Re-Cult Policy Recommendations

The following document contains the main recommendations identified during the different phases of the Re-Cult project. The recommendations have been co-designed by the partners based on the feedback they received after the local and transnational events held during the project (the local blended workshops, the transnational LTTAs, the learning path testing workshops, and the multiplier events) as well as on their collective experiences and reflections during the project cycle.

Recommendations for educators and social workers

In the following, recommendations for the main target group of the project, i.e. educators, teachers, and facilitators using or intending to use visual creation for enhancing the inclusion of people with migrants and refugee backgrounds are collected. These recommendations have been also included in the Re-Cult Curriculum Handbook.

1.1. Understand your group and create a supportive environment

Understanding the people forming the target group of the exercises presented above is of high importance, especially as they usually come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and have experienced trauma and displacement. Empathy and understanding are critical because they help build trust, which is the foundation for any effective engagement. When people feel safe and understood, they are more likely to open up and engage deeply in activities, creating a more conducive environment for learning and healing.

It's also important to be aware of the languages and cultural backgrounds of the participants in the exercises. This intercultural understanding helps facilitators avoid misunderstandings and ensures that the activities are tailored to the participants. Choosing activities with cultural sensitivity makes them more engaging and meaningful to the participants: beyond supporting their active participation, it also shows them that the facilitators respect and value their cultural perspectives. This fosters an inclusive atmosphere.

For people who went through trauma, the activities can be important for their recovery and personal growth. By selecting methods that reflect participants' real-life experiences, one can provide therapeutic benefits that aid in healing, reduce stress, and promote a sense of normalcy and community among participants. This approach ensures that interventions are finely attuned to meet the specific emotional and cultural needs of the group, ultimately supporting a more holistic recovery and learning process.

Some useful tips are as follows:

- **Always begin the exercises or training with an introduction**. Take the time to get to know your participants and find out about their cultural backgrounds, languages, hobbies, and occupations. Introduce yourself and the team by taking part in the same activities you offer the group.

- **Spend time observing participant interactions and behaviors during initial activities.** This non-intrusive approach can provide clues about their comfort levels, social dynamics, and personal interests.
- **Foster an atmosphere of respect and inclusion.** Make sure that everyone feels valued and understood. Provide clear instructions in several languages if necessary and support throughout the activities, allowing space for individual expression and group interaction.
- **Learn about the participants and present yourself by using group art projects.** Encourage the group to create artworks that represent people's cultural heritage or personal stories. This method helps reveal their identities and values in a creative and open-ended way (for examples see the unit descriptions above, p.20).
- **Organize small group discussions around a piece of art, music, or a common theme** if you have a group who share a common language or have a translator. This setting is a great way to share personal experiences and cultural backgrounds in a more natural and less formal environment.
- **Engage with local migrant NGOs** and invite people who can not only translate but also communicate the cultural topics relevant to participants.
- **Offer workshops where participants can express themselves through different media such as painting, drawing, sculpture, or Lego models.** Observing what people choose to do in these workshops provides insights into their personal preferences and emotional states.

1.2. Design activities inclusively

The principle of Inclusive Design helps in planning activities by ensuring that everyone takes part and gets the most out of the experience, regardless of their differences. Inclusive design involves considering different abilities and limitations, making venues accessible to everyone, using inclusive technological solutions, and taking into account different cultural backgrounds, languages, and learning styles. This approach complies with ethical and legal standards, enhances engagement by making content relevant and accessible to everyone, promotes active involvement, and reinforces the value of each participant's perspective.

Moreover, inclusive design fosters equality and fairness within a group by providing every participant with an equal opportunity to succeed. It helps break down social barriers and stereotypes, facilitating a cohesive community where differences are celebrated and leveraged. It makes everyone feel more included and part of the group, allowing them to do their best and have a say in what happens, leading to richer discussions, more creative outcomes, and a deeper collective understanding. As a result of this thoughtful approach, participants may feel more included and have a good experience. The approach might need to be readapted at any time according to the needs of the group.

1.3. Engage and motivate

- Use activities that truly resonate with the participants' personal experiences, needs, and expectations. Mixing units of discovery, artistic creation, digital exploration, and blended modules into a long-term project or learning path can help keep people interested and encourage their involvement.
- Always take some time to engage in a conversation with the participants about the aims, expected learning outcomes, and results of the activities. Initiate a discussion after the activity by asking some general questions, such as, "What do you think this activity was designed for?" or "How do you think this activity can help you in your work?" Such discussions help participants adapt the activities to their work in the future and can also be used for evaluating the activities (find examples of learning paths below).

