

Safe spAcEs For LEarning+ SAFE

SAFE SPACES FOR LEARNING



The SAFE Learning Guide

How to create and maintain a safe
space for adult learning

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EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS



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The SAFE Learning Guide:

How to create and Maintain Safe spaces for Learning

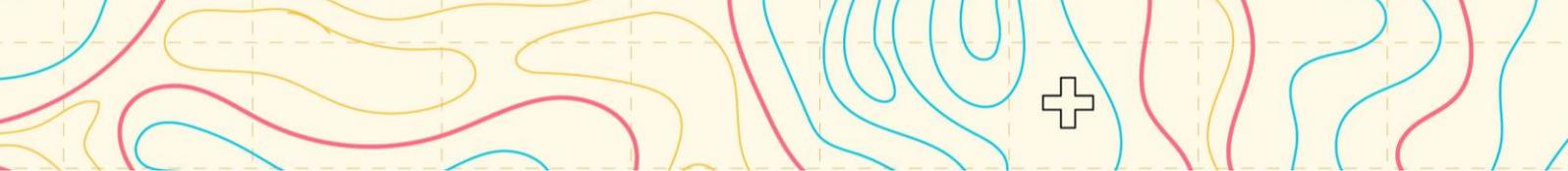
IO1.A SAFE Spaces for Learning Guide: How to create and maintain a safe space for adult learning

Publication Coordinated by: ICAE- International Council for Adult Education

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Introduction

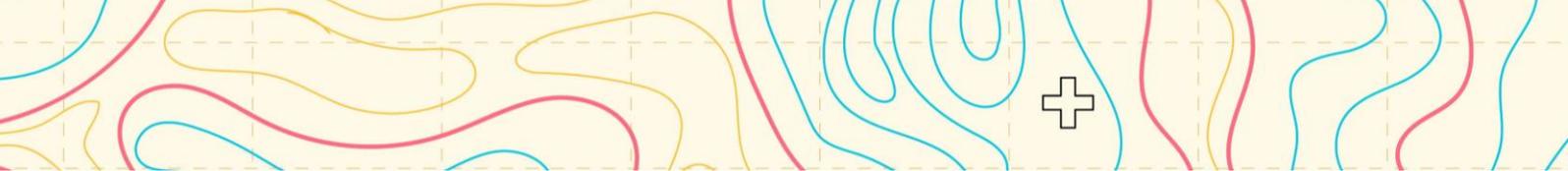
The goal of this guide is to support adult educators, trainers, organisers and other adult education providers in how to create and maintain safe spaces for learning. The concept of safe space is broad and complex and can relate to different aspects of educational practice, whether it is connected to the physical aspect of the space, online setting, or the role of the trainers, organisers and/or learners in creating the safe learning atmosphere. Within this complex framework, the project has come to an understanding of how the ideas around safe spaces for learning should be framed not through static notions of “safe” and “unsafe” but rather through relational work between all the agents in the learning process, as well as through constant work of cultivating them.

Project consortium within its activities with diverse groups of learners collected examples of how the safe learning environment promotes education for difference and welcomes inclusive spaces for different backgrounds (sexual orientation, cultural or religious).

The topic of safe space is connected to all learning environments, including:

- ✔ Formal educational spaces (schools, universities...)
- ✔ Informal (public spaces, open communities...)
- ✔ Non-formal (nonformal organisations, associations, and community intervention projects...)

Considering all these environments, the consortium has collected the [Visual Library](#) of Safe Spaces with examples of good practices from all partner countries. [The Visual Library](#) introduces the examples of work within different organisations, community groups, nonformal movements and work with diverse groups of disadvantaged adult learners (refugee groups, learners



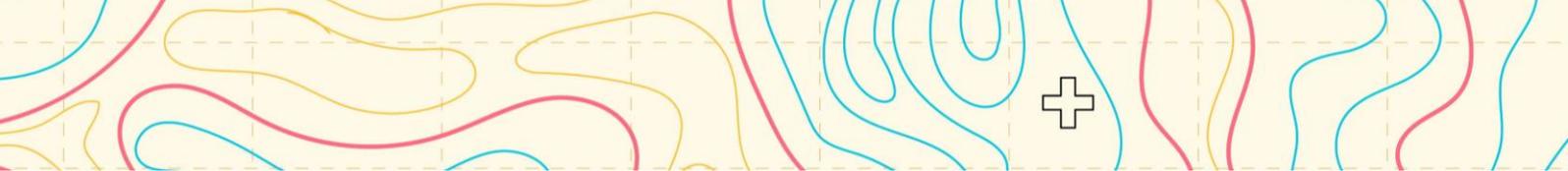
discriminated based on gender identities, groups of marginalized women, LGBTIQ+ groups).

[The Visual Library](#), which is available both online and as a publication, highlights the main elements of a successful paradigm of a safe learning space. The good practices cover both safe physical spaces as well as safe online spaces.

In the research phase, the consortium has organised extensive focus groups in countries where the project has taken place, with individuals from various backgrounds, the broad adult education community including adult educators, trainers and adult education providers working in formal, non-formal and informal education. The focus groups have also included the adult learners and their perspectives on how the safe learning spaces should be created, maintained and how they are experienced by the individual and the group. [The report on focus groups](#) provides an analysis of the concept of safe space and of the groups' conclusions and inputs. This guide will use the recommendations from the report as well as the visual library examples, the insights for educators and organisers on how to create and maintain safe spaces for learning.

[The Report on Focus Groups](#) has a general structure for the data analysis that is based on five questions: *the Why, the What, the Who, the Where* and the *How*, referring to the concept of safe learning spaces.

The Why refers to "Why do we need safe spaces?", both as educators and as learners, i.e. reasons from the daily life of learners and also the difficulties faced by educators as they have to hand over power and change their traditional roles. *The What and the Where* consist of what constitutes a safe space; whether it is a real space, a virtual space or a special kind of relationship between the group and the educator. *The Who* addresses the question of "Who needs a safe space", "Who decides what a safe space is



and “for whom’”, and “Who has the right to determine the safety of a certain space.” *The Where* tackles the location of safe spaces. Here we are talking about real spaces, and their location, for example in the statement “in the neighbourhood” – so that they are easy to reach. Finally, *the How* refers to the pedagogical work within safe spaces. It brings up the question: how can and should we - as educators - act within these safe spaces. These questions show the multiple dimensions of the concept of safe spaces in education, and the complex relations between all these elements when proposing insights and suggestions on how to create and maintain these learning environments.

