

# iMotion

## DO YOU CALL THEM JUST COFFEE BREAKS?

Guidelines for framing  
Informal Moments in adult learning

WOW

COOL

OK





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- [www.kamaleonte.org](http://www.kamaleonte.org)
- [www.alp-network.org](http://www.alp-network.org)
- [www.2kroner.de](http://www.2kroner.de)

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## 0.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDELINES

The iMOtion Project started with an informal chat during the Covid-19 emergency period. We, adult education providers of this project consortium, were sharing how challenging it was for us to have shifted from onsite to online trainings in such a short time and how participants were tired of online work and were desperate to be in social contact, to talk and to share. The cognitive load of online formats, the reduced mobility, the close-eye contacts and the absence of literally any informal moment and shared recreation time during the learning experience were exhausting both for us and our learners. We started reflecting seriously about how the **breaks in trainings** were more than just moments during which we and the participants could drink a coffee or find refreshment for ourselves. This new awareness made us turn the coffee breaks into valuable **informal moments**, which we consider to be vital for networking and for creating deeper connections with other learners.

This is how we decided to investigate on their potential and importance and why we decided to consider them an **integral part of the learning processes**. Given that learning is a holistic process that involves thinking, feeling, and doing and that it cannot exist independent of the social context, we thought that informal moments could be the privileged spaces where individuals could process their insights into further learning. We thought of them as a social playground where individuals could develop and practice their social skills and their leadership potential. Indeed Informal moments allow for a more open, trustworthy and creative learning environment, this is why we thought they could suit even more the needs of marginalized groups like the LGBTQI community, the unemployed people and the migrants.





## 0.2 THE STEPS OF IMOTION PROJECT

The project unfolded in three main steps:

1. A **Research Phase** in which we explored what was already written about the topic and created a bibliography of the most interesting readings (Link).
2. A **Lab Phase** in which we met in Wiener Neustadt (AT) with experts and trainers, who are working with different marginalized target groups (e.g. unemployed people, migrants, women, LGBTQI). We reflected together upon the key aspects that are needed to create a meaningful informal moment and what could be the impact on participants. We also reflected on how the specific needs of the different marginalized groups could be taken into account, how the venue affects informal moments and on which are the differences between informal moments online and offline. Here we tested practices and generated ideas that could contribute to challenging and eliminating obstacles in mainstream trainings and thereby make them more inclusive. In the second part of the lab, we tested the guidelines in the local and national surroundings.
3. A **Production Phase** in which both the gathered knowledge and expert inputs, as well as the activated competencies from the previous knowledge-transfer activities, research and lab phase, were adapted for the target audience of European adult educators as well as the broader educational public working with learners in online environments. In order to achieve this we elaborated the present **guidelines** ("iMOTion – Framing Informal Moments in adult learning"), **6 "iMOTion Podcasts"**, that are available on Spotify (Link), and **12 "iMOTion Blog Articles"**, that are available free of charge on the partners' websites and on Epale dedicated group (Link). These products are meant to ensure that adult educators can obtain knowledge on the

topic of informal moments, can consciously initiate aspects of informal moments in both their offline and particularly online learning offers and professionally reflect on didactical aspects and benefits of informal moments within learning contexts.

## 0.3 WHO ARE THESE GUIDELINES FOR?

Our three associations have focused on the beneficial effects of *informal moments* in adult education, with particular reference to the LGBTQI community and the unemployed people and the migrants. Therefore, these guidelines have been designed in particular, but not exclusively, for **adult education providers** (trainers and facilitators) who are also working with these target groups. However, they can be an interesting starting point for all those working in adult education. The guidelines for framing *informal moments* refer to the suggestions, principles, and recommendations that trainers can take into account to create an environment for such moments to happen. These guidelines clarify what *informal moments* are, why they are essential, how they should be framed, and the adequate space and time needed for them to unfold.

The guidelines should not be considered rules. Rather they can be thought of as inputs for framing *informal moments*. They have been elaborated according to our experience as practitioners and to the results of the "lab and testing" phase of our project, during which we involved other practitioners to test some *informal moments* with their learners.

*Informal moments* are framed spaces and times that are deliberately intended for informal learning, group dynamics, recreation, and well-being. These moments respond to the different needs of the learners and are part of the learning process. *Informal moments* are influenced by factors such as the internal or external environment, the course's nature, the training session's length, the resources

These moments respond to the different needs of the learners and are part of the learning process. *Informal moments* are influenced by factors such as the internal or external environment, the course's nature, the training session's length, the resources available, and the trainer's attitude.

Therefore, below you will find inputs on how to facilitate the development, spontaneous or guided, of *informal moments* from the point of view of spaces, times, methods of development, why they are part of the learning process, the role of the trainer, of the usable resources and the target groups to which they are dedicated. We encourage you to frame and create appropriate spaces and times for *informal moments* and incorporate them into the course curriculum. Educators should also know learners' needs and interests and foster an environment that encourages participation and engagement. In conclusion, Informal Moments are an essential part of the learning process that should not be considered interruptions or simply breaks. If adequately framed with guidelines in mind, *informal moments* can lead to effective learning, group dynamics, and the general well-being of learners.

