclusive learning to happen might include the following:

How can I create an environment in which everyone is equal, respected, and acknowledged?

How can I create an environment in which everyone is free to be with everything they bring with themselves without their dignity being questioned, debated, confronted or argued?

How can I create an environment in which everyone is allowed to be themselves?

How can I create a sense of belonging to a group?

How can I create an environment in which learning happens without judging what is right or wrong, good or bad?

Important 'ingredients' to take into account while creating an inclusive learning environment based on the systemic principles include:

- perception
- systemic attitude
- awareness of own belonging
- awareness of systemic principles
- setting of the learning
- going beyond judgement
- maintaining neutrality
- being present to hold the space
- helping in an empowering way

"I learned that I need to include to be included."

participant of the training course
Yes. Please. Thank you.

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER IN A SYSTEMIC WAY

In environments where individuals with different cultural and national backgrounds meet to learn together, either short-term or long-term, it is important to acknowledge and respect the origins of every member of the group in order to support their inclusion.
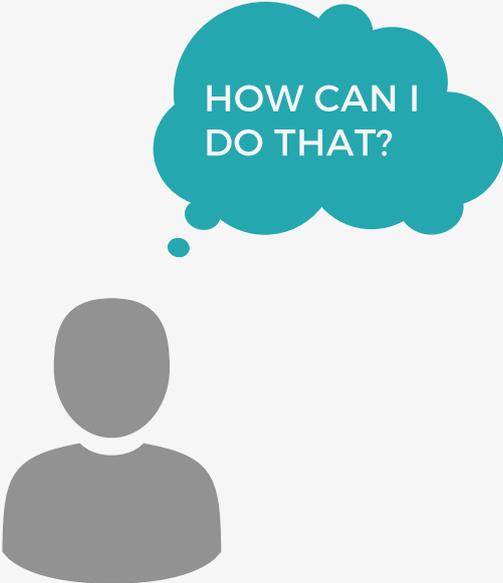
HOW CAN I DO THAT?

By including everything that they bring with themselves. By learning about their origins and what belongs to their systems. Instead of everyone introducing themselves as individuals, we invite them to introduce themselves within the context of systems they belong to. Depending on the context a group is working in, it is possible to create:

1. a portrait of the members, ancestors and events which belong to their family-of-origin
• 2. a map of the countries, territories, cultures, regions, cities, or villages which belong to their system
• 3. a combination of both

Since this booklet puts an emphasis on belonging on a collective level – to countries, territories, cultures, regions, cities or villages, the following guidelines are there to support participants in creating a map of what belongs to their system. **The map can be drawn on a piece of paper, or set up as a 3D map in space with figurines, papers, stones, shells, shoes, or any kind of other material at disposal.**

What to include in a map of the system on a collective level when working with this topic?

- Country / countries where a person was born and where he / she lives or lived (if it is different from the country of birth)
- Country / countries where person's parents were born and where they live or lived (if it is different from the country of birth)
- Countries where other ancestors come from as far in the past as they know (grandparents, great-grandparents, etc.)
- Countries where their partners come from (past and present)
- Countries which are connected to their family through some historical events which had a great impact on the family system
- Countries / regions / cities / territories they are attracted to even if they do not have a conscious explanation why
- Additionally, add territories, cultures, regions, cities and villages if relevant following the same principle

Afterwards, we invite each person to present their map and share what they feel sharing about what they created. All of the maps are put on the wall to be visible and present in the room.

This process includes and acknowledges the origins of each individual member of the group, and enables everyone to see each other in the context of a wider system. It is important to hold space for everyone to present their maps, and to be fully present by focusing attention on them as a sign of respect for what they bring with hemselves. It is also important to emphasise to the group that comments and questions for clarification are not allowed during presentations. We go beyond our curiosity and the need to know more, or to question why something is the way it is. When everyone can share what they want without their dignity being questioned or confronted, they will feel welcome to be themselves without fear of being excluded because of what they bring with themselves. This way everyone's belong to the group is acknowledged.

