



UpGameIn

Upskilling of Game Industry for more Inclusive and
environmental friendly games

UpGameIn- Upskilling of Game Industry for more Inclusive and environmental friendly games

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About the project

The “UpGameIn- Upskilling of Game Industry for more Inclusive and environmentally friendly games” project is an initiative aimed at transforming the game industry by integrating principles of inclusivity, accessibility, and environmental sustainability into game design. Through collaborative workshops, curated resources, and vocational training, UpGameIn empowers game studios, educators, and organizations to create games that not only entertain but also address pressing global challenges outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By fostering cooperation between industry stakeholders and promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups, UpGameIn is shaping a more inclusive, equitable, and environmentally friendly gaming ecosystem for the future

THE IDEA BEHIND

The UpGameIn project is driven by the recognition of the immense potential of the game industry to not only entertain but also educate and promote social change. However, this potential can only be fully realized if games are designed to be inclusive, accessible, and environmentally friendly. The idea behind UpGameIn is to address the existing gaps in game design by providing resources, training, and guidelines that empower game industry professionals and educators to create games that cater to diverse audiences and address pressing global challenges outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and circular economy principles. By fostering inclusivity, promoting diversity, and considering environmental sustainability throughout the game development process, UpGameIn aims to elevate the industry and contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and environmentally friendly gaming ecosystem.

OBJECTIVES

The project objectives are to:

- Adapt to the needs of the game industry by facilitating co-creation learning training workshops and developing a library collection of frameworks, methodologies, and guidelines for designing inclusive, accessible, and environmentally friendly games.
- Adapt vocational education and training (VET) to meet industry demands by creating guidelines for upskilling game design teams and improving the skills of VET educators to teach topics related to inclusivity, accessibility, and environmental sustainability.
- Update Game-Based Learning pedagogy and didactics to foster a more inclusive and environmentally friendly future, ensuring that educational institutions and organizations leverage games as effective tools for learning and social change.
- Empower inclusion and accessibility of vulnerable or marginalized groups in the field of games by providing resources and training that enable the creation of games playable by all individuals, regardless of their abilities, age, culture, economics, education, or race.

- Create materials, including a resource library and training resources, to disseminate partnership experiences to both VET trainers and the game industry, with the goal of developing the skills of game studios and VET organizations in creating more inclusive, equal, and accessible games that address environmental challenges and promote a circular economy.
- Enable cooperation between educational institutions, NGOs, and businesses to address key European priorities, including adaptation of VET education to labor needs, enhancement of inclusion and diversity, and the fight against environmental destruction and climate change

TARGET GROUPS

The main target groups of the project are

- Game studios and professionals
- VET organizations, educators, and professionals
- Educational organizations, especially those focused on game-based learning
- Organizations empowering vulnerable groups
- Members of partnership, game societies and groups
- Institutions or individuals interested in the project

GREEN RECOMMENDATIONS

The partnership of UpGameIn has agreed on a green approach to the whole project and its outputs in alignment with the EU's guidelines.

Thus, it is highly recommended and encouraged that this approach be adopted by any future game designer or stakeholder who will use the following guidelines.

- **Digitalise:** Instead of using physical materials for the following activities, try to adjust them to digital alternatives. Some examples are: shared documents for the brainstorming of the groups, digital posters and digital presentations, to name but a few.
- **Recycle:** Sometimes the digital form may be inconvenient or exclusionary for certain groups. In the case of physical material usage, be sure that all the expendables are both recycled and recyclable (e.g. paper).
- **Re-use:** There is no need to print or purchase your educational material again and again. It is highly recommended to “upgrade” your reusable printed material. Another recommendation could be to purchase small whiteboards, so that the participants waste less paper for the activities.
- **Adjust and improvise:** Every activity of these guidelines needs to be adjusted to the participants' needs and abilities. The best equilibrium between accessibility and green awareness needs to be found, depending on the country, the space, the time, and any other factor that makes the upcoming workshops unique.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY ADJUSTMENTS

Scope of the document

This document is addressed to VET trainers on the field of game designers and contains 4 modules on the topic of inclusivity in games.