- Keep an eye on how well your activities are working by asking your participants for feedback. Then, make any changes necessary to ensure you are meeting everyone's needs.
- Use non-verbal methods such as smiley face scales, thumbs up/down, or color-coded cards (green for good, yellow for okay, red for not good) to allow participants to express their satisfaction or concerns visually.
- Invite participants to create a small artwork or symbol representing their activity experience. This could be a drawing, collage, simple clay, or Lego bricks model.
- Provide a suggestion box where participants can drop anonymous notes about their experience. These can be written in any language.
- Use multilingual digital surveys or apps that allow for simple feedback through icons, emojis, or voice recordings.
- Engage with local migrant NGOs and invite people who can translate and interpret the cultural nuances of feedback from participants.

Recommendations to policymakers

Although Re-Cult has been primarily dedicated to developing and testing teaching and learning tools and pathways for people with migrant, minority, and refugee backgrounds, during the activities, some general needs and challenges linked to the political and social environment have been identified and transformed into recommendations for policymakers.

Visual art, similar to performing arts, provides a non-verbal form of expression allowing individuals to build bridges between each other by using their personal experiences and imagination. Distinguishing itself from performing arts, visual creativity thrives in various settings: as a reflective individual pursuit or as part of a collaborative group effort within a broader community. Visual art serves as an essential tool for understanding and overcoming obstacles that isolate individuals from their physical and social surroundings, as well as assisting in the resolution of "inner barriers" associated with psychological issues, trauma, fear, and diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.

Visual Art in Education:

Visual and conceptual arts, when used to convey clear political and social messages, possess strong didactic potential, bridging the realms of art and education. The roles of visual art in education are manifold, harnessing the power of symbolism to foster critical thinking, encourage shifts in perspective, enhance empathy and understanding, and raise awareness about concealed values and unseen issues. While images have become the most widely diffused and consumed medium in communication in the 21st century, the meaning, objectives, and content of what we call visual culture remain ambiguous and multifaceted.

Learning about visual culture has not been a priority in formal education systems until recently, and surprisingly, this trend persists, albeit much more than half of the Earth's global population (approximately 64% as of May 4, 2022, according to DemandSage) has become visual content creators on social media. The majority of these content creators come from educational backgrounds where studying visual culture was insignificant or non-existent. Consequently, the impact of professional visual content creators has diminished. Moreover, in marketing, they must adapt their visual language to fast-changing trends in visual communication, often relying on ready-made effects built into popular applications. In a world flooded with billions of short-lived images produced daily, it is challenging to convey that images and other elements of our visual culture can have deeper meanings and values worth more than a glance. In this context, visual education, both on a general

level and as a form of popular education, cannot aspire to be comprehensive, covering art history from ancient times to contemporary art. However, it is possible to raise awareness of the messages conveyed through images by dedicating more time to creating, co-creating, and discussing them. Learners should be provided with invaluable skills in using digital tools and encouraged to consider content more intricately. We can explore the advantages of observing within or beyond our immediate surroundings, such as our homes, neighborhoods, and local museums, and incentivize learners to discover the familiar and unfamiliar. This approach enables them to comprehend why and how creating images is a means of self-assertion. Additionally, using materials and craft techniques can reconnect them with the benefits of manual creativity for the mind and raise environmental awareness through recycling and upcycling materials.

The main **recommendations are**:

1. Highlight the transformative impact of visual content creation in the digital age and the need to incorporate visual education into formal curricula.

2. Emphasize the importance of understanding visual culture, and digital tools, and creating and discussing visual content to develop critical thinking skills and a deeper societal awareness.

Visual expression for social participation:

The integration of people with migrant, refugee, and minority backgrounds also means their involvement in public debates and decisions, and in general, the participatory processes taking place on the local and national levels. One of the main obstacles to this involvement is the lack of capacity to communicate with the majority society due to the difficulties of these people to express more complex ideas and issues in the language of the hosting society. Art creation can also serve as a communal practice, promoting belonging, collaboration, cooperation, and the sharing of values and mutual understanding. As stated by Klausz et al (2023), "By creating art that challenges the status quo, artists become agents of empowerment, inspiring others to embrace their identities and act.".

Policy Recommendations:

1. Propose the integration of visual arts into educational curricula with a focus on the study of visual culture and the provision of resources for visual education.

2. Advocate for policies aimed at promoting social participation, encouraging the use of art creation as a means to facilitate the involvement of marginalized communities in public discourses.

In conclusion, visual art has the potential to be a powerful tool for social inclusion, education, and promoting understanding among diverse communities. By recognizing the value of visual expression in teaching curricula and social participation, we can work towards creating more inclusive and empathetic societies. Embracing visual art as a means of self-assertion and empowerment can lead to meaningful connections and a broader appreciation of diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.