During the research phase of the project, the consortium has identified different elements that a safe learning space have such as:

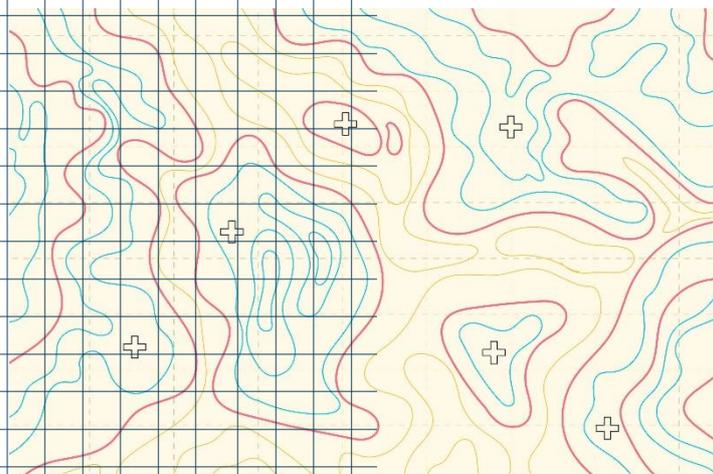
- ✔ A suitable physical equipment (for live and online venues) designed according to specific learning group and constantly adapted (flexibility)
- ✔ A learning atmosphere that supports collaborative culture, trust and inclusion
- ✔ Educators and trainers with reflective skills, able to activate processes of analysis and self-reflection on personal skills, ideas and beliefs; having strong listening skills is one of the crucial elements; teacher/trainer – learner relationship using different forms of communication such as encouraging, prompting, supporting
- ✔ Methods to enable as well as to promote the expression of opinions, ideas, dialogue, and collaborative work.

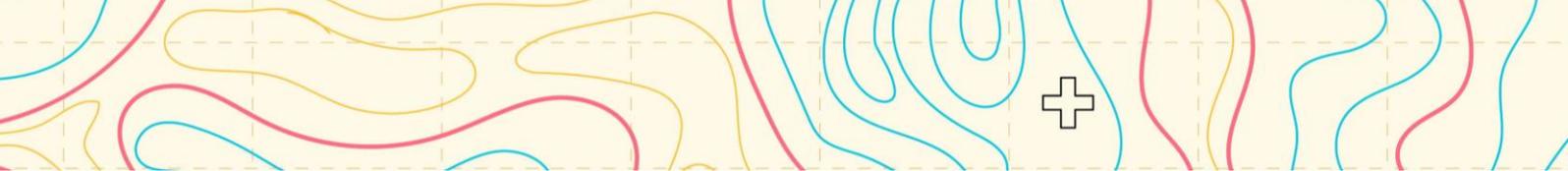
These elements were the basis of how to structure the guide and approach the topic of safe learning spaces, as well as how to specific insights, learners' groups and diverse settings for learning.



The project consortium, in the stage of both creating the project idea as well as during the first stages of the project development prioritised the establishment of a common and as holistic as possible understanding of the concept of safe spaces from a social and an adult education lens. In order to reach an agreement on a representing conceptualisation of a safe learning space, the partners carried out several brainstorming sessions that were being fed by desk research and the findings of the carried out focus groups that are represented in the “The Why, the What the Who and the How: Report on focus groups” publication of our project, and resulted in the following statement that will be used as a base for writing specific suggestions and insights for educators and organisers in adult education for building a safe learning environment.

A safe learning space is a space which, either technically or emotionally, is meant to provide equal opportunities, representation and communication outlets for marginalised groups or persons in an environment of respect and understanding that eliminate oppressive behaviours, recognise the struggle and cultivates dialogue.





The role of institutions in creating safe spaces for learning

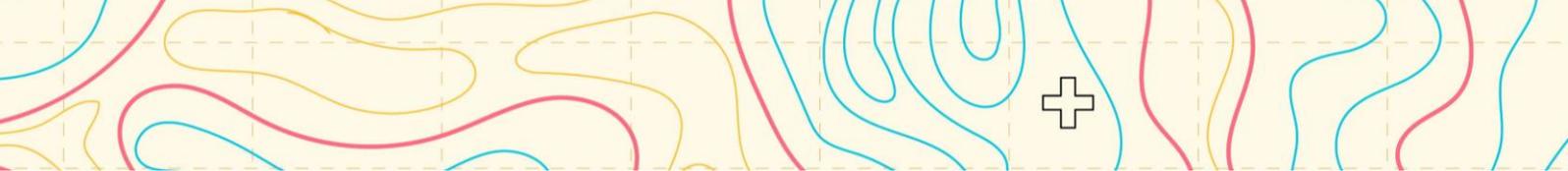
Different institutions involved in adult education, either formal or non-formal are involved in the topic of safe spaces for learning through their everyday activities. The concept of safety has been differently managed and maintained within these institutions for adult learning. Various regulations and procedures for learning within these institutions have an impact on how the safe space would be approached and created, and how the group of learners would be able to create a safe and group dynamic, as well as express their ideas and opinions.

Within workplace learning, the most important aspect is trust in the learning process between the trainer and learners, as the input during the training process will not be used as an evaluation of workplace performance. In this example, the training team within the formal institution or company has a huge role in providing a safe space for learners, as providing freedom of expression and confidentiality is one of the fundamental principles of safety within the learning group.

Other organizations working in the field of adult education have mainly concerns for preparing the ground for a safe learning space to happen. Some of these aspects involve preparing the physical aspect of the space that is inclusive towards all participants, which is a starting point for open collaborative work with the individuals and group. Moreover, setting clear goals and outcomes, shared in advance with participants, prevents potential misunderstandings from happening later during the learning process, and sets a clear basis for a more fluid and productive group learning dynamic.