About the project.....	3
Overview.....	7
Summary.....	7
Duration.....	7
Target audience.....	7
Learning Objectives.....	8
Theoretical Background.....	8
References.....	9
Module 0– Pre & Post Self-Assessment.....	10
General information.....	10
Materials needed.....	10
Detailed description.....	10
Module 1 – Underrepresented Groups in Games.....	12
Learning Objectives:.....	12
Theoretical background / Key Concepts:.....	12
Icebreaker 1 : Analysis of Examples.....	13
Game 1: Creating an Inclusive Character.....	13
Game 2: Classify your favorite games.....	13
Module 2 – Challenges to Inclusivity.....	14
Learning Objectives:.....	14
Theoretical Background / Key Concepts:.....	14
Icebreaker 2: Hunting for Bias.....	14
Game 1: A More Inclusive Pitch.....	15
Game 2: The Inclusive Budget.....	16
Module 3 – Strategies for Enhancing Inclusivity.....	17
Learning Objectives:.....	17
Theoretical Background / Key Concepts:.....	17
Icebreaker 3: Build Your Player.....	18
Game 1: An Inclusive Concept.....	20
Game 2: Inclusive Co-Design.....	20
Module 4 – Tools, Frameworks and Case Studies.....	20
Learning Objectives:.....	20
Theoretical Background / Key Concepts:.....	21
Icebreaker 4: Yes, and then	21
Game 4: Play Session: Space Ability.....	21

LESSON _ INCLUSIVITY IN GAMES

Overview

Summary

This lesson deepens the concept of inclusivity in games, which is essential for ensuring that learning environments reflect diversity and promote equity. Games often reproduce cultural biases, leaving women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, and people with disabilities underrepresented or misrepresented. This lack of authentic representation diminishes engagement and can reinforce marginalization, whereas inclusive portrayals foster motivation, belonging, and recognition.

The lesson is articulated around 4 main topics, each one developed within a specific module:

1. Underrepresented Groups in Games;
2. Challenges to Inclusivity;
3. Strategies for Enhancing Inclusivity;
4. Tools, Frameworks and Case Studies.

Ultimately, by confronting underrepresentation, acknowledging systemic barriers, applying inclusive strategies, and leveraging proven tools and frameworks from existing case studies, learners will imagine a new series of inclusive games, transforming them into powerful tools for empowerment, equity, and social cohesion.

Duration

4 modules (approx. 1 hours each).

Target audience

Trainers, educators, game designers, VET students, youth workers.

All the activities are intended to be played by 3 to 10 participants.

Learning Objectives

- Define inclusivity and explain its importance in games.
- Recognize the main underrepresented groups and the challenges related to representation.
- Identify bias, stereotypes, and barriers in the industry and game design.
- Apply strategies and tools to develop inclusive and accessible content.
- Evaluate best practices and real cases as inspiration for their own work.

Accessibility and Inclusivity for the activities

The activities of the following modules are conceived for being as much accessible and inclusive as possible.

However, before presenting them to the players, facilitators could apply some extra practices to make them even better:

- While creating and printing the proper materials, pay attention to use a well-readable font for the written parts.
- Some elements within the activities (such videos or other forms of contents) can be adapted depending on
 - The country the activities are played in
 - The age of participants
 - The expertise of participants

The idea is to make the contents more familiar with the target audience

- Create a presentation to introduce the rules and the actions the players will have to follow and perform, to increase the chance there is no misunderstanding about what they will have to do
- Conduct the explanation of the rules in a way that everybody are able to listen and focus on. If some participant start distracting others or produce some noises, interrupt the explanation and help the group to refocus.

Theoretical Background

The integration of inclusivity into educational game design is a recent research stream in game design that emphasizes the importance of representation, equity, and participatory approaches in learning contexts. Indeed, inclusivity in games is about creating experiences that reflect human diversity, overcome stereotypes, and promote empathy.

One of the most persistent issues in games is the underrepresentation or misrepresentation of certain groups, including women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, and people with disabilities. Their presence is often limited, stereotyped, or marginalized, which not only shapes the culture of gaming but also impacts how these underrepresented groups perceive themselves in game-based learning environments (Shaw, 2014). Inclusive representation has multiple benefits: it fosters engagement, validates diverse identities, and strengthens the capacity of games to serve as tools for social learning (Ruberg & Phillips, 2018).