Examples of 3D family maps / portraits:

Examples of maps of countries / cities / lands which belong to a system of an individual learner:

"The national identity was the best and most important learning. I found what aspects of my identity were influenced by my country. It was really nice to be aware of it."

participant of the training course
Yes. Please. Thank you.

PERCEPTION OF THE FACILITATOR

Application of the systemic approach and inclusive attitude starts from the facilitator himself / herself.

The questions for the facilitator to ask are:

Where do I belong?

Who is a part of my system? Where is my place?

Who is excluded / missing in the systems I am a part of?

Who needs to be included?

That is the first step of creating an inclusive environment - that the facilitator sees him / herself as a part of a system. **It is a step towards the inside first, including and acknowledging who and what belongs to our systems.**

The next step is towards the outside and seeing others as a part of a bigger system they belong to – their families, nations, cultures, ancestors, organizations, etc.

ATTITUDE OF THE FACILITATOR

Approaching the group with the attitude of having the whole system in our sight is very important. It requires respect for everyone who is included and respect for everything all the learners bring with themselves. Another key ingredient is acknowledging what is – it means that as facilitators we let go of our own beliefs, judgement of what we consider 'good' or 'bad', 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable', etc. **Acknowledging** means acceptance of what is there, exactly as it is, and everyone's contribution equally. **Facilitator and learners are equal in the process, and together they turn towards a goal or a solution.** As facilitators, we are also opening up to the unknown, to everything that is surrounding the whole learning process and we are not aware of, opening ourselves to whatever comes out of the process with trust.

Facilitator is not guided by his / her need to help, and needs to give up the idea of doing anything. He / she lets go of this need and physically leans back in his / her chair, or steps a bit outside of the process learners are going through. **This creates a space for learners to go through their own process without anyone in their own way, and it prioritizes a system.** When a facilitator is in the middle of the process, or interferes in it, it limits the learners' experience, and puts the facilitator's needs in focus.

SELF-ASSESSMENT AND SELF-AWARENESS

The starting point for creating an inclusive learning environment is the attitude and behaviour of those who set the ground for learning to happen – facilitators of a learning process, trainers, teachers, educators, youth workers, etc. A person who is facilitating a learning process can ask himself / herself the following questions to become aware of his / her way of being, where it comes from, and what influence it has on them and the way they facilitate a process:

> Who am I as a facilitator of learning?
> What are my beliefs / opinions about the people and the world around me?

> Which beliefs, opinions and behaviours have I learned, developed or acquired as a result of belonging to that certain system those systems? Which do I still have and transfer from one system to another?

> Which systems do I belong to (or belonged to before) – which members, which events, which countries / regions / cities? Who or what is excluded in the systems I am a part of? Who / what is missing? Who am I excluding? (draw it or write down)·
> * On personal level (family, partnerships, friendships, subgroups, school)
> * On professional level (school, university, training groups on specific topics, organizations where we are active members, previous job(s), current job(s))
> * On (inter)national level (place of birth, places where I live(d), places where I stayed temporarily)

> Which 'rules' am I loyal to as a member of my family-of-origin and country-of-origin? What impact is has on relationships with others who come from systems in which different 'rules' apply?

> What do I perceive as 'good' and what do I perceive as 'bad'? Which system do those beliefs come from?

> How do I act or react to beliefs / opinions / behaviours of those who are different than mine? Do I exclude someone due to the difference in our beliefs or perspectives on life?

> Which of my beliefs / opinions / behaviours are supporting me in facilitating an inclusive learning environment? Which of the beliefs / opinions / behaviours are limiting me in facilitating an inclusive learning environment?

> What does my body language say? What do I express through my face? What impact or influence do I have on others as a facilitator in the learning process by expressing who I am?

APPLYING SYSTEMIC PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

There are many different ways of how to put systemic principles into practice. Here are just some which were implemented in the learning processes during the training course.