Additionally, organisations have to be flexible and open in facing the difficulties happening during the learning process and be able to address



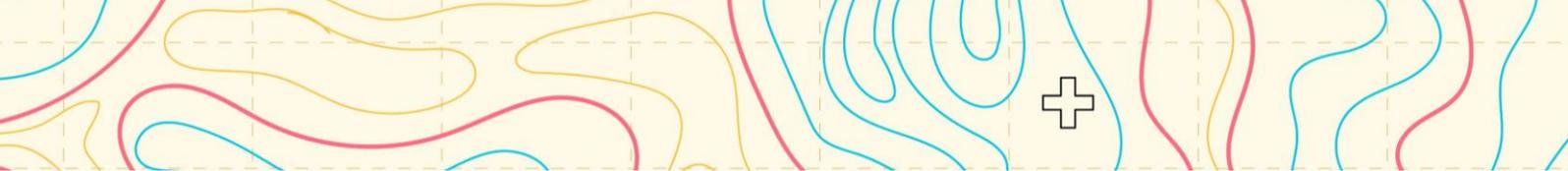


them. This aspect presents the level of understanding of the organisation of how the safe space should be approached as a collective process, in a constant process of negotiation.

Development of the productive learning process relates to the creation of a safe learning atmosphere, and organisations have a role in creating the initial conditions for the collaborative work to happen than enable participants and the learning group to express themselves freely. The creation of safe spaces can depend on the outside environment as it has an impact on the overall organisation, learning outcomes and power structures that hold the learning context.

In other words, it is important to be transparent with the group in all aspects of the organisational work and the role the organisers are having in the process. Additionally, organisations should be ready and open in allowing different content to be part of the process and not just one that is declared as only relevant and appropriate, within the political and cultural context. This way, organisations in the field of adult education are openly participating in the democratic mechanism together with the learning groups. Thus, they are a valuable source in creating positive changes in broader society.

Responsibility for providing the safe space is divided among all the agents that are part of the learning context: organisers, trainers and participants. Within the learning process responsibility is shared between the educator/trainer and participants, from the trainer's perspective in setting up the initial scene for the safe learning space, to the group choosing the right communication skills, and methods for different phases of the group's development and learning. Part of the responsibility goes to the overall society in relation to the educational system (laws and regulations, policy frameworks in both formal and nonformal education), as it sets out the values and attitudes towards education and learning in general.



Structure of the guide

The guide is structured by the elements of the safe learning space listed above, with specific links and quotes both from [The Report on focus groups](#) and [The Visual Library](#). The guidelines are intended to serve as insights on how to approach creating safe learning spaces for diverse groups of learners, including different settings (public spaces, virtual spaces, formal and non-formal environments). Additionally, in the recommendations, the project consortium has identified certain groups of learners, with additional insights on how the learning environment can be adapted and improved for work with these populations.

The guide includes recommendations for trainers and educators, who can adapt and improve their skills and competences in building a safe learning environment, as well as methodologies in work with diverse groups of learners. Additionally, the guide has used good practice examples and quotes from the learners and participants of the focus groups to prompt readers to practical examples and suggestions.

The concept of safe space in this guide is inclusive for physical and online spaces, with specific exemptions on insights due to the different settings of these environments. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, lots of adult education providers and educators were using the online space as the only learning place, and the recommendations and suggestions on how to create a safe online learning environment were extremely useful. [The Visual Library](#) has provided many interesting examples of how to operate in a virtual safe learning environment.



Learning setting as an element of the safe space

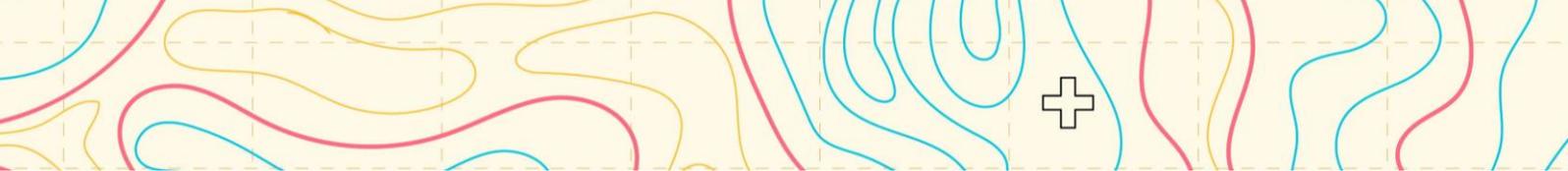
Physical space

Physical space is very an important aspect in the learning environment, as one of the initial elements participants encounter in the learning process. Organising an inclusive and personalised physical space contributes to building a safe, comfortable learning space.

The physical arrangement of the workbenches, designed and created to represent the equality of all members in the groups, e.g. the "non-classroom classroom" as a multifunctional place of study, meeting, operation, exchange and construction of knowledge is an important aspect in creating the safe space for learning. This physical aspect has been particularly important as it provides agency to the learners in being equal participants in creating the learning space and outlines the identification of the participants with the learning group. Additionally, it establishes the multidimensional aspects of learning as a space for exchange between individuals and groups, moving, exploring and understanding knowledge learning as something dynamic and fluid, through different meaning-making processes.

As one of the participants in the focus group mentioned "wherever the place is, it is a place "(...) where I feel comfortable"; (learner) and "to feel safe, I must know that all the physical security rules are being respected" (learner). Generally, we can say that the atmosphere of a safe space seems to be very important both for learners and educators" ([A Report on Focus Groups](#), p.23).

When expanding the understanding of the learning space from a physical aspect to others, such as the context of learning atmosphere and environment, the topic of safety is entangled with ideas of comfort and contentment. If the safe learning space is understood as a comfort zone, it prevents learners from developing the competencies for a productive



dialogue and critical review of ideas and approaches. The difference between perceiving the space as safe and a feeling of comfort has been described by one adult educator/trainer as:

“Safety is quite different than comfort, it is important to differentiate the truth, especially when working with the adult groups that we are working with. How can we suppose that the person is free to share experiences if we do not perceive those moments of discomfort may be caused? The key to the adult educator is to know how to tackle discomfort and use it as a learning premise does not eliminate it” ([A Report on Focus Groups](#), p.16).