Yet despite the growing recognition of these advantages, achieving inclusivity remains challenging. The structural dominance of homogenous development teams, the persistence of commercial priorities over educational ones, and the lack of systematic training for educators on inclusive digital pedagogy all contribute to a fragmented implementation of inclusivity principles (Weststar & Legault, 2019). Moreover, the concept of intersectionality highlights how multiple forms of marginalization can overlap, creating compounded disadvantages that cannot be resolved through superficial gestures of inclusion (Crenshaw, 1989). These challenges remind us that inclusive game-based education requires deliberate reflection on design choices, teaching strategies, and institutional support. Addressing such barriers involves adopting strategies that embed inclusivity into the core of educational practice.

Participatory design, which engages learners and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds in the creation of games, has been identified as one of the most effective approaches for ensuring authenticity and relevance (Björk & Holopainen, 2005). Equally, frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) emphasize flexibility and multiple means of engagement, encouraging educators to design learning experiences that accommodate varied abilities and perspectives (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). Reflective pedagogy, whereby educators actively interrogate their own assumptions and biases, complements these structural strategies by ensuring that inclusivity is not treated as an afterthought but as a guiding principle throughout game development and application.

Beyond strategies, the operationalization of inclusivity in games relies on concrete tools, frameworks, and documented practices. The *Inclusivity Guide* developed within educational projects offers a systematic approach to embedding inclusivity across stages of design and implementation, helping educators move beyond ad hoc efforts and towards coherent, replicable practices (Inclusivity Guide, 2023). Complementary models such as the Gender-Inclusive Game Design framework (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009) provide evaluative criteria for assessing whether games reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Case studies also illustrate how inclusive games can be designed and applied in practice: for instance, role-playing activities that allow learners to adopt diverse perspectives, co-designed digital simulations where marginalized voices shape the narrative, and classroom projects in which games explicitly address stereotypes to foster empathy and critical thinking. Evidence from such cases demonstrates that inclusivity can enhance

learner motivation, promote collaboration, and contribute to social cohesion, showing that inclusive design is not only theoretically justified but practically feasible.

Ultimately, inclusivity in game design is simultaneously a moral imperative and a pedagogical necessity. By addressing the underrepresentation of marginalized groups, acknowledging and overcoming systemic challenges, applying strategies grounded in participatory design and UDL, and leveraging tools and frameworks supported by case studies, educators can ensure that games function as powerful instruments of empowerment. Far from being a peripheral concern, inclusivity represents a foundational principle that aligns educational game design with broader commitments to diversity, equity, and social justice.

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Module 0– Pre & Post Self-Assessment

General information

Duration:

5-10 min

Objectives of the activity:

- understand and visualize the actual impact of training activities
- assist VET trainers to redesign their methodologies

Structure:

A set of 9 Likert scale (1-5) questions can be used in both sessions.

Materials needed

- Online survey tools (e.g. Mentimeter, Kahoot, Google Forms etc)
- Computers/smartphones/tablets

Detailed description

Preparation

The facilitator creates two online questionnaire, one for the pre-assessment and one for the post-assessment, that contains the following set of Likert scale questions:

PRE-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE:

The questionnaire is divided into 3 sections:

Section A: Knowledge and Understanding

Q1. I know the main models of disability (medical, social, and rights-based).

Q2. I know the main dimensions of accessibility in games.

Q3. I can identify accessibility barriers in a game.

Section B: Application and Skills

Q4. I can apply Universal Design principles in my own game projects.

Q5. I can integrate accessibility features (e.g., subtitles, remapping, color options).

Q6. I can create and use an accessibility checklist for playtesting.

Section C: Attitudes and Awareness

Q7. I believe accessibility makes games better for everyone.

Q8. I see accessibility as a creative opportunity, not a limitation.

Q9. I feel confident discussing or applying accessibility practices in game design.

POST-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE:

For the post assessment, the facilitator can create the following open-ended questions.

Q10. Which activity helped you most to understand accessibility in game design?

Q11. What is one idea or tool you plan to apply in your future projects?

LIKERT SCALE:

1: not at all

2: a little

3: somewhat

4: quite a lot

5: very much

Implementation

The facilitator shares the link to the questionnaire and lets participants fill it in.

An informal discussion, especially in post assessment session, can follow.

Module 1 – Underrepresented Groups in Games

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify the underrepresented groups and the stereotypes in games.
2. Understand the importance of inclusivity in games
3. Discuss positive and negative examples of representation in industry practices
4. Improve representation in participants' favorite games.