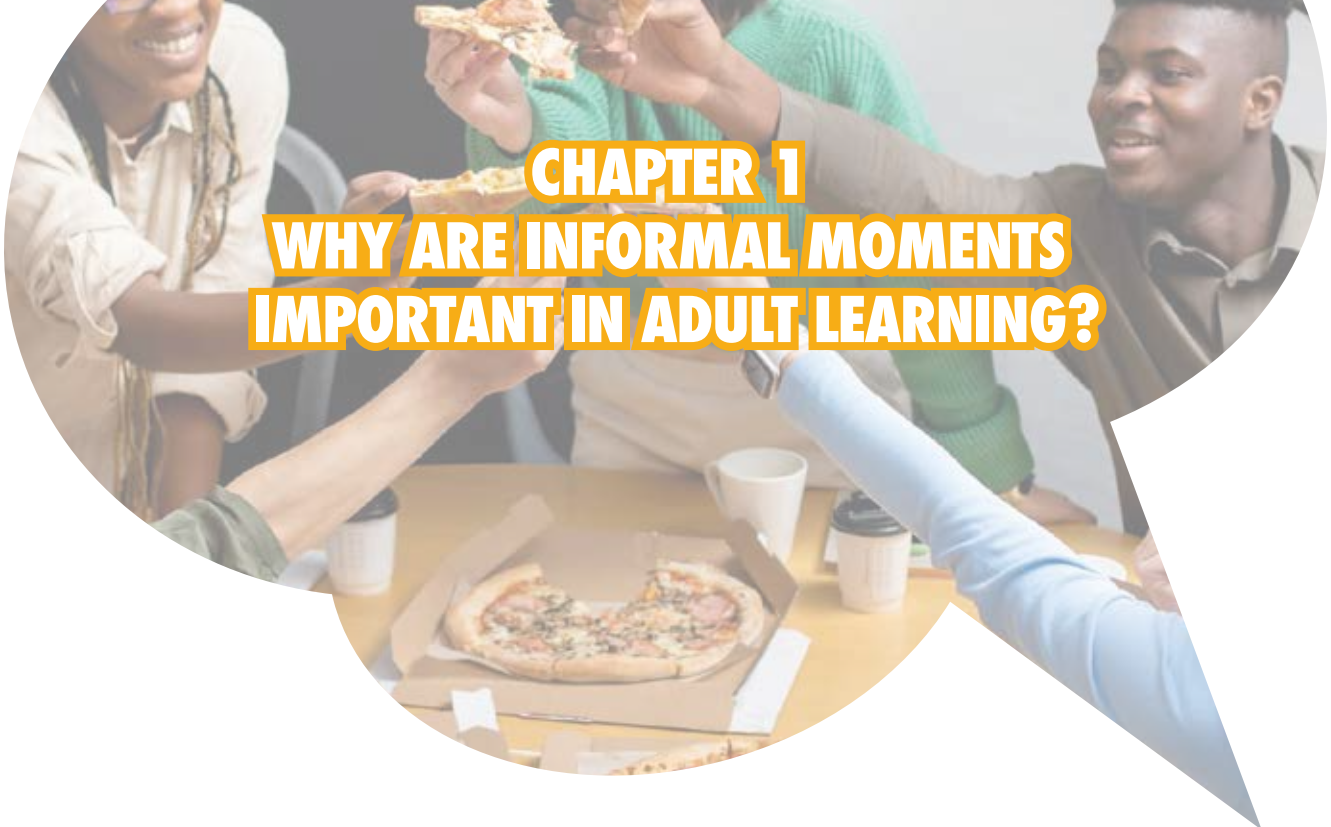
## 0.4 THE START MODEL

When we were writing these guidelines we realized that the initial letters of the elements that we were taken into account for framing informal moments were forming the word **START**. We liked this accidental combination so much that we decided we could suggest our readers to use the **START** model for framing informal moments. As trainers, we know that using some type of representation can help with understanding and recalling important information. So why not start valuing informal moments for the benefit of your learners and help yourself recall the key elements needed to frame them by using the **START** model? In the chapters that follow you'll read about why informal moments are important and how you can frame them according to the **START** model.

- **S** stands for space and in this chapter, we will share with you some ways on how to choose and organize the venue.
- **T** stands for time and here we will share with you our findings on how long informal moments should last.
- **A** stands for attitude and here we will tell you how the trainer can have a positive impact on informal moments and how she/he can become a learner among the learners.
- **R** stands for resources and in this chapter, we will suggest you what materials and creative approaches you can put in your trainer's toolbox.
- **T** stands for target group and in this chapter we will tell you a bit more about the needs of the groups that were specifically taken into account in the iMOtion project and why there can't be any fit-all solution.

We hope you enjoy the reading and that you find some inspiration for yourself. Please feel free to share with us your experience on framing informal moments in the Epale dedicated group ([Link](#))





# CHAPTER 1

## WHY ARE INFORMAL MOMENTS IMPORTANT IN ADULT LEARNING?

### 1.1 WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY INFORMAL MOMENT?

In the 4th century BC., the Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his work *Politics*<sup>1</sup>, defined the human being as a socially active being. For one of the greatest thinkers in the history of humanity, sociality was an essential and necessary characteristic of the human being. The family, community life, and the foundation of cities started from human's need to have emotional and dialogic contact with other human beings. Shortly before him, Plato<sup>2</sup>, and in general, all Greek culture from antiquity to the classical era narrated the existence of symposia. Deriving from the Greek word *sympósion*, which means "drinking together," the symposium was nothing more than an opportunity to spend time together and spontaneously share, during a banquet or a dinner, each other's skills and cultures. It was not uncommon for poets, musicians, philosophers, or politicians to be invited on these occasions, which were aimed at the

individuals' cultural and social development and the personal and community well-being of the polis<sup>3</sup>.

The reference to the two great Greek philosophers helps us underline how Informal Moments (IM) was an important feature of life also in antiquity. Within this project, we define Informal moments as:

*"framed spaces & time for informal learning, group dynamics, recreation & well-being to happen, in order to respond to the different learners' needs. It implies, during the planning phase of the course and also during the course, a conscious choice from the trainer's side. Informal Moments are part of the learning process and should not be considered as an interruption of the process itself, neither for the trainer nor for the participants. These moments are influenced by different variables such as the duration of the training session, the resources available, the trainers' presence<sup>4</sup> and whether they are held indoor, outdoor, or online; or launched in formal or non-formal courses."*



Allowing and fostering informal moments requires an open mindset from us trainers, who need to follow the flow and the group process. Informal moments are, due to their very nature, not predictable but follow the flow of spontaneity. The learners can co-facilitate/initiate informal moments and they impact content and outcome. Framing them implies the learner's free choice to use those spaces, moments, and resources available based on one's current needs.

The basic idea of our research is that informal moments should be recognized as having a significant role within courses or programs aimed at adult education. Just like symposiums for the ancient Greeks, informal moments are characterized as privileged spaces of emotional, social, and cultural learning. As part of the learning process, the use of informal moments depends on the participant's free choice, which may or may not coincide with the trainer's intention. It offers a spontaneous and significant space for the person's growth and well-being.

## 1.2 ABOUT THE NATURE OF LEARNING

In the last thirty years, the debate on the nature of learning has developed in two main **trajectories**<sup>5</sup>: the recognition of formal **learning**<sup>6</sup> considered as "learning delivered in an organized and structured context (for example, in an educational or training institution or at work), specifically designed as such (in terms of learning objectives and learning time or resources)" and the recognition of two other possible forms of learning: non-formal and informal. The European definition of non-formal learning defines it as that form of learning characterized by the intentional choice of the person which takes place outside the formal systems in any organization dedicated to education and training purposes (including organizations, voluntary associations, aggregations of private or companies, etc.). Informal learning is defined as that which, regardless of an intentional choice, takes place in daily

life activities and happens due to the interactions within the work, family, and leisure contexts.

The two possible ways of thinking are confirmed: institutional learning and spontaneous learning that takes place and can take place in different fields. Beyond the places and contexts - formal or informal - in which an individual's learning develops, the concept of goal underlines the differences between the different approaches that define formal, non-formal and informal learning. In the case of the definition of the informal moment, this is related to the objective in a relationship of possibilities. For example, you as a trainer may structure informal moments within a training day to make it easier for the group to get in touch with each other. The objective, in this case, would be the facilitation of knowledge within the group. What characterizes the informal moment is precisely the possibility of choosing. Participants can decide whether to participate in the informal moment as a group or whether to do so as individuals, since at that moment, the need of one of the participants may not coincide with the needs of the group or with the possible objective foreseen by you who is delivering the training.

## 1.3 ABOUT HAVING THE POSSIBILITY TO CHOOSE

This space of possibilities does not make the informal moment less impactful. Still, on the contrary, it underlines its essential peculiarity: that of **being a free space and adaptable to many different learning situations**. An informal moment can easily be part of a formal, or non-formal program, and even more: it can be understood as the bridge between the different forms of learning as an added value.