Safety should be guaranteed by the atmosphere, group dynamics, physical space, and methods through possibilities to openly discuss and express opinions, at the same time allowing positive changes in learners through tackling important topics and critical reviews of certain content. Safe and in advance prepared physical space can allow a positive atmosphere to prompt the learning process.

Time

Dedicating additional time for learners to get to know each other and create a comfortable group dynamic is very important in the context of safe learning atmosphere. Additionally, taking into consideration different cultural backgrounds and languages in relation to time is very valuable as it is closely linked with how different individuals and groups learn and motivate themselves.

Following the learning space of the group and individual learners helps in providing learners with a sense of ownership of the learning process and allocating time for additional support and feedback builds on the collaborative learning dynamic.



How the safe learning space should feel for participants

Safe learning space enables a multi-directional change in learners that can lead them to improve their skills and knowledge, make them curious about new things and gain confidence (in themselves) to increase levels of awareness and action.

Providing additional time and space in the learning process for participants to share their knowledge, skills and experiences enable the feeling of agency and presence in the process, and co-creation of a safe learning environment.

As one participant asked, “How can we truly be safe if we are afraid to say who we are?” ([A Report on Focus Groups](#), p.13)

Formal education setting

Using the open curriculum approach (the programme can be adapted and co-created with participants) in formal education provides more closeness with participants' local realities, and more space for participants to include their visions and interests in the learning process. This approach includes participants in creating their own version of safe learning space within a formal setting.

This is especially valuable in working with specific vulnerable groups (e.g. the Roma communities) in formal education processes, that the curriculum is adaptable and open for a change. This can be achieved also through local coordinators working as mediators between the education providers and learners as they understand the local context.



An example of how the specific formal educational training with the Roma community created a safe space for participants and the local community can be found here under the programme [Functional Basic Education for Adult Roma](#) in our Visual Library.

Public spaces

Working with an open community group in public spaces opens new ways of including the historical and social aspects of the specific learning environment.

Encouraging the non-hierarchical leadership roles and aspects of the learning group together with the group's mutual agreement on a learning space and shared goals provides a good starting point for the creation of a safe learning space.

When working in a public space, a socio-economic context where the learning environment takes place is very important. It informs, designs and frames the learning space as it represents the diverse backgrounds of the learners. A safe aspect of the learning space can be achieved by acknowledging these aspects.

Using sport and recreation as a way to explore the public spaces (streets, squares, different neighbours) can be an effective way to approach building a safe space, as a shared community experience. E.g., running to promote inclusiveness, multiculturalism, participation, and equality through exploring the public spaces as a social and physical activity. These activities can be expanded to socializing, and events for raising important issues in the local communities (e.g. environmental, humanitarian).



A very good example of such a practice is [Belgrade Urban Running Club \(BurtBG\)](#) which through sport and recreation creates community activities and safe spaces for the expression of solidarity and collective engagement.

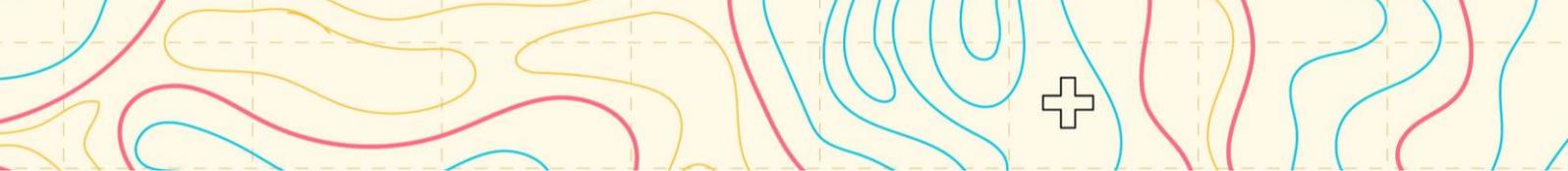
Using sport and recreation is a valuable mechanism in exploring the physical aspects of the public space (such as local spots, topography) and using it through collective recreational activity proposes looking at the safe space as an explorative learning process.

Public spaces as shared collective learning spots can be inspirational places to start an intergenerational exchange. Examples of fantastic non-formal community groups of elderly women creating a shared co-living community space can be found in the Visual Library, under the name of [Foundation/Intergenerational Volunteer Center](#).

When trying to integrate vulnerable groups in the creation of the safe public spaces, it is necessary to keep in mind:

- ✔ Building new learning public spaces should reflect the specificity of their context (e.g. refugees, people from different cultural backgrounds than most of the local residents)
- ✔ Physical aspects of the space where the educational activities are held should be open and considered safe for participants to come by, spend some time, feel comfortable and welcomed.

These safe educational spaces are a work in progress and should reflect the diverse social backgrounds of the participants, so the learning activities, and curriculum should be flexible, and learner centred. The safe aspect of the learning space should include the openness and flexibility of different public programs; aim to advocate for different group members including the rights of the vulnerable and minority participants. The educational programs should include the topics of participation in the local communities and ways of including different voices and cultural backgrounds in the group.



Online, digital spaces

Digital spaces such as social media platforms and virtual rooms for communication have been an important element in battling inequalities through non-mainstream media. The non-physical aspect of the virtual space for some participants provides a less stressful environment to express themselves but also shows other challenges to the learning process (methodical challenges, less interactive, non-verbal aspect is practically impossible, etc).

On the other hand, when organising education programs around basic IT skills for non-experienced participants, a virtual learning environment can be a source for methods such as *learning by doing*. Using the *getting to know approach* to learning skills to practice together while simultaneously online providing a sense of togetherness, and possibilities to create group cohesion.

Digital learning tools such as virtual realities and learning platforms can provide various experiences in exploring and enhancing the capacities of individuals in being part of diverse groups across the world. Exploring the public spaces in virtual reality provides participants with a chance for an everyday easy to access experience out of their comfort zone. An example of how the initiative “[City Walks](#)” has been using virtual realities in the midst of pandemics to provide people a chance to “travel” digitally can be found in the [Visual Library](#).