Theoretical background / Key Concepts:

As cultural artifacts, games often mirror and perpetuate existing social biases, which results in the underrepresentation or misrepresentation of many groups. Women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities are still commonly subjected to stereotypes, rendered invisible, or included only in tokenistic ways within mainstream game narratives and mechanics (Shaw, 2014). This lack of authentic representation restricts opportunities for identification and engagement while simultaneously reinforcing broader patterns of exclusion. In educational contexts, such omissions can reduce learners' motivation and intensify feelings of marginalization. Conversely, studies demonstrate that when games offer inclusive and diverse representations, they strengthen players' sense of belonging and affirm the value of multiple identities (Ruberg & Phillips, 2018). For this reason, tackling underrepresentation is a crucial step in applying games pedagogically, as it supports the overarching educational commitment to equity and diversity.

Icebreaker 1 : Analysis of Examples

Present positive and negative representations of characters within games.
The examples presented are the following:

- Representation in video games
- Representation in board games

Each example contains 10 characters, and players must say which of them are represented in a positive way and which in a negative way, and explain why.
For each set of characters, an open debate among the players begins, lasting 10 minutes.

Game 1: Creating an Inclusive Character

(tot. time: 20 min)

Players must collectively create a character that is as inclusive as possible. In turn, each player must say one feature that makes the character more inclusive.

The facilitator gives each player 2 minutes to state their feature. Once the feature is given, the facilitator writes it on a whiteboard to build a list. If the player cannot come up with a feature within 1 minute, they lose their turn. The round lasts for 2 complete turns.

At the end of the game, the facilitator starts a 10-15 minutes discussion by observing the results and highlighting the character's peculiarities. The discussion will focus on whether the character created is truly inclusive, if it is stereotyped, or if it lacks some characteristics that could enhance inclusivity.

Game 2: Classify your favorite games

(tot. Time: 10 min x game=40 min)

Each player writes down their favorite game (of any type) on a sheet of paper. The sheet is then passed around among all participants.

The facilitator then selects 3 games from those written on the sheets. The chosen games are the ones that are known by all or most of the players.

At this point, the facilitator starts a discussion phase for each of the 3 games, lasting 10 minutes per game. During the discussion, each game is evaluated according to the following three criteria:

- **Diversity of characters**
- **Presence of stereotypes**
- **Equal distribution of roles**

For each criterion, players assign a score from 1 to 10, where 1 is the lowest score and 10 is the highest.

Module 2 – Challenges to Inclusivity

Learning Objectives:

1. Analyse the current industry practices
2. Identify the challenges encountered by each underrepresented group
3. Discuss about the audience perceptions and possible resistance to changes.

Theoretical Background / Key Concepts:

- Design and content: stereotypes, lack of diversity, tokenism.
- Industry practices: non-diverse teams, structural discrimination.
- Audience perception: toxicity, resistance to inclusive content.

Although awareness of inclusivity in education has increased, significant challenges continue to hamper its full realization in game-based learning. Within the gaming industry, the prevalence of uniformed development teams often narrows the diversity of viewpoints incorporated into design processes (Weststar & Legault, 2019). In schools and universities, limited teacher preparation in inclusive digital pedagogy further compounds the issue. Moreover, achieving inclusivity requires an understanding of intersectionality—the overlapping dimensions of identity such as gender, ethnicity, or disability that can intensify marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989). True inclusivity in games cannot be reduced to simply featuring a wider range of characters; it requires a rethinking of game mechanics, storylines, and pedagogical objectives so that varied experiences are authentically represented. On top of this, educators often contend with time pressures, scarce resources, and institutional resistance to change, all of which complicate the integration of inclusive practices (Inclusivity Guide, 2023).

Icebreaker 2: Hunting for Bias

(tot. Time: 15 min)

Players analyze 2 trailers from 2 different video games. The trailers are chosen by the facilitator, based on a previous research on each country's most known games. After the viewing, the facilitator encourages reflection by showing clips of the trailers and pausing at key moments.

The facilitator must guide players in identifying the stereotypes used in the video and point out their function, without framing them negatively. In fact, the facilitator should explain how stereotypes can serve to make characters recognizable or to give players the intended impression.

Game 1: A More Inclusive Pitch

(tot. Time: 30 min)

Players are divided into groups of 5 people each.

