

BRIDGES

A **toolkit** for **diversifying knowledge** and **tackling discrimination** through **civil society participation** in universities.

Toolkit Workshop

Academic Carousel

TOOLKIT WORKSHOP

ACADEMIC CAROUSEL

🕒 1H - 1.5H

DESCRIPTION

*The following exercise is a board game that aims at making visible challenges and difficulties of everyday life - academic-related and otherwise - connected to **Neoliberal Compliance**, **Eurocentrism**, and **Migra*BPOC¹ Resistance**, as well as enforcing strategies of mutual cooperation and support. The activity methodology is inspired by Paulo Freire's ideas on exercises of codification and de-codification, which entails a three phases activity.*

Firstly, a common issue within the student group is identified in a quasi-ethnographic approach; i.e., through carefully listening to the group, educators/researchers identify topics that afflict the students.

Following, these topics are codified in one observable support - a board game in this case - in order to present and represent the issue in an observable manner.

Lastly, the situations observed during the game should be discussed with the students under an organized moderation (the de-codification), connecting the circumstances observed during the game with the students' everyday life. The text is divided into three main parts:

1- Background

2- Objectives of the exercise

3- Academic Carousel – The game

¹ Migra*BPOC refers to persons in Germany, that have or are ascribed migration biographies or have migrated themselves due to economic, political, social or personal reasons, and/or self-identify as Black and/or People of Colour or are labelled as such. In the following we will use Migra*BPOC to denote the heterogeneity of these persons and their lives while stressing the different yet similar experiences of discrimination.

PART 0

Background:

Paulo Freire was an Educator and Philosopher born in Recife/Brazil, in 1921. He was a precursor of the critical pedagogy, and his most influential book is called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹. In the work, Freire discusses strategies for a critical education that aims at the emancipation of human beings. This means an education that enables a personal critical engagement on the social, historical, and political levels. Discussing practices of education, Freire identifies two different educational approaches: (a) the problem-posing education and (b) the banking education. The banking education addresses the student as a bank account, where the teacher deposits knowledge and is neither challenging nor transforming. In turn, the problem-posing education approach embraces the students' experiences in continuous dialogue with the teacher. Thus, the social life, its causes and effects are problematized within the classroom, and strategies on how to overcome situations of *oppression* – in Freire's words – are addressed. Adapted to BRIDGES, within the context of dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in HEI, the following *forms of oppression* can be identified: (a) the practices, (b) the dynamics, and (c) the systems of discrimination in HEI in Europe.

According to Freire, a problem-posing education requires educators/researchers to start the educational process by listening to the group they are working with. Such a strategy aims to broaden the educators' perspective by recognizing firstly how the students perceive their place within society, and what they observed as everyday relevant issues in their own life as a whole. Only through hearkening can educators/researchers identify topics that are pertinent to a specific group. Once the students' particular needs are identified from their perspective, it is time to plan and organize the topics which will be worked in the classroom. The elaboration of the topics consists of schematizing an activity that fits with the students' profile. Firstly the educators/researchers *codify* in the form of activity the found issues, and afterwards *de-codify* the exercise, relating it to students' everyday life. In Giessen, two workshops were promoted with *Migra*BPoC* students, in order to identify what they perceived as relevant in their academic life. Among other topics, there

¹ Freire, Paulo. 2018. *Pedagogia Do Oprimido*. 66th ed. Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

were found pieces of evidence regarding the lack of institutional engagement on fighting against the processes of discrimination at the University. Therefore, the educators/researchers planned on ways to discuss institutional racism in an activity, the board game, and a set of guidelines to connect the situations experienced in the game to the students' life in a debate at the end of the activity (see the full description of the game below).

Freire proposed this model because he believed that, in order to achieve a critical and liberating education, the students should be able to visualize their own context as a whole, i.e., to identify the set of historical events and social conventions that enable processes of oppression and not only the acts of oppression in itself. In other words, to understand how a context that allows practices of discrimination is formed, not only the daily racist, xenophobic, and sexist practices in itself.