Although contemporary literature recognizes the validity of informal learning as a process that occurs naturally in the individual immersed in different contexts of their daily life<sup>2</sup>, it does not seem to have yet highlighted the fundamental importance of what we have defined as "*informal moments*." When sharing our experiences as trainers and facilitators in the consortium, we realized that in training courses, the knowledge, awareness and well-being gained by participants were often strengthened or even acknowledged during the *informal moments* within the program. This happens because the *informal moments* make it possible to prepare the participants for cooperative learning, critical thinking, open-mindedness, and peer education.

Many things can happen during *informal moments*: a debate can spontaneously generate over a cup of tea; a reflection can be ignited during a walk alone or with other participants in one of the natural areas surrounding the venue where the course is taking place; an emotional connection can rise with another participant, an organizer or a trainer.

## 1.4 ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF INFORMAL MOMENT IN ADULT LEARNING

Several aspects are called into play during the *informal moments*: the **well-being** of the participants, **socialization**, and the possibility of nutritional **personal and collective needs** such as, for example, the exploration of the **natural, social and cultural environments** in which the course is taking place, or even simply to rest the mind and body. The benefits of IM impact participants as well as the trainer, as very often they allow you to **get in touch with the participants in a different way** than you would during an activity, be it non-formal or formal. At the same time, *informal moments* offer participants the opportunity to get to know each other better, to bring out the characteristics that until then they had not been able to share, to satisfy their natural,

physiological but also mental and emotional needs and, above all, to **rediscover or recreate** their comfort zone within an unfamiliar environment.

We could list the beneficial aspects of informal moments as follows:

- They allow you as a trainer to rest, observe and get to know the participants, both personally and professionally: to better understand their needs, personalities and perspectives, and for offering them tailored support for their learning.
- They allow participants to feel comfortable and to express themselves freely. It offers the space to share information that may not emerge within the more structured parts of the course, also thanks to the possibility of one-to-one communication, which could be more difficult to develop during programs or activities.
- They allow participants to make the best use of their time, distract themselves, digest learning, rest mentally and physically, move at a physical level, deepen the content of the course, and prepare mentally and emotionally for the next session, empowering them to be open to new learning inputs.
- They allow the group to create relationships and settle internal dynamics. IMs allow networking, and sharing moments of leisure time through physical activities or games, and encourage group forming. Moreover, during informal moments, individuals' characteristics, skills and peculiarities, which may not be directly linked to the topic of the course, might emerge, facilitating the networking process and broadening trainers' and participants' social and professional possibilities.
- They allow the creation and choice of moments to spend with oneself. During a training course, personal space is substantially reduced in favour of community life however, this can lead to a greater need for spaces dedicated to oneself.



# S

## CHAPTER 2

# SPACE. THE COMPLEXITY OF LEARNING SPACES

Ultimately formal, non-formal and informal adult education can take place in many different places and venues. We as adult educators/trainers know this. The actual place – not necessarily understood as an actual room, but contoured as the wider context of a learning space, e.g. where a training is situated, and conflated with the learning content, the moral and/or ethical principles and capacities of clients and participants as well as the set of preferences of the trainer(s) – can be imagined as a “typical” seminar room, a library, a workshop, a camp in nature or the cyberspace to name just a few. However, due to the Covid-19-Pandemic many office workers developed their living rooms (and other rooms) into impromptu workplaces. Even though this situation at that scale was collectively born out of a necessity, it also transformed those rooms into places for further education and thus a reason to professionally reflect on and assess those new and slightly “atypical” spaces.

If we as trainers want to frame informal moments and allow them to happen, it is of

great importance not to underestimate the actual learning space. We encourage three reflectional steps for thinking and maybe also rethinking the spaces/venues where trainings take place:

- 1. Always make the space/venue a conscious and deliberate choice.**
- 2. Use your position to influence the choice of learning space and the equipment at your disposal in order to heighten the chances of informal moments to happen.**
- 3. If you are not in a position to influence the space, make yourself and others aware of the barriers the given space has in relation to informal moments, as well as to the expected learning effects.**

Ultimately, we (as trainers) have to understand that both logistical and organizational considerations are not accidental or merely collateral. They are as important as the educational program itself. It simply means that it matters what and how the place “looks” like – and even though sight is one of the most predominant senses, for those of us who possess it, also sound, smell, tactile perception and maybe taste will contribute to the first impressions of our learners. It matters where the “room” is located and how it can be accessed. It matters if all participants travel to the place or if the training is held in a company building. If meals will be a joint activity in a canteen, at different restaurants or not organized at all should be conscious decisions. Those, and other questions are not subordinate to the educational program. They significantly influence the trainer’s and the group’s capability to create *informal moments*. There is no “one-fits-its-all solution” and the different learning spaces set up by adult education providers are not as such good or bad choices. The important fact is to be aware as a trainer, which possibilities a space can offer to initiate *informal moments*. Not all examples and thoughts provided in our iMOtion project are possible to adapt for every location. It, therefore, is important to have a set of training skills to choose from.

## 2.1 SCENARIO 1: SEMINAR ROOM - “THE CLASSIC”

The learning space is a medium-sized seminar room on the premises of either an educational institution, a company, or a conference center/hotel. It is designed in a so-called “functional” way (we argue that those rooms are not so functional after all, as paradigms of learning have shifted over time). The walls are probably painted white beige. You cannot make anything wrong with white, can’t you? The furniture consists of rather massive tables and chairs. There is basic tech equipment, e.g. beamer and

laptop, and a flipchart and/or a board of sorts. The basic seating plan(s) will be oriented towards the wall with the board/flipchart and are arranged in such a way that each participant can see the board and the leader - hereby assuming the trainer is a leader. A horseshoe setup comes to mind. In the not-so-far future, a rising number of those rooms might as well be quickly and easily equipped for hybrid formats with 2-3 cameras – showing the trainer, the flipchart and the room. There will also be a room microphone. The surroundings matter. Is the room located close to a train station, or the airport? Does the surrounding offer a cultural or natural experience, e.g. in the middle of the picturesque old town or along a branch of a river? However, many of you know by experience, seminar rooms are often neither close to an area of any cultural nor natural interest. When clients hire experts to perform as inhouse-trainers they often prefer an implementation at their own premises for the simple reasons of practical organization. This makes it significantly harder for the trainer to create any detachment from the workplace and the obligations connected to it. Being close to their work desk the learners will tend to deal with business-tasks during the breaks instead of engaging in informal moments. Also, the wish to optimize travel expenses and time results in trainings that are held close to train stations or even at airport conference centers – not always but often areas where cultural or natural experiences are not the top priority. That said, we encourage you – for didactical reasons – to make the place a subject of discussion with your clients.

he challenge with the “classic” set-up is obvious: there is literally nothing to see and nothing to remember. But as the visual beings many of us are, to see something opens the door to informal talks or individual mind wandering. Our brains like to link experiences to specific places to remember things. Memory is essential in learning. This includes sensory memory. During a train-the-trainer event this year one colleague stated that the conference hotels she visits mainly differ in one thing - color and pattern of the carpeting - which helps her to distinguish them from each other. In other words: classic seminar rooms are boring and do not encourage connection among learners nor remembrance which is essential for fruitful learning. The classic seminar room, therefore, is a most unsuitable setup to initiate informal moments.