Each group plays the role of a development team tasked with correcting a game concept. Every group receives a sheet describing the same non-inclusive game concept. The concept is as follows:

- **Genre:** Fantasy Action RPG
- **Setting:** A generic medieval kingdom, with castles, knights, and non-human creatures.
- **Protagonist:** Sir Alaric, a young athletic knight, with pearl-white skin, blue eyes, and golden hair. A solitary hero who must rely only on his own strength to solve the situation. He is the only playable character.

Secondary Characters:

- *Princess Claire:* Delicate as a flower, always perfect and dressed in sumptuous silk gowns. Her skin is like velvet, and her voice is as sweet as a swan's song. She has been kidnapped by the forces of evil and depends on Sir Alaric to be saved.
- *The Unknown Sage:* An old man with a frail yet confident demeanor. Every word he speaks inspires reassurance. He is the only person Sir Alaric has ever trusted.
- *The Villain:* Rotor, a brawny, muscular orc with poor language skills. What drives him and his horde of servants is hatred. He kidnaps Princess Claire out of pure hatred for the kingdom of men.

Each group has 20 minutes to completely rethink the game concept to make it more inclusive, by modifying the characters, their roles, and the game's narrative. At the end of this phase, the facilitator gives each group 5 minutes to present their changes, followed by another 10 minutes of debriefing to analyze the solutions invented by the players.

Game 2: The Inclusive Budget

(tot. Time: 10 min)

Players take on the role of a development team that must decide which inclusivity options to invest in. The choice is made using a budget of 100 credits.

The list of options must be printed and presented to the players. Players must select their options from the list. These are as follows, with the corresponding costs:

Options – Cost 15

- **Internal guidelines on inclusive language and representation**
A shared document for the team.

- **Basic accessibility check**
Clear subtitles, legible fonts, colorblind options.
- **Quick awareness session**
A 1-hour internal workshop on stereotypes and bias.

Options – Cost 30

- **Diverse beta testers pool**
Testers are selected from different backgrounds and abilities.
- **Diversity consultant**
Hire an expert consultant specializing in inclusivity.
- **Expanded customization options**
Develop a more diverse character customization system with choices regarding:
 - Gender
 - Body types
 - Ethnicities
 - Inclusion of different physical and psychological abilities

Options – Cost 50

- **Narrative rewrite**
Rework the game's storylines to introduce more inclusive elements.
- **Advanced accessibility**
Conduct an in-depth accessibility review, including remappable controls and adjustable difficulty for players.
- **Representative main characters**
Redesign all the main characters to make them more inclusive and non-stereotypical.

In case participants finish the activity with extra money we leave them the choice to redistribute the amount for the purpose they prefer.

Afterwards, players have 10 minutes to present the options they chose and explain their reasoning.

Module 3 – Strategies for Enhancing Inclusivity

Learning Objectives:

1. Explore concrete examples of inclusive games
2. Learn new strategies to integrate inclusivity into game design.
3. Apply methodologies of community engagement and feedback.

Theoretical Background / Key Concepts:

- Inclusivity in design and development (inclusive storytelling, customizable gameplay, technical accessibility).
- Community feedback and co-design.
- Inclusive marketing and promotion.

In response to challenges presented in module 3, several strategies have been proposed to embed inclusivity more effectively in educational games. Participatory design, which directly involves learners and community members from diverse backgrounds in the creation process, has been shown to yield more genuine and representative outcomes (Björk & Holopainen, 2005). In addition, inclusive pedagogy stresses adaptability and learner-centered design, principles that can be translated into flexible game mechanics offering multiple routes to achievement. The Universal Design for Learning framework (UDL), for example, advocates providing different modes of engagement, representation, and expression to accommodate diverse learners (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). Equally important is reflective practice, where educators regularly examine their own biases and teaching assumptions to ensure inclusivity is consistently prioritized. Together, these approaches enable educators to build environments where diversity is respected and all learners feel empowered to participate.

Icebreaker 3: Build Your Player

Players are divided into groups of 5, each tasked with creating a persona—a player. To do this, they must use puzzle pieces provided by the facilitator.