Facilitating online spaces for youth with various platforms for learning, casual and chatting, and playful activities engages this specific population towards more suitable youth participation. This participation provides the explorative potential of learning through the language they use in everyday situations, openness to share personal experiences, and feeling more engaged in educational activities. By facilitating the online presence, trainers could approach youth by offering digital presence as a space where learning and co-creation of a safe environment are happening simultaneously.

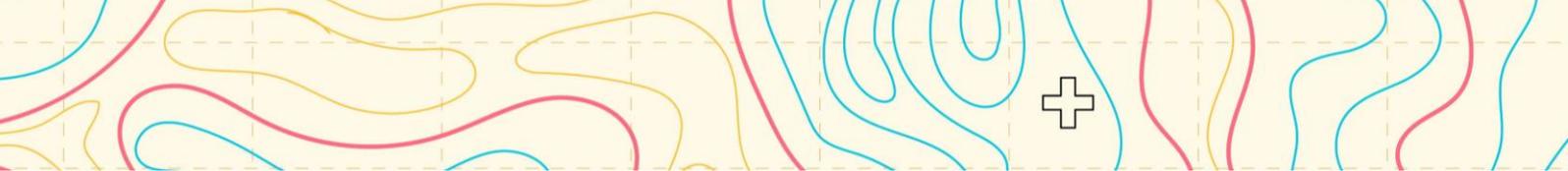


Open access to online learning spaces could be challenging when trying to create a safe zone. The design of the online space dictates certain kinds of visual and audio exposure, and presence within the framework of the virtual space.

The topic of safety in the digital presence could be transformed into a learning process, through the reflection on personal experiences, digital identities and online communication tools. Safe spaces for learning and communication on the internet should be facilitated in a way that reflects and critically approaches hidden humorous insults, belittling, condescension and verbal violence towards everyone, and especially marginalized groups.

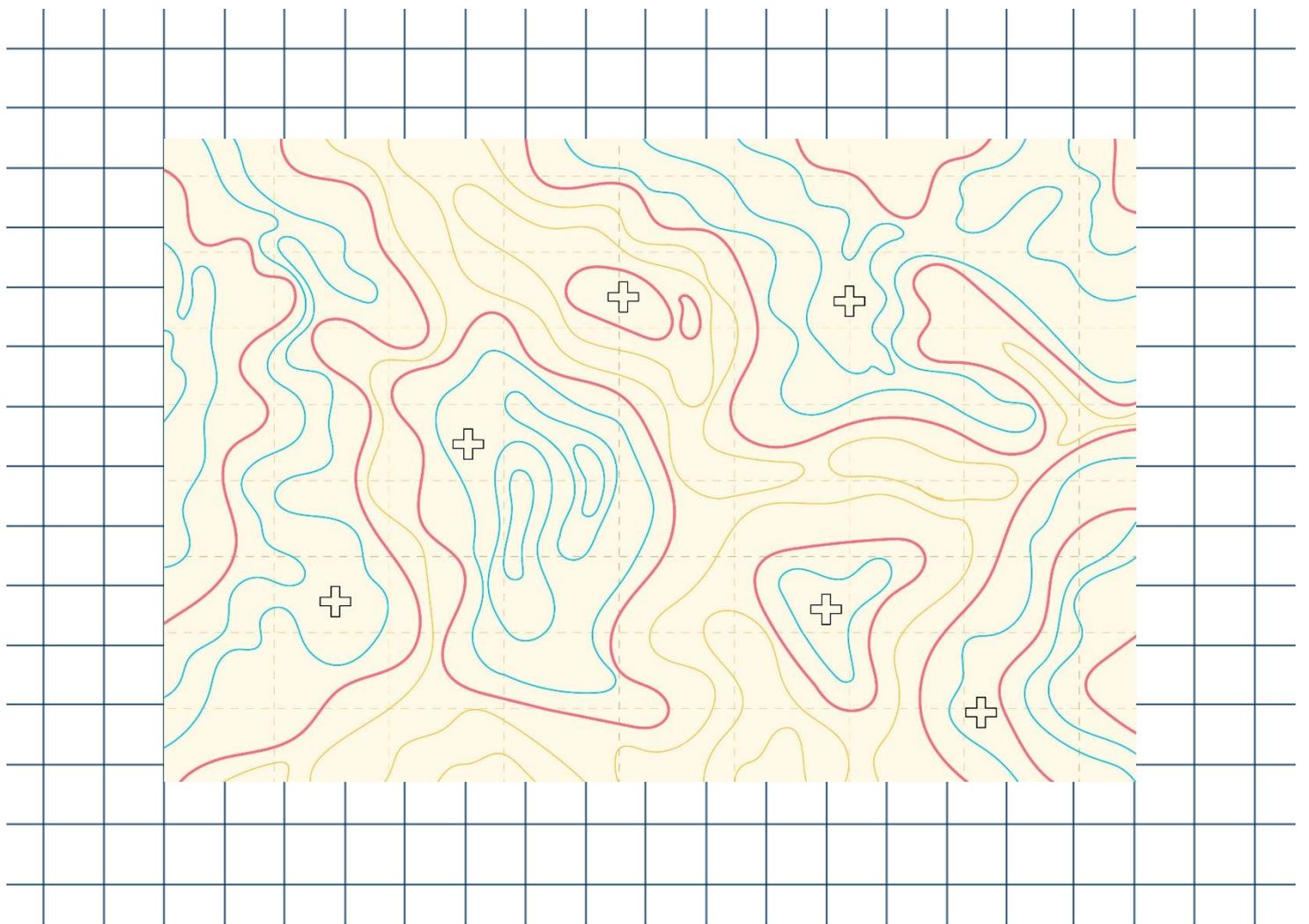
All digital platforms for conferencing collect participants data, which questions the learning process regarding the topic of safety in the digital setting. Sometimes, choosing the online platform where learning will happen, together with ensuring the privacy guidelines are shared in advance can provide a certain safety for the participants (what they can expect and how they can prepare in advance). The organisation or adult education provider is also responsible for addressing the issues of digital learning safety, as the participants should be notified in advance of any recordings or usage of their personal data.