One possibility for you as a trainer is to add at least a certain color and vividness to the classic seminar room by using your flipcharts. Often trainers produce flipcharts “on the flow” but additionally we could also prepare an extra set of carefully elaborated colorful artsy multipurpose flipcharts. These can be used again and again for all kinds of topics and purposes. Motives like trees, mountains, icebergs, clouds, fishing nets, pyramids can do the trick. Motives taken from nature have been with humankind for quite a while and hereby have the potential to initiate good spirits and manifold associations. Avoid text. Text will be added later through moderation cards, post-its or static cling sticky notes. Use wax crayons to create shadows and spatiality and opt for colors different from the usual

black-blue-green-red flipchart marker selection. You invest some time and resources in the elaboration of multipurpose flipcharts, but the audience will appreciate when you’ve gone the extra mile.

If you are in the lucky position to gradually adapt, refurbish and renew a seminar room in your institution, think of the following in order to allow more of the informal to happen: Break open seating plans - participants should be able to sit face to face (e.g. two-table islands, circles and the like). Suitable furniture for modern trainings can be moved easily, brought in, or taken out according to the needs of a particular session. To change seating (or standing) arrangements during a training is essential to allow participants to form connections with other learners. Groups are not simply aggregates of people learning individually in a parallel fashion; they are social networks!

To name some alternatives: pouffes and deckchairs are easy to move. Easy chairs, bean bags, a couch or a comfortable corner bench can create islands and corners for individual retreat or group work. Give the room some color. White paint is often preferred in educational contexts, as it matches everything and makes a room look more spacious and brighter. But you cannot make much wrong by opting for another color on a single wall and by adding some pillows and a painting. For a more advanced approach use an interior designer, which takes us to another sort of learning space.





## 2.2 SCENARIO 2: HUB, MARKER SPACE, INNOVATION HUB

Over the course of time, learning spaces have been adapted and slightly altered. Some have been rethought and reimagined from the foundation. New settings join the traditional venues of education. Originating in the tech and it-sector those spaces pop up in urban centers and can be booked. Unlike the adaptation of a single room, a true makerspace (different names are in circulation, and not every place meets the label) addresses the entire learning environment. The actual building offers different spaces, places for meetings, places for lectures and presentations, places for retreat and concentration, and places for games and breaks.

Specific rooms are often named and designed around themes to make them unique. For example, “the workshop” being actually equipped with some tools, or “the boat” following a maritime scheme. Some makerspaces connect the surrounding community by preserving industrial buildings giving them a new function or by trying to serve multiple generations. They integrate a specific restaurant/caterer into their concept to provide a unique culinary experience. Makerspaces are often focused on renewable sources of energy and materials. This is usually achieved by reducing overall resource consumption through usage efficiency, re-use, recycling and upcycling. The architecture opens to the outside through terraces, yards and gardens. Coming from an industry where above all creativity and innovation is decisive, those places are open to multi-sensory experiences. Living plants with or without a sensory effect, e.g. lavender, and fountains or internal water-wall installations are integrated. Sound systems are installed that can play your music of choice or imitate sounds of nature. Clearly a suitable setup to initiate informal moments. However, the challenge with these places is that they are not always but often on the pricier side and

still rare outside urban centres or tech-companies.

## 2.3 SCENARIO 3: NATURE

Getting as much distance as possible from your workplace or usual environment to develop your mind and creativity has always been a concept in education. People used to go on journeys to educate themselves. Sometimes those journeys and trainings move not only to other places but totally away from buildings as the “temples” of education. We are part of nature and there is no other place than nature that stimulates all our senses. From all our examples nature is the most non-formal place and therefore clearly suitable to frame informal moments. Nature can teach us a lot. One could say nature is a huge real laboratory. Workshops in nature can incorporate elements of sustainable self-sufficiency. Yurt classrooms and community tents can be set up. Specific rules, such as not using your mobile phone or keeping away from the internet might be set. Everyone who once visited a “camp” knows how fast informal structures are established. Nature is a perfect space for trainings aimed at cooperation, personal well-being and development, mindfulness and the like. But even if your topic is a formal training for a specific software, content-loaded with facts to prepare you for a specific examination or dependent on some equipment such as desks, laptops, sockets - a location within beautiful natural surroundings will still support your learners during breaks. As bestselling author and holder of a doctorate degree in the history and sociology of science of the University of Pennsylvania Alex Soojung-Kim Pang has shown in many examples: breaks and rest are as important for succeeding as the actual work itself.<sup>8</sup> Among others, the Silicon Valley based visionary Soojung-Kim Pang is a promoter of the 4-day workweek.

## 2.4 SCENARIO 4: ONLINE

There are two ways people responded to the remote environment in education. Some did enjoy the freedoms it offers, and others got lost on the way. Currently most trainings are carried out via Zoom or similar video conference tools. On the plus side: you can attend your training from basically everywhere. For many people throughout the pandemic this would be home - but turning the pandemic aside it could also be a nice place at the beach, your grandma's place or a cubicle in a public library. Remote environments particularly serve those informal moments that participants need for themselves, but they have much higher barriers in terms of social informal moments between people as compared to offline spaces. If learners are at home the things around them will be familiar. The learner can choose the "chair" - of course, the chair could be a bed, the floor, a standing pult... During breaks, people will supply themselves with the beverages and food they are used to. And in an amazing turnaround of power, they can leave a training for a break whenever they feel the need to, without being exposed. On the minus side, there can be various factors around the learners that disturb them such as sound, the thought of unmade dishes or family members that require attention. In fact, all things culturally and socially considered "private" affect the learners more. If participants learn from home, getting the informal into online-trainings is an extra sensible issue. All actions that involve showing the place where you are, should be optional and therefore initiated as such. Preferences, that are either personal or to some degree also established as "online normal", become visible in the use of wallpapers or blurry backgrounds. Some participants freely show their place or home space, while others prefer to not make use of a camera at all. One possibility to get remote participants on board is to produce a short little video that shows the way from let's say the closest train station to the

location of your training center, showing maybe parks or little takeaway places, where you have your lunch or specific everyday things that are part of your culture. The video follows you when you enter the door of the training center, elevators, stairs and finally the seminar room. You can use music or voice along with it. Mobile phone videos are an easy thing to get acquainted with. If you have a steady location it is quickly and easily done. Such a video is particularly useful for the "on-boarding" of the remote participants in hybrid trainings as they can share the experience of the in-situ participants. Videos as such can also motivate the participants to make a little video of their own during a course, showing their surroundings and learning space. In contrast to the "I would be happy if you show your offices/workplaces" attempt, those video clips or self-made wallpapers allow you to share your personality without giving up your privacy. This is also the reasoning behind icebreakers such as "go to the kitchen and grab a particular object to present". An action that can be extra nice in hybrid settings is when the in-situ participants write on a piece of paper what they anticipate the other group to grab: scissors, knives, cups, saltshakers...

Language classes are often connected to the culture of the respective community. And culture is often represented throughout traditional meals. In remote language classes, you can motivate the students to prepare meals from the culture by providing the necessary recipes and vocabulary. Results can be shown and eaten during the next session. In variation, this can be an activity for international teams to dig into the culture of others. In this case, different recipes can be exchanged. We give an example in our iMOtion-Article "Cooking and Eating as a Group Building Bridge into Digital Settings".