BELONGING / PLACE

In a learning group, it is important that everyone has a place, even if they are not present at a certain moment. Acknowledging what and who belongs to the group - acknowledging the history of a process, origins of the approach used, previous experiences, including everyone who was involved in the process of creating it, including participants and the systems they bring with themselves (their family origins – members, events, countries and cultures which belong to their systems).

We consciously include everything that each individual brings into the group and give it a respected place - through words, gestures, behaviour, etc. A map of everyone's system can be present in the physical space the group is working, to acknowledge the belonging of each person and their system in the process.

Sentence we can say during processes when learners share whatever they want to say:
<div align="center">'Yes. That also belongs.'</div>

Learners can be invited to look at each other and say to each individual member the following sentence:
<div align="center">'I see you'</div>
<div align="center">'You are one of us.'</div>

TIME / ORDER

Members of a learning group organize themselves according to the order of the time they joined the group and the length of time they spent as members of the group. Such organization enables everyone to be in the place which is good for them to fully experience every step of the way. Group organizes itself in complete silence without any non-verbal communication by the length of time they have been as a part of a group, including the facilitator, support person(s), team members, etc. if everyone joined at the same time then learners organize themselves by their age. It is possible to experiment with different orders, for each individual to find a place in the group which feels good and relaxing for them. Learners start organizing from the facilitator's left side in the clock-wise direction from the person who has been a member for the longest time.

EXCHANGE / BALANCE

In a group learning process, all the individual members are in some kind of interaction with each other, and have an impact on the learning processes of the whole group. Everyone contributes to it in their specific way. To balance relationship and the contribution of everyone in the group, following sentences can be exchanged between them:

'**Thank you, I learnt a lot from you.'**

'What I gave you, you can keep.'

'What you gave me I will keep, thank you.'

'Thank you for _____.'
(fill it in with something you are honestly thankful for to the other person)

NON-INTERFERENCE

In a group everyone is with everything that exists in their own system, in their own 'bubble'. Each person takes what belongs to him / her, and leaves to others what is theirs. Non-interference means **holding space for everyone to do what they need to do for themselves and by themselves.** We as facilitators step back from the need to help, and look at the learners with the following sentence on our mind:

'I trust that you can do it by yourself.'

THE CIRCLE

There are many different settings which can be used within the same learning experience which fit the topic or the context – individual work, work in pairs, small groups, plenary sharing, presentations, etc. What is particularly important for inclusion of everyone who is involved in a learning process is setting in form of a circle. **Circle setting serves the purpose of building a sense of belonging to the same group. It is particularly important that everyone has equal time to share and that everyone hears everyone.**

Only sitting in a circle is many times not enough to create an inclusive environment and atmosphere of acknowledgement and respect. **There are many different scenarios when unconscious exclusion of an individual can happen while working:**

- there is a lack of listening. and learners are thinking what they will say while another person is speaking
- members of the group start questioning each other about the content they are expressing, commenting, or expressing their disagreement through body language, mimics or sounds;
- debtes start within a group between two, three or more people;
- one person is sharing for too long, or speaking frequently; other members of the group are excluded;
- side-talking is taking place or someone is having a private conversation with a neighbour about what has been said during the circle;
- individul learners are using their mobile phones during sharing and not listening

The consequence of exclusion of a member of a group due to lack of listening or miscommunication is that **they withdraw from the group**, especially if their dignity is touched.
In learning groups where learners from different countries or cultures meet, it might happen that their way of being, their attitudes, their beliefs or opinions are totally different and many times even contradictory. And it happens that learners try to argument or justify their point of view, or that others consider it 'wrong' or 'bad' and try to convince each other in something different. When someone needs to defend or justify themselves, their dignity is put in danger, they start feeling shame, and as a result they withdraw.
Most of these processes are completely unconscious, and the way group is interacting depends on what each individual person brings with themselves in their system. The role of the facilitator is to promote the attitude that everything is equally valuable and belongs to the group.