However, to abstractly contemplate their own social and historical presence, managing to identify and reflect upon their own life as a whole, distinguishing different layers of socio-historical life tends to be burdensome, usually leading to simplifications or misapprehensions¹. Thus, offering one activity that presents and represents specific issues in an observable manner improves the opportunity to generate an exchange between codified reality (the game) and students' everyday life (the discussion after the activity). In other words, the game creates a space for the students to materially observe socio-historical elements that contributed to making them perceive their context as they do. Observing a specific part of their experiences represented, in a controlled activity, enable the students to see in the game situations similar to their own experiences (consciously or otherwise, at this point) and, afterward, discuss what was noticed during the exercise linking with their own life, leading to a better understanding of their own context. The process of codification and de-codification provokes an intermittent dialog between the pieces of reality represented in the game and the full reality of the students' life, in a back and fro movement that permit the students to recognize themselves in the codified reality (the codification), and the codified reality in the relation to themselves and the previously identified issue (in the de-codification).

Giessen has partially worked with Freire's methodology. On this basis, three tools were developed: Eurocentrism, Neoliberal Compliance and Migra*BPOC Resistance. As a result, the board game exercise aims at codifying the found issues. The target is to represent and modulate life situations

of Eurocentrism, compliance and resistance calling the students' attention and engagement. The game imitates everyday life circumstances when a mind-set perceived as typically European is generally accepted as the pattern and the norm and/or when the students face bureaucracy usually designed to keep them as outsiders (or, at least, not fully insiders). Moreover, when due to neoliberal challenges, students focus in navigate and survive the Eurocentric system, perceived as an unavoidable reality. For instance, the experience shared during the workshops in Giessen by one student, regarding a professor who is known for having expressed sexist comments during class, but has not faced consequences. The participant voiced how they understand that this is the pattern, and try to institutionally fight against it is worthless, as the professor would be ultimately examined and protected by its peers.

The game modulates these kinds of scenarios, in order to show which profiles and biographies tend to be more or less affected by specific situations, how students can deal with such matter on the individual and the group level, and which institutional changes they can imagine – and what it takes for them to make these changes become effective. During the game in itself the participants would have to debate among them how addressing (or not) a given event and/or situation would pragmatically affect their academic path. After the game the students should, under a focused moderation, to debate how the issues represented during the game can be addressed by students from the institutional and/or individual perspective, and how to overcome bureaucratic systems that protect privileges based on ethnicity, social class, gender, and others aspects. Thus, the game gives space to stimulate moments of compliance as well as acts of resistance and enables visions for change.

In summary, the exercise here proposed is both a process of codification and de-codification, with a first moment during a board game, and a following moderated discussion about the played game. The exercise aims to make visible situations of exclusion that Migra*BPoC students can face daily due to forms of discrimination based on gender, racism, class, ableism, etc. In the codified form, the participants can engage in developing a network of mutual support and can observe the colleagues' personal challenges – which sometimes can be their own (consciously or otherwise). This moment allows observing and stimulating processes interpersonal empathy. The objective of the exercise is to point out how different people face different challenges to similar obstacles, and how they could together build bridges to reach a specific goal. If they all reach the target of the game (the center of the board with their characters) is not so important, because the main purpose of the game lies in embracing mutual cooperation and attempt to reach the center together and reflect upon the process.

Objectives:

Altogether, the exercise contributes to the following reflections:

- Create awareness on structural and institutional discrimination, unequal distribution of opportunities in society and opportunities for participation;
- Underline and discuss patterns and norms that are perceived as natural and logical, but are socio-historical constructs based on white privilege and Western European colonialism;
- Identify and reflect circumstances in which Migra*BPoC students accept or comply with norms that hinder their full academic life experience to either avoid further problems or to focus on difficulties perceived as more urgent;
- Unveil personal daily and/or institutionally organized acts when Migra*BPoC students gather energy to cope with their challenges and resist;
- Sensitisation and reflection of the prevailing and one's own stereotypes about different groups;
- Sensitisation and reflection of one's own intersectional privileges and the reasons they are connected to (e.g. group membership, and being perceived to belong to a certain group) and what consequences this has for everyday life and studies;
- Promotion/impulse for discussion about the distribution of opportunities and (structural) discrimination;
- Promotion/impulse for mutual support and cooperation, in order to understand, create and strengthen interpersonal support networks and alliances.
- Promoting contact between people with similar issues, enabling the awareness that the barriers are not an individual incapacity;
- Foment of networking which might help these students to organize themselves pursuing institutional changes.