A very easy activity to frame an informal moment in a Zoom room is to allow a breakout session during the training without a task or topic. During the project, we labeled such sessions as “coffee talk” and got very positive feedback. It is important that those sessions do not replace a regular break but are an integral part of the training. Currently, most Zoom-like tools can be used by participants with little digital literacy. The Pandemic sped up digital transformation processes. Also among elderly trainers and learners.



With a generation of digital natives to come we foresee that digital learning spaces will become much more advanced. If your dream learning environment looks like a library with tons of books, bottle green and burgundy colored wallpapers, decorated with old paintings and a crackling fireplace – more or less a scenario taken out of a 19th century European novel – chances are high, that sooner or later those places can be created and inhabited digitally. In the real world it will be difficult to find a 19th century manor house with a library located within walking distance of a 15th century Japanese Zen Garden, that you both would like to access for your training. Not to speak of the admission or rental cost. But online you will swiftly and easily locate yourself in different

virtual settings, jumping from a library to a garden, to a beach and back - just as you please.

The current challenge remains that existing technical solutions developed for the gaming sector have not yet been explored and developed in depth for a wider adult education audience nor for educational purposes in general. Opportunities still lack for trainers and learners. But also for developers. The school sector and some work-based learning approaches have already progressed a bit further in this regard. One software we tested during the iMOtion Project is Mibo: a browser-based meeting tool made specifically for virtual socializers and developed in the Netherlands ([www.mibo.com](http://www.mibo.com)). Today Mibo offers different landscapes to explore: a Caribbean Island, a Town Hall, a Zen Garden. The advantage of Mibo compared to Zoom and other conference tools is that participants can move on their own like in a computer game and hereby initiate conversations of their own. They are free to enter and free to leave conversations much like in an actual room allowing informal small talk. The disadvantage is that Mibo was intended for the corporate field, as the developers had team meetings in mind and not trainings. But with the expected generations of digital natives to come, we are confident similar solutions will enter the market and job environment of trainers.



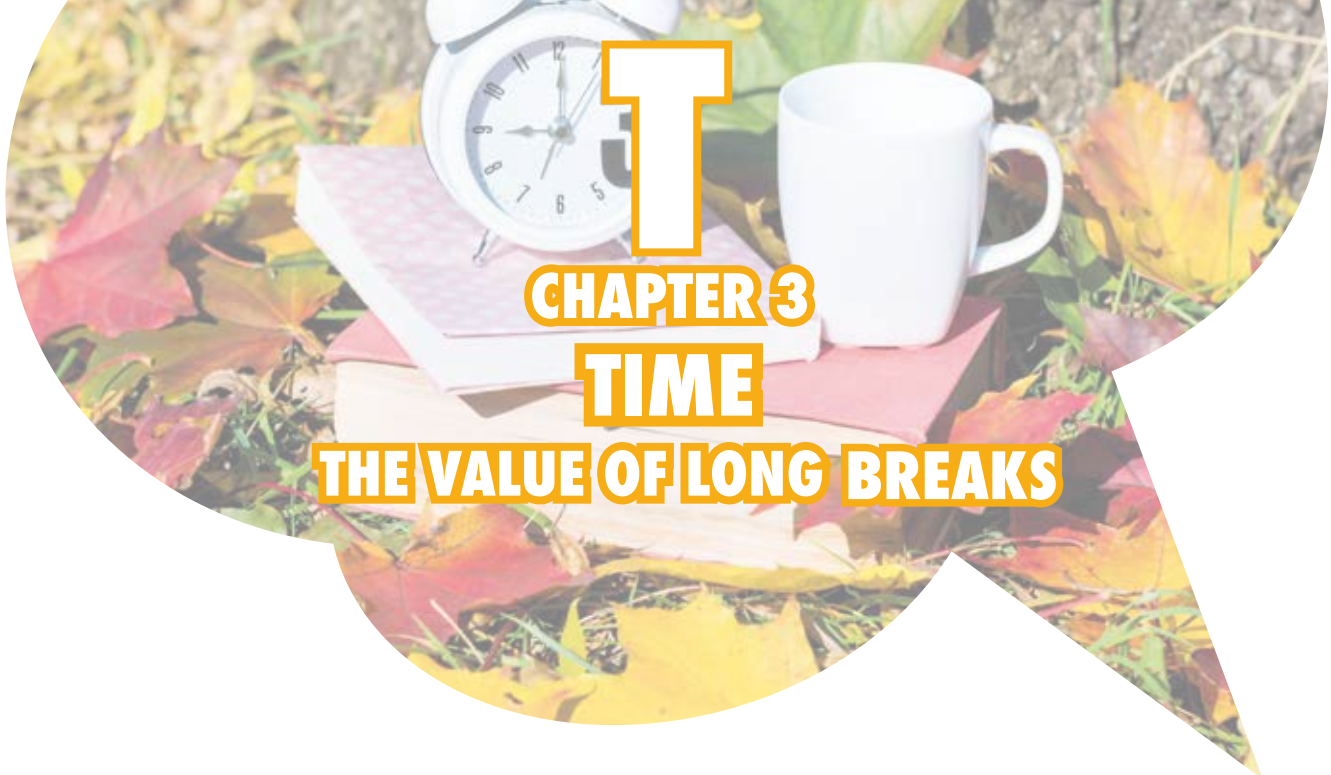


## 2.5 SCENARIO 5: TO SUM UP

As a trainer take your time to think of the places you use and explore your learning environments. Even the most classic seminar room can be combined with multi-sensory experiences and relaxing breaks if the room itself is e.g. in a monastery and surrounded by a garden. Think of everything that supports yourself to be creative, to laugh, to move and to distract. Informal moments support your learners to keep their energy for solving problems, challenges and exercises. Ask yourself, what would your own dream of a learning environment look like? Probably much different than the places you came across throughout your career. For learning we need to stimulate all our senses, we need to move and to change not only places but perspectives. Some of the magic of the makerspaces and hubs origins in the specific freedom of the

strongly demanded profession of programmers to literally do as they liked. And that is how ping pong tables entered the office building. If you host a small bunch of learners, one possibility to surprise your learners with an entirely new learning environment is to book an Airbnb flat or any other kind of holiday apartment not to live in (accommodation will still be in a hotel) but to use it as "seminar-room". A flat like that is easy to upgrade with a flipchart or beamer and allows you to integrate for instance the informal moment of preparing meals together during the training. But what should you do if you are not in a position to change anything regarding the space? On many occasions, trainers are not necessarily the ones that define the location. Particularly not if you are hired for in-house training. We only have the possibility to express preferences without the guarantee of being heard. There are still some changes you can implement. As you can read in chapter 5





# T

## CHAPTER 3

### TIME

#### THE VALUE OF LONG BREAKS

What is the right time frame for a break? Five, ten, fifteen, thirty or sixty minutes? Did you ever ask your participants? The answers in the testing phase were very interesting. Having teachers as learners, who grow up 5-10 minutes break, they ask for the same time-frame, as this is what they are used to from their working schedule. Participants coming from other industries and businesses usually demand longer breaks, of up to 20 minutes.