Introducing diverse online tools and methodologies for activating the screen learning space (using the visual boards, comment section, collective reading and writing exercises) can be beneficial in overcoming the passive participation.



As stated in the [Report on Focus Groups](#) "it is important in relation to online safe spaces to be open to participants' needs and limitations and adapt to different learning situations" (p.24).

An example of how to engage youth learners in the digital environment using the various collaborative platforms can be found in the [Visual Library](#), in a programme [JUMP Jugendzentrum Marco Polo - ONLINE](#).





Methodologies in the context of safe learning spaces and trainers' skills and approaches

Trainers and educators who work directly with learners in the field of adult education have an important initial role in establishing a safe learning environment. The project consortium has identified some insights, suggestions on methodologies and approaches practitioners can use in their work. These insights are intended to serve as guidelines for practitioners when integrating the topic of the safe learning environment in their work, as a cross-cutting aspect in adult learning practices. Some insights are more focused on trainers' skills and approaches when using already established methods, and some are just suggestions on how to include more participatory methods in everyday educational practices.

Suggestions

- ✔ Encouraging peer communication between learners during the learning process
- ✔ Supporting learners in different learning environments to establish connections and built a shared understanding of what the safe space is
- ✔ Providing support for learners (psychological, technical) and maintaining that support during the whole learning process
- ✔ Encouraging learners to check on each other and how they are coping with the changes in their learning environment
- ✔ Supporting the creation of safe learning space through maintaining the balance between the collective action and individual representation in the learning process



- ✔ **Allowing participants to be part of co-designing the learning program together with the other collective activities**
- ✔ **Creating a program adaptable to the needs of students, and the learning group; adapting to the local needs of these specific groups, their family and work requirements.**
- ✔ **Principle of 4 walls – principle of confidentiality among participants during the whole learning process**
- ✔ **Encouraging the welcoming, and inclusive space where self-expression and actualisation are possible**
- ✔ **In non-formal vocational training, safe spaces could be both oriented to gaining skills and engaging students to share other practical and personal skills and experiences. Vocational training can be goal and skills-oriented, and usually exercises for group cohesion and integration can be skipped. The approach to maintain both helps in integrating diverse voices and experiences in the group and benefits in sharing collective learning responsibilities in the process.**
- ✔ **Proposing and supporting educational methods that enable the expression of opinion, interests and values and enable students to gain a variety of experiences during the learning process**
- ✔ **Collective agreement on the rules and principles of the learning process also brings an understanding of a broader topic of active citizenship and community participation**
- ✔ **Providing additional time for reflection and feedback and paying attention to physical aspects of the space where the learning is happening**

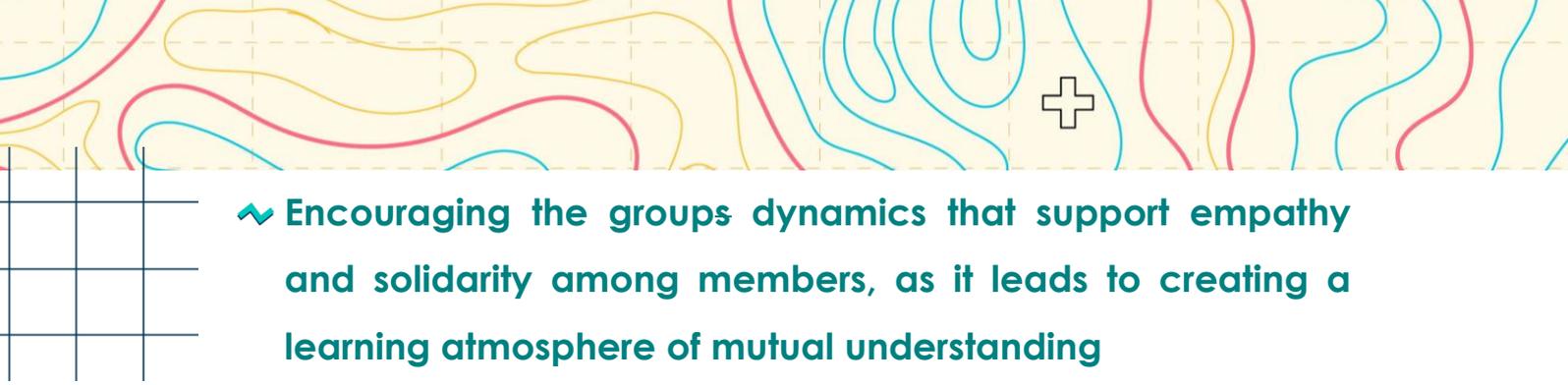


Continuous work on enhancing certain trainers' skills helps in supporting and creating safe learning spaces. Some of the skills involve: work with multicultural groups and marginalized populations, problem-solving skills, mediation, conflict-resolution skills, a "near-peer" methodological framework that helps learners to actively participate in the learning process, promotion of education for difference, i.e. a transversal approach to education that aims to provide the critical tools needed to deconstruct dominant models linked to gender identity, sexual orientation, cultural or religious background.

Nurturing the reflective sessions, and feedback on the learning process as well as the personal evaluation and self-assessment of improved/acquired competencies can help in establishing the open space for dialogue and continuous improvement.

Suggestions

- ✔ **Learning by doing, enabling a sense of agency to learners, to be active creators of the learning process**
- ✔ **Favouring active and cooperative teaching methodological strategies that facilitate operative approaches that enable the integration, complementarity and interoperability of its spaces.**
- ✔ **Emphasis on teacher/trainer – learner relationship using different forms of communication such as encouraging, prompting, supporting**
- ✔ **Emphasis on enabling learners to learn from each other, to work on diversity and collaborative principles of safe learning spaces, and if possible, become educators or multipliers in their local communities**



↘ Encouraging the groups dynamics that support empathy and solidarity among members, as it leads to creating a learning atmosphere of mutual understanding

Creation of the safe space is a continuous effort and process within different learning phases. The dynamics of that process reflect different levels of feeling safe for and with different groups and can be echoed through different methods, educational tools and exercises.