Arranging the setting in form of a circle can be challenging as most of the people automatically follow the pattern of communication they bring with themselves, and it might take several tries to make it work. **To make a circle setting work it is important to introduce the following principles which are based on the methodology of 'the way of council'.**

The way of council consists of several elements: **the facilitator, the speaker and the listeners, the four intentions, an object in the centre of the circle, a talking object, confidentiality, the topic of the council, an opening and an ending.**

Facilitator introduces the elements of the council in the beginning, and explains the four intentions of the process. Those intentions are:

1. **speaking from the heart**
2. **listening from the heart**
3. **speaking the essence**
4. **spontaneity**

It is important to emphasize that there should be only one person speaking at the time, that there are no comments or questions allowed, especially not to justify what someone has said. Everyone chooses to share or express what they want. Everyone speaks for themselves only, about their experiences from the 'I' perspective without talking about what others said or did. What is said during the council, stays there, and should not be discussed among each other afterwards – including both the learners and the facilitator(s).

The benefits of application of the way of council in a learning process:

.
- learning listening in the present moment – when one person speaks, the whole group focuses their attention on that person without thinking what they will say next; then there should be a moment of silence for the words to sink in, and the next person continues when he / she is ready
- learning patience – each person needs to wait for their turn to speak, and be present with the person who is sharing
- learning from each other's experiences and points of view
- learning to respect the differences among each other
- learning to express oneself in front of the whole group
- taking responsibility for one's words and the state of being in the group
- everyone is heard by each member of the group
- the whole group is aware of the inner state of each individual member

HUMAN-TO-HUMAN APPROACH

In creating an inclusive learning environment we as facilitators need to act from the position of finding what connects the whole group, opposed to diving individual members according to the 'conscience' groups they belong to. **We introduce concepts such as humans, citizens, learners, adults, which connect everyone in their essence.** The following process ws adapted from Hellinger (2011), and is an exercise which can be implemented with a group **to experience the miracle of a human being** standing in front of them.

'ONION' PROCESS

Each person finds a pair and they form 2 lines so that each pair can see themselves at the distance of approximately 2 meters. The aim of the following activity is to experience the miracle of a human being in front of each other. The facilitator is leading the process by saying the following at a very slow pace:

For a moment, close your eyes and imagine that you let go of losing anything essential. Imagine that you are like an onion and you are peeling layers of yourself one by one. Let go of your language... let go of your culture... let go of your religion... let go of your successes and failures... let go of your education..., let go of your beliefs... let go of your opinions... and even let go of your history... Slowly you arrive to something quite essential and simple, your pure being – here and now. This alone is essential. Nothing can add anything to it, nothing can take away from it. It's your core identity.

And now slowly open your eyes and look at the other human being in front of you, at their core identity, and at their core being - here. You meet from being - here to being - here. Nothing can come between us. In our being - here, in our core identity we are equally essential.

While you look at them from the position of your core identity, and also imagine that they are peeling away layers of themselves. Every time you see one layer coming off, you make a small step forward to each other. When you look at them, you see how they are letting go of their layers - their culture, profession, language, past, education, beliefs, nationality, all the layers they have on themselves.

*When you come close to each other, look at each other's eyes once again and see only their core identity, and tell to each other: '**I am just like you**'.*

FACILITATING LEARNING BY HELPING IN AN EMPOWERING WAY

Many professions that involve working with people can be considered 'helping' professions. It means that one or more people are there to support another person or more in a specific process (education, training, consulting, coaching, therapy, etc.). Helping is like an art and as such it requires practice. **As we all exist in systems, we all depend on someone and their help – to get things done, to develop, to flourish. Helping is mutually beneficial, and requires an exchange in order for a relationship to be balanced. This kind of helping gives strength to everyone who is included, and enables expansion.**

There is also another way of helping, the one which makes us weaker – both as helpers and those who receive help. **When we help someone to feel better about ourselves or to help ourselves, we are putting ourselves in a superior position and putting our needs before theirs. By helping in such a way, we are sending them a message that they are not able to do something by themselves. This position makes the one we are helping weaker.**