The schedule planning of a seminar or workshop is usually your responsibility as a trainer. You need to organize breaks depending on the content (e.g. emotional learning versus substantial new content) and the length of the training (4 hours versus 5 days). Hereunder are examples adopted by two different trainers as gathered from a workshop:

- *"When I run a content session I usually break after 20 to 30 minutes, because of the attention span of the participants and because the content needs to sink in and generate further questioning?"*

- *"I run very active seminars on personal development, which are several days in a row. I plan my session for 1,5 hours and then allow a break of 20 – 30 minutes and a lunch break for at least 1,5 hours. During the session, I sense the group, if there is an additional break needed."*

Williams (2017) in an article about improving one's focus, highlighted that:

- *"Some studies dating from the 1990s suggest that due to natural variations in our cycle of alertness, we can concentrate for no longer than 90 minutes before needing a 15-minute break. Other studies have found that even a micro-break of a few seconds will work, provided it is a total distraction. In the studies, people did a few seconds of mental arithmetic, so you may have to do something more intense than staring out of the window."*



The lengths of attention and focus are related to individuals and to their experience in keeping attentive. We would like to point out that breaks are never a waste of time, but an essential part of the training. They are needed to digest and relax our brains so that individuals are able to focus again.

Research in neuroscience highlights that human beings need to focus and unfocus in order to learn and be creative. According to Joe DeGutis and Mike Esterman, from the Boston Attention and Learning Lab in Massachusetts *“When you need to focus for long periods, less is more” (as cited in Williams, 2017). In brain imaging experiments, they found that the most successful strategy for staying on course was to focus for a while and then take a short break before going back to concentrating. People who tried to be ‘on’ all the time made more mistakes overall.”*

Participants' ability to focus varies and this has to do with the mood they are currently in and their state of mind, for example, when being sad or in mourning. This implies that one of the key competencies needed as a trainer is to **continuously check and sense the group**.

When participants are not listening anymore or seem exhausted, because of emotions they are going through or because of the intense content they need to digest, then it is time for an additional break. This can result in sacrificing content in favor of much-needed breaks.

For us partners of this project, informal moments can take place before, during and after the training course. They can be planned or be spontaneous according to the need of the participants.

### 3.1 BEFORE THE TRAINING COURSE TAKES PLACE

When participants arrive for the first time at a venue, they can feel a bit insecure. Give them a clear frame to help them feel more comfortable and prepared for learning. Therefore, in the pre-seminar written information that you send to the participants, besides providing a clear indication of the arrival time, you can be explicit in saying that the venue is open 15 or 30 minutes before and that there will be some refreshments available (such as snacks, coffee and tea). The information should also indicate the arrival time. This preparation time at the venue helps participants to get familiar with the venue and find their own space in the seminar room.

In online training, you can also open the virtual room 5 to 15 minutes before and let participants arrive continuously. If participants do not know each other and you decide on a step-by-step arrival, it is important that you are available to initiate the conversation. If participants know each other, it might be enough just to open the link to the online venue.

### 3.2 CLASSIC BREAKS

In adult education, in particular, many participants join trainings to enlarge their network. Breaks are important moments to connect with each other and sufficient time is needed to allow space for this informal exchange. It gives both the participants and you the opportunity to have conversations fitting your personal interests. An example of this is what a participant shared:

*“In the break, I learned about the different university systems in Italy and Spain and we started to think about a new Erasmus+ project on embodiment methods.”*

You can provide longer breaks for participants to interact and offer them materials, such as books, games and riddles to stimulate and spark their curiosity.

Breaks can be everything from 5 minutes to 2 hours depending on what you want to achieve and depending on what the needs of the group are. Five to ten-minute breaks allow for a quick movement, a toilet break, or a moment to open the windows when people have been already sitting for a long time. This is beneficial for some having some fresh air, checking e-mail, but it's not for a full recovery. It is usually a break for the participants but not so much for the trainer. 15-minute breaks give extra time to have a drink and socialize. 30-minute breaks give time for more than one activity, as it allows time not only for urgent tasks but also for reflective moments; change of venue for example moving outside; moments of being alone and/or being social; looking into material offered etcetera. It is also a good moment for the brain and the body to relax following an intensive session depending on the needs of the individual.

When doing an online training session, the situation is a bit different. Online trainings can be very intense and participants might need more short breaks so that their eyes can also relax away from the screen. As a trainer, you have to work even harder to stay connected with your participants. Questions can help to stay connected. Participants can be asked if they need a break and also how much time they need for it. According to our experience, we recommend that for online trainings, a minimum of a 15-minute break should be allowed. If participants need a shorter break, they take it anyway by turning off the video and the volume. For lunch breaks, it is recommended that you give at least 1 to 1 and a half hours.

It is important and necessary that you are clear about the options available during the break (e.g. how long it is; where participants can find tea/coffee/food; if the venue

offers an outside area or what books people could look at during the break) For online seminars in particular, this framing or breaks is even more necessary, as you might not reach the participants anymore once they have left the session.

### 3.3 LUNCH BREAKS

When having a full-day training, having lunch together with your participants gives time to personally connect with them and to find common ground. With reference to this, one of the participants in our testing phase said:

*"A longer break gave us the possibility to learn that the Spanish participants were looking for speakers at a conference they had to do the following year. During the lunch break, we had the opportunity to talk about the goals and content of the conference, which led to an invitation to be a speaker at the conference in Spain."*

The lunch break can also be used to transport a cultural experience or some values, which are important to you. If the training is being done with a group of migrants with a Muslim background, you could look for a place, where there are menus that do not include pork and with affordable prices due to the economic status of the participants. Otherwise, if any foreigners are participating in the training, and are visiting the country for the first time, you can suggest a typical local restaurant. Depending on the participants, a choice of vegan, vegetarian or organic options for the meals should also be considered.

In a seminar on 'Diversity' which was held in Vienna, one of the dinners was held in a Pakistani restaurant called "Deewan", where we could decide how much to pay for our meal. Therefore, the cost depended on how much one could afford. This restaurant was a conscious choice of the trainer who wanted to share this social concept.

### 3.4 SPECIAL INFORMAL MOMENTS

A special form of informal moment is one, which is organized as a full session during a workshop or seminar. In the iMOtion-Laboratory meeting in Wiener Neustadt, the training commenced with an informal session, which lasted the whole morning. The group was asked to walk through Wiener Neustadt keeping some indications in mind (see for details the example in the box below: Informal moment outside).

In the personal online reflection, the participants were asked how they felt after this experience and why. Participants replied that they felt more connected and accepted by the group, relaxed and happy. Yet, one person felt very empty.

What would have helped to improve the informal moment was answered only by half of the participants and those who replied noted that they would have liked more structured rules and to have the choice to follow the group or to walk alone in different directions.

In an Inclusive Leadership seminar in Malta, held in 2016, which was a similar experience, activating leadership potential offered the participants the opportunity to spend an early morning at the seaside. The group left at 5 o'clock, when it was still dark and they spent 2 hours at the seaside, where participants could walk or sit down, watch the sunrise and take time to think and reflect on their future leadership role. After breakfast, a reflection moment with story-telling methods concluded the experience.