Safe space does not necessarily refer to an environment without discomfort, learning struggle or disagreement between the teacher/trainer and student or students themselves. The emphasis in the learning process should be on dialogue and mutual respect and understanding.

Identified methodologies

Project consortium within its activities has identified several methodologies that practitioners, educators and trainers in the field of adult education have been using when creating and maintaining safe spaces for learning. The overall examples presented in the guide are mostly participatory methodologies, in two ways, they engage participants to be active learners in the process, and at the same time, the open structure of the learning process enables participants to have other options, select and be directly engage when choosing the learning methods and approaches. In other words, the learning structure is collaborative and participatory for all participants, as learners have an agency in the process and this aspect provides a positive basis for a safe learning environment.

Suggested methods and approaches are some examples of how in the context of safe learning spaces the important aspect is the methodology that is used in the work, as it creates the relationship between learners and trainers and together with the learning process.



Living library as a methodology has been presented in the *Visual Library*, as a learning tool that can be useful in establishing a safe space with the aim to create deeper connections between learners, using diverse experiences of learners to mediate the learning process.

Either used for sharing the specific socio-economic experiences, or other more general ways of learning, establishing connections and ways of communicating with others, is a useful educational tool for participants to get to know each other, and propose a way to establish a collective safe learning space. Additionally, this method could be organized during workshops or during community-building activities that aim to raise awareness in preventing discrimination and deconstructing stereotypes.

Suggestion

Using the method of *living/ human library* puts an additional emphasis on the facilitator and organiser to approach the process with the sensitivity that is required in the process. The method requires the facilitation of the process that communicates the personal stories and deconstructs stereotypes, respects the boundaries and at the same strengthens the collective learning atmosphere and builds the positive group dynamic.

Suggestion

Make sure that the participants in the exercise *living/ human library* are comfortable with using that term when sharing and discussing their personal experiences. The important aspect of the exercise should include setting enough time for the readers and storytellers to get to know each other, together with adjusting the physical space to feel enough comfortable and safe for the participants.



[Digital storytelling](#) for the [Visual Library](#) as a methodology in work with vulnerable groups provides a virtual platform with a space to present different voices and personal stories, through dialogue and involvement in group storytelling. Learners often come from homogenous groups and share similar experiences.

This method provides a learning space as a transformative platform through sharing the personal stories that sometimes involve a traumatic experience that can act as a therapeutic relief for the storyteller and the group too. Additionally, the possibility of sharing the digital documentation of the process to wide audiences promotes the inclusion of marginalised groups in the wider society. The example of the project that has included the digital storytelling methodology can be found in the [Visual Library](#) under the name [Safe space as the backbone of digital storytelling](#).

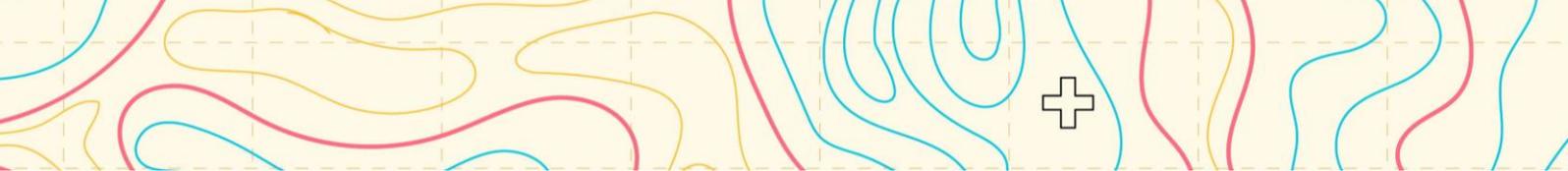
Suggestion

Trainers should be skilled to approach the process with the sensitivity that is required in the digital storytelling method, and with the support of professional staff, e.g. psychotherapists. Filming the video can often be a celebration for the group, but the final decision on publishing should be made by the group.

Art-based methodologies in adult education

Art methods and participation in material-based practices help in developing the practical skills that rely on the explorative potential and manifest hidden capabilities in the learning environment. The art-based practices are a good method in enabling the participants to express inner interests, and feelings and provide a sense of belonging and safety.

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Theatre methods such as role-play propose taking different perspectives, and experiences and understanding differences, with an emphasis on the expression of thoughts and feelings. Additionally, music practices open new ways to engage learners from marginalized groups, through a more fluid and participatory space to express themselves, understand their capacities and gain more confidence. Using the benefits of musical practice (art practice) as a means of intervention in disadvantaged social contexts, with vulnerable groups can be found in the example of the inclusive project [Som da Rua](#). This example shows various aspects of a safe learning space, from physical space, inclusive learning setting and participatory, music practices.

Collective craft practices could be used as a prompt to build safe learning spaces. The shared activities of doing something practical, and playful in a collective activity help in building a community spirit and establishing a shared secure learning environment. An example is called [Craftistas](#)



Creativity in education or opening a learning space for expressing diverse skills, and potentials, that build motivational and developmental aspects of learning, create a strong link for participants' understanding of safety. Moreover, allowing creative practices in the learning setting enables participants to be active in co-creating the learning process that suits their needs, as creative games and play relax, motivate and create a positive group dynamic.

An example of how art-based practices are linked with helping mental health patients to be more engaged in the learning activities can be found in the programme [Manicómio](#) in the [Visual Library](#).

In working with vulnerable groups, the sense of belonging and group participation using artistic practices (theatre, music, fine arts...) can be a beneficial tool in achieving the space for dialogue, and fostering the representation of differences, expressions and opportunities in the learning process.



Games in a learning setting

Gamification, used in formal and non-formal settings, both online and live can be an interesting and valuable tool in creating safe learning spaces. Gaming elements and tools can facilitate participants' expressiveness through the use of non-verbal communication channels and metaphors provided by the game. Gaming can facilitate intergroup relations; increase personal and collective competence areas while also contributing to the co-construction of safe spaces (e.g. problem solving, decision making, social and communication skills).