Questions for us as facilitators to ask ourselves:

> **Do I help learners to feel better about myself or do I help them in a way that supports their learning process and empowers them?**
>
> **Does what I am doing help? Is it necessary? Is it making the learner stronger or weaker?**

To help in a way that empowers a learner and supports learning, it is important to take into consideration several guidelines which are based on Hellinger's orders of helping and adapted to this context. They include the following:

1. **We only give what we have and expect only what we need** – it is a part of helping to recognize the limitations of giving and taking, and to respect them. Disorder happens when we want to give what we don't have and take what we don't need, or when someone expects to receive from another person what they cannot give them.

2. We respect the circumstances of someone's life – we agree with the circumstances of someone's life exactly as they are with respect, and support the person only as much as the circumstances allow us. Such helping is limited, but there is strength in it.

3. We approach learners as an adult to an adult – we treat and support learners as adults who are capable of taking care of themselves. This way we empower them to be independent from our support.

4. We observe the process more in a systemic way, and less personal – when we take a group learning process personally, we put ourselves and our needs in front of the needs of the learners. Instead of that, we facilitate with having in mind that everyone is a part of a system, and that their behaviour and the way of being is influenced by it.

5. We join what has been separated by acknowledging learners exactly as they are – we are opening ourselves to everyone exactly as they are, act beyond judgement and see them as a part of the system.

Sentences we can say inside of ourselves or directly to a learner are:

I trust you can do it by yourself. I am here for you when you'll need me.

I am only your facilitator (or trainer, teacher, educator, coach, advisor, etc.). Everything you need to learn, you can learn by yourself. I am here for you if you need anything.

"I learned that I often help people to feel better, but it doesn't help them."

participant of the training course
Yes. Please. Thank you.

"I discovered that I tend to 'help' others and interfere in their process... interrupting their learning, therefore not helping them."

participant of the training course
Yes. Please. Thank you.

GOING BEYOND JUDGEMENT

As our belonging to different systems and social groups has a significant impact on our identity, perception of the world, beliefs, behaviour and the way of being, we unconsciously start developing or own personal and professional judgement of the people and the world around ourselves.. **Judgement comes from our inner belief that we as humans have the capacity to say who or what is good or bad. Such beliefs divide us, and are a fertile ground for exclusion to happen**. We express our judgement through saying sentences like – '**I like this', 'I don't like this', 'this is good', 'this is bad', 'this is healthy', 'this is unhealthy', 'I want this', 'I don't want this', 'he/she should', 'he/she shouldn't',** etc.

When we judge people in any way, **the message we are sending to them is: 'I am better than you', and we put ourselves in a superior position in relationship to them.** In a learning process it can manifest in facilitators believing that they know what is better for the learners. And learners might expect from the facilitators to tell them what is good or what is bad, what would be better, what they should or shouldn't do. Group processes are dynamic, and each individual plays a role inside of it with his / her own way of being and judgement of the world around them that is based on beliefs, upbringing, culture, education, professional background,, etc.

It is vital that the facilitator remains neutral in group dynamic processes and expressions of opinions or beliefs. It is also important to be aware of the processes each learner is going through, and which strategies they are using to influence each other's personal judgement of something or someone. **We as facilitators need to perceive everyone as equal, and whatever they say or express we treat them with respect and support everyone equally. Everything learners bring with themselves has a place and belongs to the group / system, and is GOOD exactly the way it is because it's a representation of their reality.**

"I am way more respectful to other people's opinion and mental processes. I can wait for them to reach a conclusion that seems obvious from the outside… but it has to be them realize it. I am more focused. I am more relaxed as I only have my life on my shoulders."

participant of the training course
Yes. Please. Thank you.

26

How to notice our own judgement?