#### EXAMPLE INFORMAL MOMENT OUTSIDE

The group was sent for a walk in the city with the intention of discovering something:

- about the group
- about the others
- about the context (city, environment/nature, traditions, history, citizens, problems)

There were two challenges: walking at least 6 km (you can make this more challenging according to the time frame or to the group) and taking a group picture. Personal needs, such as toilet or coffee breaks, had to be covered during this time of exploration.

For reflection, the following questions were asked:

- How did you feel during the informal moment?
- What did you discover about this group?
- What did you learn?
- How was the activity for you?

### 3.5 AFTER THE TRAINING COURSE HAS TAKEN PLACE

At the end of the training, either online or onsite, we recommended that you are available for at least a few minutes after, to allow some time for questions and clarifications which might arise later. At times, participants need a while to digest the learning and to feel the effect of an exercise and

have the need to discuss it later with you. It is also a time, whereby participants, who do not wish to talk in front of the whole group, have the opportunity to ask you specific questions.

For the online training, it is helpful to be explicit and indicate to the participants that you will be still available for 10 or 15 minutes, just in case participants still have questions or need any clarifications.

#### DO YOU WANT TO INVESTIGATE MORE ?

We'd like to invite you to explore with your participants what informal moments (breaks) in trainings mean to them.

Try to ask them how much time they need to make good use of a break. What is enough for them? What is not enough? Is there ever a "too much"?

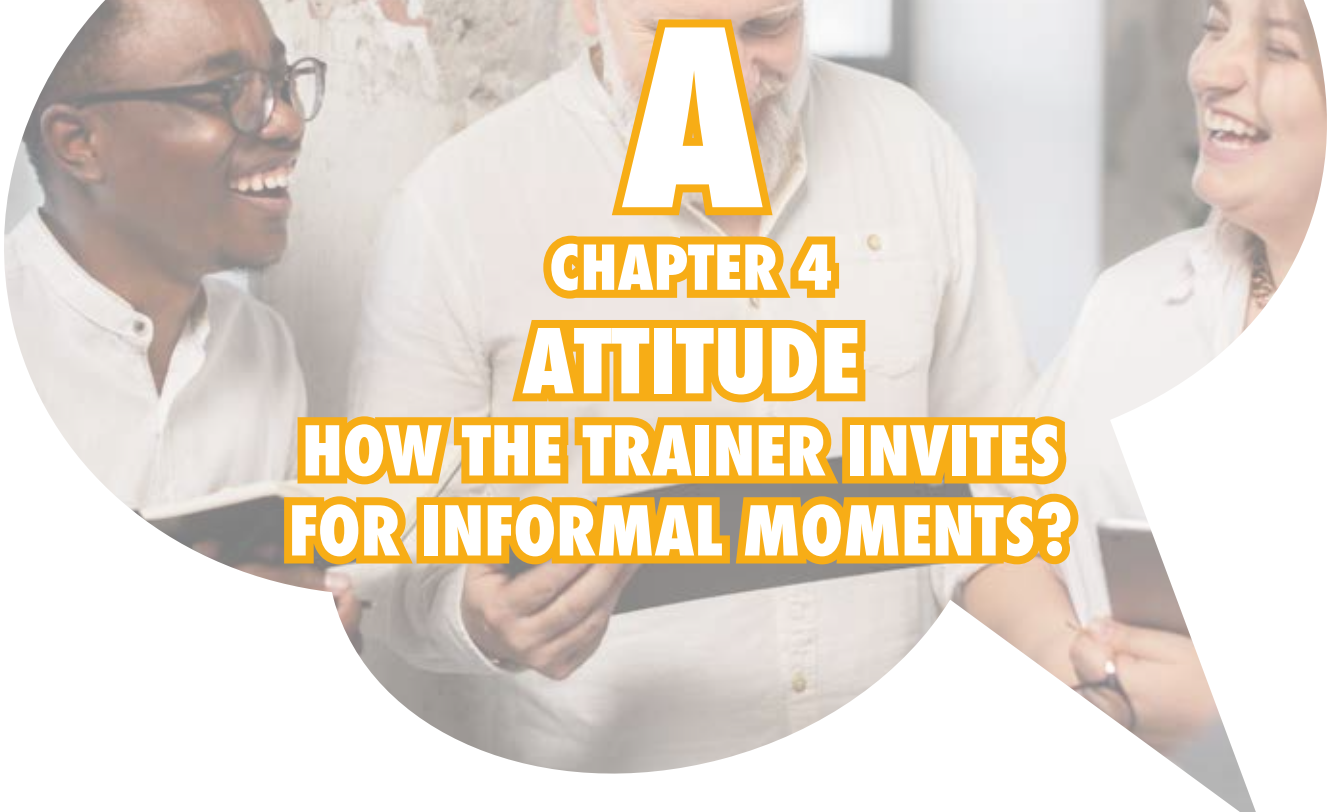
**Please join us in our Epale working group on *"Informal moments in adult education for learning, group dynamic and recreation"* and share your experience with us**

“

#### QUOTE OF PARTICIPANT OF A LABORATORY

I would have liked that the coffee breaks were even more extensive, in terms of having more time allocated to them. I would have engaged in more networking, which is of great value in the social and cultural field

”



# A

## CHAPTER 4

# ATTITUDE

## HOW THE TRAINER INVITES FOR INFORMAL MOMENTS?

### 4.1 TRAINER'S ATTITUDE

In the previous sections of this work, we have seen why we consider informal moments important and the most appropriate places and times for framing them. Based on the direct experiences of the partners during the lab and testing phase of the project, and based on the reflections of the different professionals working in the field of adult education, we will explore how the trainer's attitude impacts informal moments. The first thing you need to take into account when planning the program of the course with its activities and informal moments is the **participating target group**. Participants, who have different ages, gender, and cultural and working backgrounds, have different needs and expectations. The quality of informal moments depends on your **creativity and sensitivity** and the way you see them influences the way they'll look like.

Informal moments are about people and their needs. You can observe people, listen

to their needs, and create a program that allows for these to be respected. People are different, they have different personalities, physicality, and needs. Listening to those needs, whether they are explicitly manifested or not expressed, is a way of **respecting this diversity**. Your attitude is crucial in managing informal moments during training courses, as it can significantly impact the participants' learning experience. You are more likely to create a **positive** and **productive learning environment** if you are aware of the differences among the participants and think **inclusive**.

### 4.2 BEING SENSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE

Showing sensitivity, being attuned to the needs and feelings of the participants and being able to adapt to their needs as the training progresses is one of the most important aspects. This can include being flexible in how the training is conducted and being willing to change the pace of the course if necessary to better meet the needs of the participants.



**Inclusivity** is also key in managing informal moments during training courses. This involves respecting the participants' differences and creating a welcoming, trustful and inclusive environment. This can involve being mindful of language and cultural differences and making accommodations to ensure everyone feels included and valued.