PART 1

Game Guidelines:

Participants:

- Five players in each group; the group consists of the attendees of the seminar
- One moderator (lecturer/professor).

Role of moderator:

As previous preparation, the moderator needs to have contact with the content and discussions present on the three tools which this game aims to debate, namely Neoliberal Compliance, Eurocentrism and Migra*BPoC Resistance. This is necessary, mainly, due to the moderator's role during the discussion after the game, when they need to be able to keep the discussion focused on the original objectives, attentive to possible sensible topics. Moreover, they should be alert and subtly challenge if the discussion slide towards the reproduction of common sense, i.e., without a critical approach. This last point is especially relevant because, as inspired by a Freirian methodology, the activity aims to make the students "conscious of their previous consciousness". The role of the moderator is not teaching the students any specific form of thinking, rather promote together with them an environment that allows a critical observation of their lives. In plain words, respect the individuality and the personal process of reflection is important in the position of the moderator, but it is also substantial to incite a questioning of their own perspectives.

The moderator should also compile informational material regarding important departments, projects, organizations, and networks in the local university that provide support, help, further information, or the possibility of commitment in projects. Before the game, the moderator should create a room of mutual respect in which everyone feels to have equal opportunity to share his thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Therefore the following ethic guidelines and principles should be explained. The students shall be asked if they want to add something.

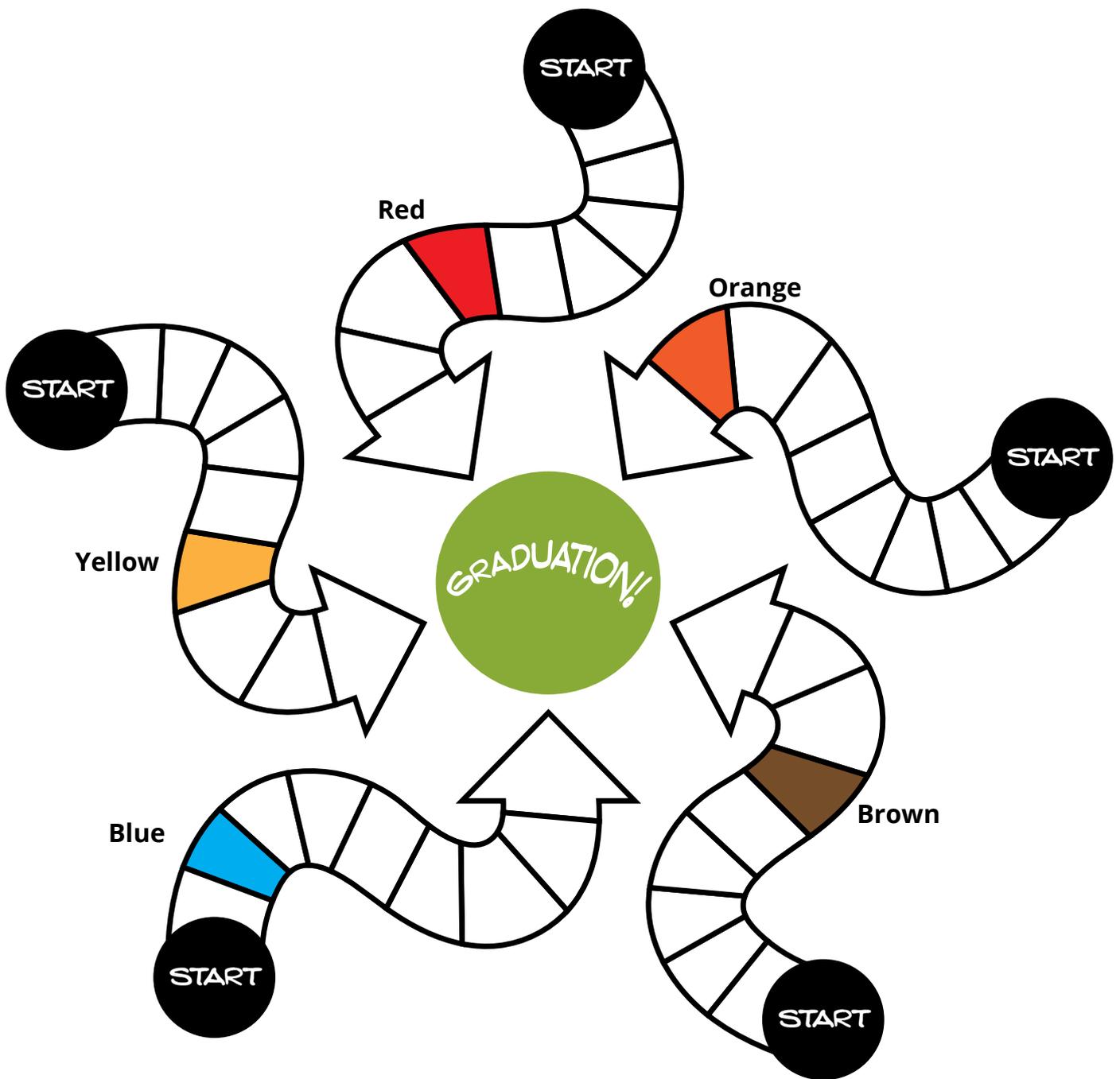
- Complete anonymity concerning the data and information gathered;
- Any player has the right to leave the game at any moment, without any consequences;