Taking a directly democratic and social-constructionist approach towards establishing the educator-learner and learner-learner relation, the consortium proposes that a teaching strategy based on the principles of a boardgame is a meaningful way to energise the structured lecture environment on the themes of realising power dynamics, safe and unsafe elements of coexisting, recognise struggle and raise awareness on multiple discrimination. Designed in the first instance to facilitate learners' understanding of substantive information, the boardgame that the project consortium created aims to further enable teachers to elicit reactions concerning the process which serve as teaching points about the theory and practice especially on the creation of a safe environment. The developed boardgame is also accompanied by an extent methodological manual drawing together strands of sociological and educational theory to demonstrate the pedagogical value of this boardgame approach, as well as provide the "rules" of the game.

The online version as well as the outline for printing and using the hardcopy version of the game our project consortium has come up with can be found [here](#).



Diverse Learners groups

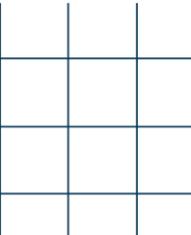
Within the examples in the [Visual Library](#), the project has reached out and identified various examples of safe learning spaces within different groups of adult learners. As all the above principles on how to approach creating safe learning spaces are intended for the general population of adults, although some examples identified suggest additional support for specific groups. Below are presented examples of projects or programmes that demonstrate specific approaches in working with a certain type of group, with various methodologies, approaches and learning settings.

Various examples in the [Visual Library](#) present the work with **marginalised groups of women, and groups discriminated based on their gender identities**, such as [Miteinander Lernen](#) other language courses, various workshops counselling and therapy for women, families and children (with migration history), and afternoon care for less privileged children from the surrounding schools.

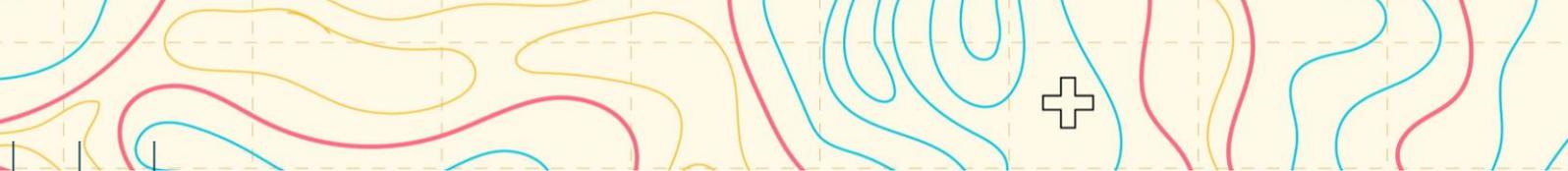
Another example by [Que\[e\]rbau Seestadt](#) offers the concept of a shared public living room and addresses queer lifestyles and alternative family and neighbourhood concepts. Using the public space for political debates, cultural events and shared neighbour meals build upon the idea of collective safe everyday learning environments.

Community development through exploration of gender identities, cultural heritage and resisting patriarchal norms, is a topic of the project [ENXOVAL: time and space of resistance](#).

Suggestions

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- ✔ **Using the multigenerational approach in creating and connecting different local communities of women helps in emphasizing diverse cultural, historical and natural**

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resources. Additionally, the learning environment should be guided by providing more equal spaces for a diverse group of women.

- ✔ When working with a vulnerable group (e.g. discrimination based on gender identities) safe space is highlighted as an outlet for emotional and physical, personal and relational acceptance and appreciation, as well as a place for gaining additional personal skills and knowledge.
- ✔ The creation of a safe space is a collective effort, participation and initiative is co-developed and serve as a way to emancipate and enhance the latent potentials of the individual.

An example of [E8 CSO organisation](#) as a youth organisation working with **diverse groups of youth**, represent the specific example focused on working with young boys about the topics of gender inequalities and healthy lifestyles.

This specific approach suggests that working with a population of youth around the topic of sexual education, and gender identities require the creation of a learning space that allows openness and acceptance. It is useful to have in advance prepared protocols to provide clear instructions on how the learning space should be maintained, in terms of communication strategies, protocols on non-violence, and prevention of discrimination and harassment.

Other examples such as [ETA BETA Workshop - "FARE TAG](#) designed for support to young people between 14 and 25 years of age in situations of hardship, using art- based methodologies and computer games to initiate participation and expression of hidden potentials. This project is especially



interesting as it enables collaborative work in design methods, approaches and games for learning between youth groups and professional trainers, psychologists, social workers and anthropologists.

[Art and Citizenship Laboratory \(LAC\)](#) works with marginalized youth groups, providing life and employability skills using various approaches and methodologies supported by the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto.

Suggestion

Trainers who work with the youth population should always provide an atmosphere that encourages self-expression, exploration of different interests and learning approaches. The group of youth and teenagers seek approval from both peers and trainers and the safe aspect of the learning space should be based around that.

Examples of organisations, initiatives and projects working with a **group of refugees** indicate the importance of supporting and encouraging refugee collective group initiatives for active citizenship and participation in the society.

Some approaches suggest facilitating networking among groups of different ethnic origins and creating an effective structure to enable their networking capacity, and their inclusive attitudes promoting tolerance, mutual understanding and solidarity.

Safe spaces in this context fill the gap between life on the margins and inclusion in society. Creating a bridge of communication with the host society provides a space for this population to feel included.

Suggestions

- ✔ **Empowering refugees and especially women to find means to support themselves; training in vocational and life skills are recommended.**
- ✔ **The learning process should include more conflict-sensitive topics and methods, which ensures that no harm is done by learning and that education does not reinforce inequalities or fuel further divisions**

Working with **LGBTQIA+ refugee groups** requires work on inclusion, acceptance and self-actualization with a strong focus on the learning process as a path to achieving autonomy and independence. Safe space for adult learning in this case is seen as a necessity for empowerment, self-actualisation and active participation in society.

The example of [Athens Housing Collective for LGBTQIA+ individuals by Safe Place International](#) offers an integrative approach to including refugee LGBTQIA+ groups in the society, offering language courses, law support, job training, and psychosocial support workshops.



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