Many times we are able to control what we say and how we say it, and somehow our body language is not matching it. If we react in any way to whatever someone has said (either through words, facial expressions, or body movement), we are unconsciously judging it, and sending back 'feedback' in regard of what has been said or done. More precisely, we are sending them a message if such opinion / belief / behaviour / action will enable them to continue belonging to the group, or their belonging is in danger.

To become aware of how he / she reacts to other people, a facilitator needs to observe the following:

- the changes in body posture when he / she hears or sees something that it different from his / her way of perceiving the world;
- if there are any feelings or sensations emerging in his / her body and where;
- the messages his / her face is sending non-verbally;
- reactions to hearing stories from learners we perceive as happy, sad, tragic, emotional, funny, etc.

When we accept that everyone is the way they are, and accept that we are all equal as human beings, we will not be triggered to comment on anyone, we will not feel any emotional reactions, we will not have the need to convince someone into something, to prove our point, or to argue or debate, and our body and face will not have any physical reactions.
To ground ourselves whenever we catch ourselves judging, either through words or body language, we look at the person we are judging, or imagine them in front of ourselves, we say the following sentence:

'I am just like you'

Through this sentence **we are acknowledging that we are both human beings that we are equal despite all the differences that might exist between us** in our opinions, beliefs, behaviour, choices in life, etc. It is a sentence that enables us to act beyond judgement, and hold space for everyone equally.

MAINTAINING NEUTRALITY

Neutrality of the facilitator goes hand in hand with acting beyond judgement. All **learners bring with themselves everything that shapes them the way they are. When different nationalities or cultures meet, it is necessary that the ground they meet on is neutral.** It means that those who facilitate the process need to maintain neutrality in what they say and how they say it, in the body language, in their reactions, and in their facial expressions.

In speech we need to pay attention to what we say and how we say it, if we are expressing our preference in a certain matter, if we are influencing learners with our own personal experience, comments or questions. In non-verbal communication we need to pay attention to what is our body language and face saying about our inner process. We need to check with ourselves if we are in touch with the whole group, if we are maintaining neutrality and serving for everyone equally.

> **"I discovered that being neutral and not so talkative is not too difficult and also it is not a big deal. Not every action around me needs my reaction."**
>
> participant of the training course
> Yes. Please. Thank you.

HOLDING SPACE

To hold space for a group means being present without doing anything. Just being there, seeing and listening without judgement is enough. To accept learners and their process like it is. This requires being open to whatever they bring with themselves. To be present in the moment and to hold space, we need to let go of our past experiences and the need to compare, and we need to let go of our need to know what will happen in the future.

We need to **switch focus from our mind** (which is usually either in the past or in the future), **to our whole body, our breathing, our body posture, and our own inner processes.** When we as facilitators have our own processes going on inside of ourselves, or capacity to be fully present is limited.

We need to **act from the place of nothing – no thoughts, no emotions, no inner images, no stories and no need to help**. When we collect and integrate our own experiences, accept everything as it is in our lives, include what is missing or excluded in our systems, **we feel full. In this fullness there is emptiness, and from this emptiness comes the freedom to act in a way that supports and empowers the growth of those we work with.**
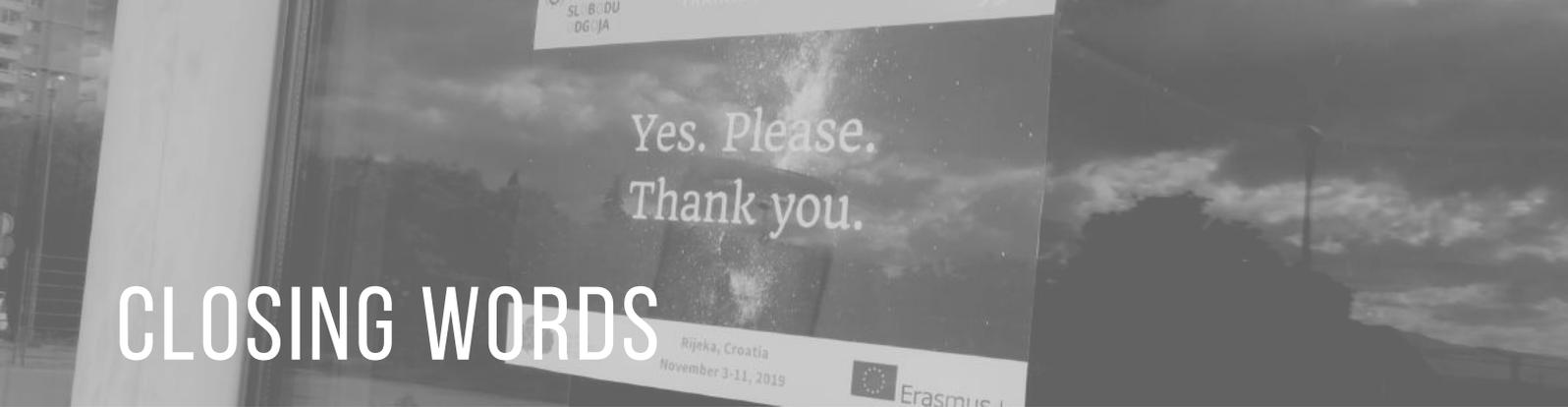
CLOSING WORDS