- If either the exercise, or one of the reflections or anyone make a player feel uncomfortable, the participant should let the moderator know;
- Take care with interpersonal contact and private space;
- Always be respectful. Keep in mind that some experiences that might be light and easier to be faced by you, can be a major difficulty in other's people life.
- Mind your language and take care to not bring up statements that can incite sexism, xenophobia and racism.

During the game, the main moderator's task is to control the time and be attentive to sensible situations. The moderator should also have clear the game's objectives and dynamics. Throughout the game, the discussions do not need to be fully controlled and structured. Instead, the moderator should note structures of thinking, the wording, the interpersonal dynamics used by the players both to base the following discussion, as well as to avoid unnecessary tensions. In other words, unless critical situations, the moderator should assume a passive role during the game and a guiding role during the discussion, challenging and analyzing the debate enforcing a critical and empowering perspective.

Necessary material:

- A cardboard (see below an example): in the cardboard must be drawn the path that the players will go through (each path divided in 10 pitches)
- Character cards: small pieces of paper containing 3 characteristics of the personage the players will play with. For instance, one card could be written "man; 25 years-old; only speaks German"
- Event cards: small pieces of paper containing events that can complicate the figures' progress on the cardboard
- Chess pawns (or other figures) to represent the players on the board



Path's challenges:

Blue: If you manage to reach here in 2 turns, you will be able to validate a credit from a course you have done, and drop one discipline in your course.

Brown: You got the flu. You cannot move ahead or offer help in this turn, no matter the Event Card or the help of colleagues.

Orange: If you reach here in 8 turns, you will be able to apply for a scholarship in a summer school. This summer school is important for people who want to have a master's degree in your academic topic.

Red: If you arrive here after six turns, you will have the right to priority enrolling in the disciplines of the university, organizing them better with your schedule.

Yellow: If you do not reach this place in 6 turns, you will graduate later than the average student.

Description of the exercise:

The exercise consists of 4 phases:

In the **first** phase, each player receives one Character Card. These characteristics should be chosen by the moderator in order to fulfill a plurality of personal features in accordance with the particular context of the group with whom the game it will be played (See below Giessen's Character Card). From the pre-established 3 characteristics the players have 10 minutes to make up a personage, filling with content and imagining a personal background and biography, a history, socio-economic situation and so forth (they can help each other in this task) (see "Questions on role finding").

In the **second** phase, which should last no more than 10 minutes, the players should ask each other about their personages, making them to get to know one another. For example, one can ask the colleague "Did you grow up in the city where you study?" "Do you have a car?", "Do you have children?" and so forth. During this moment, the players can add new characteristics which they believe to be relevant in the development of their personage's background. Important: In the game, all the characters know each other and study in the same class. (see "Questions on role finding").

The **third** phase is the board exercise in itself. Each player places their personage at the beginning of the path. One of the players will take one of the Event Cards and read it out loud. They should briefly discuss together to whom this event might present a problem (and why) and decide who of them can go forward (either one their own or through support of others) and who cannot. This phase should last between 20 and 30 minutes.

Every draw of an Event card is a participative moment, where the players must debate together whether they can go forward or not, and point out the reasons. On the back of each Event Card are questions to help reflect on the decisions. This is also a moment to find solutions and help each other to walk ahead; as the target of the exercise is that everybody reaches the last point. The picking of Event cards continues until all players reach the center of the board or until they run out of event cards.