The puzzle pieces are divided into small boxes, each marked with a symbol representing its category. The categories are as follows:

- **Age**
 - 9 years old, primary school
 - 14 years old, secondary school
 - 19 years old, university

- 32 years old, working adult
- 65 years old, retired
- **Accessibility Conditions**
 - Visually impaired
 - Colorblind
 - Limited mobility
 - ADHD
 - Autism
- **Background**
 - Lives in a rural area, weak or no internet connection
 - Migrant, speaks only their native language fluently
 - Lives in the outskirts of a large city, with limited economic resources
 - Enthusiast of pop culture
- **Motivations**
 - Wants to play to learn
 - Seeks a game to feel part of a group of friends
 - Wants to train skills for a future job
 - Plays to relax and reduce anxiety

- Loves customizing avatars and stories
- Competitive, aims to beat records and climb leaderboards
- **Preferences**
 - Educational games (quiz, learning)
 - Adventure games (stories, exploration)
 - Simulation games (building, resource management)
 - Logic and puzzle games
 - Cooperative games (team-based play)
 - Interactive narrative games (choose your own story path)

Each group has 5 minutes to pick pieces from the boxes and assemble their player. Once the time is up, the facilitator organizes the pieces selected by each group and announces that the next game will be centered on the players they have created.

Game 1: An Inclusive Concept

(tot. Time: 30-40 min)

The groups now have 15 minutes to design a game concept based on the player they created during the icebreaker activity. Please note that this game is connected to the icebreaker activity before.

At the end of the time, the facilitator gives each group 5 minutes to present their concept, followed by feedback.

Game 2: Inclusive Co-Design

This allows them to experiment by including a more diverse range of collaborators and audiences.

The team must develop an educational game for a target group of students from different parts of the world.

Within 15 minutes, they must define the following points:

- **Which community members to involve**
(e.g., associations, families, schools, experts)
- **How to gather feedback**
(e.g., interviews, playtests, focus groups)
- **How to integrate feedback into the design**

Afterwards, players have 10 minutes to present the co-design plan they created.

Module 4 – Tools, Frameworks and Case Studies

Learning Objectives:

1. Explore current reference frameworks and tools to create inclusive games
2. Evaluate a case study with an inclusivity checklist
3. Test one/more best practices into your own educational/professional context.

Theoretical Background / Key Concepts:

- Inclusive Design Frameworks (Microsoft, AbleGamers, IGDA).
- Cultural consultation & sensitivity tools.
- Inclusivity testing tools.
- Industry standards and certifications.

Turning inclusivity from theory into practice depends on the availability of tools and structured frameworks. The *Inclusivity Guide* serves as a resource that prompts teachers and designers to examine inclusivity at every stage of the process, ensuring systematic integration instead of piecemeal adjustments (Inclusivity Guide, 2023). Additional models such as the Gender-Inclusive Game Design framework (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009) and UDL offer practical benchmarks for assessing whether learning activities genuinely promote equity. Case studies further illustrate the effectiveness of these principles in action, ranging from role-playing games that encourage learners to adopt multiple perspectives, to co-created digital simulations shaped by marginalized voices, to classroom projects explicitly designed to challenge stereotypes and cultivate empathy. Such examples

demonstrate that inclusivity in games is not merely an abstract principle but a workable, evidence-based practice with proven benefits for learner engagement and social interaction.

Icebreaker 4: Yes, and then...

Players are arranged in a circle. The facilitator then explains the rules of the activity:

The first participant must say the phrase *“An inclusive game should...”* and add one characteristic at the end. The next player continues the sentence by saying *“True, but also...”* or similar phrases, each adding another characteristic.

The activity ends when all players have contributed, thus building a short collective definition of inclusivity in games.

Game 4: Play Session: Space Ability

Up to 5 players are selected to play Space Ability.

The goal of the session is to play a round of Space Ability while highlighting the aspects of inclusivity addressed within the game. The key points to emphasize are:

- **The nature of the characters and their disabilities**
- **The types of activities players must choose from when organizing each event, and why these activities may not be inclusive for the characters**
- **The consequences of the stress caused by these difficulties**

The game session lasts 20 minutes, with facilitators guiding the players through the first turns and helping to speed up the match.

Once the play session ends, a 10-minute debrief takes place, where facilitators encourage players to reflect on the themes explored in the game—specifically, how disabilities are often overlooked in the organization of major events and how this can result in a lack of inclusivity.

After this discussion, facilitators lead a short Q&A phase, asking the players:

- **What accessibility solutions were implemented in the game?**
- **Did you empathize with the difficulties experienced by the characters?**