Inclusion starts from ourselves - from including those who belong to our systems, accepting ourselves as we are, our parents, ancestors, countries, cultures as they are, and our past as it is. When we do that, we accept everything and everyone exactly as they are, without having the need to change them. Then we are in our full strength and capacity to support inclusion of others with respect for what they bring with themselves.

Taking into consideration insights from the systemic approach, **we open up to everyone equally and hold space for all the learners (and their systems) to share about their origins, cultures, families, and all the events that shaped their identity and their way of being.** Allowing everyone to be as they are, and acknowledging their contribution without their dignity being touched, is the first step towards a more inclusive society. We move away from what divides us, towards things that connect us as human beings, as one small piece of a bigger puzzle. This way we honour each other and the contribution each person gives in their own special way.

We stand firmly with both our feet on the ground, and inside of ourselves we acknowledge everything and everyone that belongs to the systems we belong to. We say 'yes' to it exactly as it is, with respect and honouring for what we have received. **From there, we move on, forward, step by step, into something new and unknown with trust. We walk our own path in full strength as a part of a greater system.**

'Yes. Please. Thank you.' is not only the name of the project, these words are also an important ingredients of inclusion, and are an essential part of systemic work. They stand for **acceptance** of everyone and everything exactly as it is, for **humility** in front of all the circumstances of life, and **gratitude** for what we receive, as it is.

Finally, dear reader, **THANK YOU** for reading this booklet and the time invested. If there is anything you would like to share with us about this topic or give us feedback, **PLEASE**, click on the link below.
And, **YES**, you also belong, you also have a place, exactly as you are!

**CLICK
FOR
FEEDBACK**

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

Whittington. J. (2016) **Systemic Coaching and Constellations – The Principles, Practices and Application for Individuals, Teams and Groups**. London, UK: Kogan Page.

Hellinger. B. (2011) **In the Service of Life.** Berchtesgarten: Hellinger Publications.

Hellinger. B. (2009) **Success in Life**. Berchtesgarten: Hellinger Publications.

Hellinger. B. (2010) **Stories of Success in Business and Professions**. Berchtesgarten: Hellinger Publications.

Franke-Gricksch, M. (2003) **You're One of Us - Systemic Insights and Solutions for Teachers, Students and Parents.** Heidelberg: Carl Auer International.

Stam. J.J., Hoogenboom, B. (2018) **Systemic Leadership**. The Netherlands: Systemic Books Publishing.

Stam, J.J., Scheuder, B. (2017) **Systemic Coaching: Systemic Work without the Constellation**. The Netherlands: Systemic Books Publishing.

Zimmerman, J., Coyle, V. (1996) **The Way of Council**. Colchester: Bramble Books.

yes
please
thank
you

yes
Please
thank
you