Besides the moderator and participants' management, in order to bring obstacles to the flowering solidarity among the players, each path should have some events which bring personal advantages to the player who decided to go further, instead of help a colleague. These accomplishments might

mirror the neoliberal and competitive context of academic life. For example: on the third pitch of a given path is written 'if you don't reach this place in 3 rounds you will finish your bachelor/master later than the average student'.

Eventually, the exercise can end with no one reaching the center, and/or they can go further and leave someone behind in one round, if they cannot identify options for mutual support to a specific Event card.

In the **fourth** phase, after the end of the exercise, they should come together and debate on what happened during the game (see "reflection questions" as a guideline). In this phase, the students can exchange their experiences, feelings, and thoughts they had during the game and analyze and reflect on them. The empowering concept of the game is located in understanding reality as a socio-historically constructed, and as such can be changed. As every person is a constituent part of society, even under oppressive bureaucratic systems people can rebel against it and make it changes. Therefore, one source of power is to understand that life is changeable. That means to perceive that a discriminated person, who usually feels small in relation to Eurocentric norms and neoliberal challenges, can be able to resist these adversities building bridges, as the barriers are not as organic and unavoidable as they seem to be.

Character Cards:

Persona 1

Single mother; 35 years-old; Migrant biography.

Persona 2

Early 20s; European citizen; Lives in a shared house.

Persona 3

30 years-old; raised in Giessen; trains a dog.

Persona 4

19 years-old; daughter of South American migrants; lives in a nearby village with the parents.

Persona 5

Late 20s; migrant; low-level of German skills.

Event Cards:

Event

You want to apply to university. Your certificates must be submitted in one month.

Questions for reflection

- What language is my diploma in?
- Is my diploma valid in Germany?
- Does the university have a guideline for the process of diploma validation?
- How much is the cost of diploma validation and can I afford the validation?

Connection to Tool

Eurocentrism

Event

The professor invites the class to a dinner after a lecture about Arab spring. The lecturer, who will attend the meeting, does not have an Arab biography.

Questions for reflection

- Will I feel comfortable?
- Would be there reasons why I would feel uncomfortable?
- If I decide to go, how will I engage in the process of networking?
- What are my expectations of this meeting?

Connection to Tool

Neoliberal Compliance
Eurocentrism

Event

During work sessions of your research group pejorative comments (perceived as comic comments) about Migra*BPoC and LGBTQI+ have happened. The professor responsible for the research group engaged in the comments.

Questions for reflection

- How do I feel about it?
- How can I react?
- Which consequences can appear with my reaction?
- (Where) can I denounce this at the university? Who can support me in the denouncing process?

Connection to Tool

Neoliberal Compliance
Resistance

Event

There will be a demonstration in the city center against a statue of a person accused of crimes during colonial times tomorrow. You have an important test the same day and time.

Questions for reflection

- Do I feel personally touched by colonialism?
- How do I feel about other students protesting? What could (not) happen?
- How do I feel about political activism at university?
- What consequences could it have for me to be visible as a political person at university?
- How can I manage if I miss the test?
- What would happen if I get arrested?

Connection to Tool

Neoliberal Compliance
Resistance

Event

You engage in a political group which targets to decolonize the curriculum. This will take about 10 hours a week.

Questions for reflection

- How will my engagement influence my networks?
- How will my engagement influence my relationship with the professor, staff etc.?
- What are the costs and benefits of voluntary political engagement for my academic future? (e.g. for scholarships)
- What may be costs and benefits for being seen as a politically engaged academic?
- Can I afford the time?

Connection to Tool

Neoliberal Compliance
Resistance

Event

There is an application for a scholarship open, but the form must be filled in German.

Questions for reflection

- Why do you think the application can only be submitted in the language of the country?
- What would be the challenge for the application? How could I handle them?
- Is it worth the effort?
- Do I have the time to apply?
- Do I fit in in a German speaking position/scholarship?

Connection to Tool

Eurocentrism

Event

The examination performance in a seminar is a term paper. A group house work is favored. The term paper must be submitted in German.

Questions for reflection

- What is my availability to meet for extra hours?
- How do I feel about this group work? What are the costs and benefits of it?
- How do I feel about writing in German? What other options do I have?
- How do I feel about other people reading what I wrote in German?
- There was a chance to discuss with the professor about different options?

Connection to Tool

Neoliberal Compliance
Eurocentrism

Event

Your supervisor tells you about an internship during the semester break that is linked with your research topic. The internship is unpaid.

Questions for reflection

- What would be the benefits of the internship?
- How can I financially sustain myself during this period?
- Is there anyone who depends on me financially?

Connection to Tool

Neoliberal Compliance
Eurocentrism

Event

Your class is offered to attend a field research trip to Morocco for two weeks.

Questions for reflection

- Can I leave my house unattended for two weeks?
- Can I pay for the travel?
- Is it possible for me to take vacation from my work?
- How would I benefit from this trip?
- What happens if I don't go?

Connection to Tool

Eurocentrism

Event

A large company offers an assessment center in your department for a paid internship during your studies. In addition to professional and academic knowledge and skills, good capacities in other languages than the country's official language are an asset, and your general education about the country's history will be tested.

Questions for reflection

- Do I know the country's history?
- Am I familiar with the process of an Assessment Center?
- Do I have time to prepare myself for the test?
- Am I comfortable to write a test and make an interview in German?

Connection to Tool

Neoliberal Compliance
Eurocentrism

Questions to inspire/guide the role finding

- How did you grow up?
- Did you have any brothers or sisters?
- Did your parents live with you?
- What did your parents do for a living?
- Did you live in the city or in the countryside? In an apartment or a house?
- Did you have a room of your own?
- Where and how do you live now?
- Who do you live with?
- Do you have children? Or other people you take care of?

- What are your hobbies? How do you spend your spare time?
- How does a typical weekday look like? How does a typical weekend look like?
- Do you spend much time with your friends?
- Where do you meet new people/friends? What do you do together with your friends?
- How do you organize your holidays?
- What are you studying? Have you ever studied/trained before?
- How much time does it take to go to university? Do you need transportation (e.g. bus/bike/walk)
- Do you work and study at the same time? If so, where and how many hours a week? Do you enjoy your part-time job?
- Do you have any difficulties in life? E.g. language, dis/abilities, etc.
- How much spare time have you got? What do you do during the rest of the day when you do not have "free time"?
- How do you finance your studies/How do you finance yourself?
- How do you imagine your future?

Reflection Questions (to help the moderator in the de-codification)

- Was it easy to walk all together?
- Which were the main problems for each of you in reaching the centre?
- What could be different in the exercise's universe to help everybody go further together?
- What was beyond personal will, but could have been changed by the University (or City Hall, or National policies, and so forth) to improve the chances of a conjoint progression of the personages? How?

Reflection concerning your role (you are still in your role)

- How do you feel in your role? How have you been?
- Which event impressed you the most?
- How did you get to the pitch you are now?

Reflection concerning your role (after your role)

- How did it feel like to be in the role that you played?

- How did you imagine your character?
- From where did you take the inspiration to develop your character?
- Which information helped you to form the role? (news, jokes, social media, books...)
- How much does your character mirror an actual person's life?
- Did the characteristics you have chosen challenged or reinforced stereotypes?
- How did stereotypes reflect the interpersonal relationships in your group?

Reflection of Society

- Is it possible for everyone to enforce the same level of privilege at all times?
- Are there situations people can contribute to institutional change? How? Are there situations they cannot influence?
- What would have to change so that everyone has the same chances? How could this be realized?
- What kind of departments, organizations and projects exist in your university that could support people who face any kind of discrimination?
- What needs to change/to be established in your university to provide an open, non-discriminatory atmosphere in university (personal/structural/institutional level)?
- What can you do?

Reflection of your own situation

- If you played as yourself, what would be different?
- Are there aspects in which you were in an advantage? Are there aspects in which you are privileged? Are there aspects in which you believe you are in a disadvantage or in which you have to face discrimination?
- When was the last time you recognized that you are more/less privileged than others in a certain situation?



This document is part of the BRIDGES Toolkit, a set of tools and strategies for addressing and dismantling structures of exclusion in Higher Education curricula. The Toolkit has been developed in the context of the Erasmus+ project **BRIDGES: Building Inclusive Societies: Diversifying Knowledge and Tackling Discrimination through Civil Society Participation in Universities**, whose working team consists of the following entities:

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