There can be noticeable differences between **introverted** and **extroverted participants** during informal moments in a training course. Some examples are:

- **Participation in group discussions:** Extroverted participants may be more likely to participate actively, while introverted participants may be more reserved or hesitant to speak up.
- **Socializing with others:** Extroverted participants may be more likely to initiate conversations and socialize with others during informal moments, while introverted participants may be more content to observe and listen.
- **Comfort with virtual communication:** Some introverted participants may be more comfortable communicating through writing (messaging or online forums), while extroverted participants may prefer more interactive forms of communication, such as video conferencing or phone calls.

It's important that you are aware of and sensitive towards these differences and that you create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all participants, regardless of their personality type. This might involve providing multiple options for communication and interaction and encouraging all participants to share their thoughts and ideas during group discussions and other activities.

## 4.3 THE TRAINER'S PRESENCE

Learning to observe, listen and get to know one's group remains a fundamental point,

even in framing informal moments. Furthermore, we'd like to underline **the importance of not leaving such moments unattended.**

This doesn't mean being a control freak, rather it means being present, which is a state in which you experience being connected with yourself, others and the context. When you're present, everything about you – what you're thinking and what you're feeling is completely focused and centered on what it is you are doing at that moment. You are not thinking about what happened earlier, or what you are going to do next. When you're present you're completely connected, concentrating on, and tuned into what is happening in the "here and now".

Being present means perceiving what participants' needs are and being available for them whether they'd want to ask for clarifications about the topics of the training course, want to ask for general information about what is available in the outdoor context, or even if there is the need for an intervention in case of a conflicting situation arising in the group.

For example, it might happen that, due to diverse cultural or religious backgrounds (like for example in a group of migrants coming from different countries), gestures or tones of voice might be misunderstood, causing discord and in the worst of cases conflicts.

Indeed disagreements and conflicts might arise simply if people, even those coming from the same community, have different viewpoints! As a general indication, we suggest you be more available at the beginning when the group is in the forming phase. Participants usually refer more to the trainer at the beginning because they didn't have the time to socialize with the other participants yet.

The trainer's presence would also be useful during the storming phase of the group, as it's usually in this phase that misunderstandings and conflicts happen. This means dealing with this stage in a conscious manner, knowing that it's a great opportunity to make the conflict visible and to facilitate reflection for a deeper understanding of each other and for consolidating trust among the group members. It's much better to deal with conflicts rather than ignore them, as they can become the elephant in the room!

In some cases, individuals or groups can self-manage informal moments and breaks, as they are more proactive, motivated, and naturally driven by relationship building. In others, they may need to be accompanied.

Remember you are a reference point and as such, you need to be available and intervene when necessary. You can take advantage of the informal moments to get to know all the participants better, even those whom you find more difficult to know during the activities.

However, it is also important that you take care also of your personal needs, fairly dividing the time available. It is like being on a plane when there is an unlikely event of pressure loss and you need oxygen. First, you need to wear the mask yourself and then you can support others.

A straightforward example of an informal moment in which your presence can help build relations is meals. During lunch, dinner, or even<sup>13</sup> at coffee breaks, participants can experience a less formal environment, in which it is allowed to feel more at ease, to step away from the pressure of productivity, and release tension. Oftentimes these moments are an opportunity to have a more confidential chat for sharing details about your hobbies or maybe music preferences or even life experiences that brought you to do what you currently do.

The basic needs of eating and drinking are a common human condition, that go beyond the roles and the knowledge each of you might have. This unconscious feeling of belonging to humankind, after all, shortens distances and participants feel freer to express their needs. This aspect of informal moments contributes to **creating a more trustful and safe environment**, which **has a positive influence on the training and learning environment** too, because it contributes to arising pleasant emotions.

A positive training environment is essential, as it enables participants to be inquirers and explorers and true leaders of their own learning. A positive environment is where learners are able to work as a team, celebrate each other's achievements, and learn from mistakes.

Caine and Caine state that "What we learn is influenced and organized by emotions and mindsets involving expectations, personal biases, and prejudices, self-esteem, and the need for social interaction"<sup>14</sup> They maintain that emotion and cognition cannot be separated in learning but rather that both are integral to the process. "Emotion is the foundation of learning. Emotions affect what is learned and what is retained,"<sup>15</sup> impacting the quality and strength of the neural trace or imprint in the brain. In other words, there must be a strong enough emotional hook for the learner to notice something and begin the learning process. This has important repercussions for the ability to recall what has been learned or experienced.

What is evident, from what has been written so far, is that informal moments help create pleasant experiences, like feeling comfortable and at the same time positively challenged by the need to build relations, which promote engagement and ignite deep learning.

## 4.4 EMOTIONAL E PHYSICAL SAFETY

Another aspect that is not to be underestimated is the emotional and physical safety of the participants. This is why we suggest you take this aspect into account not only when you plan your sessions, but also when you frame your informal moments, by choosing adequate settings for them to happen and by providing clear instructions about spaces and things that can be available for participants.

The idea of psychological safety as it relates to adult education was first mentioned by Knowles<sup>16</sup> as a need to reduce interpersonal risk. Due to the nature of interpersonal risk, psychological safety can be defined as a group phenomenon as individuals must feel safe to speak to others within a group or team.

Physiological and safety needs are foundational in building a learning community that is both happy and motivated to learn. The **informal moments' environment**, as well as the learning one, needs to be led with presence and **needs to be set up for all with policies, procedures and resources that promote physical, emotional and social safety**. The rules need to be clear, firm and fair for all. We suggest that you care for learners, as this will make them feel less vulnerable and more willing to participate and learn. **Active listening** and a **sense of shared identity** can be powerful tools when learning to apply psychological safety with adult learners. Creating a safe space for informal moments to be pleasant experiences includes the need to assess and support one another with respectful communication. It is not enough to simply state this condition instead, as a trainer, you should provide examples of good respectful communication and model this throughout the informal moments as well as the training. In addition, you will acknowledge respectful feedback or inquiry provided by the other participants.


## 4.5 THE TRAINERS LEARN

While conducting our research, we discovered that informal moments **are part of the learning process**<sup>17</sup>, and they should be valued as such. It is a learning moment both for participants and for you, as they allow you to observe and get to know the participants differently. Furthermore, they offer you the possibility of better understanding your own needs and working times.

## 4.6 ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES

There are many opportunities for informal moments to occur during an online training course. Here are some examples of what you could provide:

- **Virtual coffee breaks:** These can be scheduled at regular intervals throughout the training to take a break and chat informally with each other.
- **Group discussions:** Online training courses often involve group discussions or breakout sessions, where participants can share ideas and experiences.
- **Social media groups:** Many online training courses have dedicated social media groups or forums where participants can connect and discuss course-related topics outside the training sessions.
- **The music room:**<sup>18</sup> Where you can have a chat listening to classical or relaxing music with the participants, designed to help ease the mind and facilitate relaxation
- **One-to-one conversations:** Online training courses often provide participants with one-to-one conversations with the trainer or other participants through video conferencing or messaging.
- **Online games or activities:** Some trainers incorporate online games or activities into the training to facilitate informal learning and socialization among the participants



# R

## CHAPTER 5

# RESOURCES

# BE CREATIVE

### 5.1 RESOURCES CAN SUPPORT RELAXATION, LEARNING, AND CONNECTION

As a trainer, you are the architect of the educational times. As such, you are not only teaching and facilitating content, but you are also framing space and time, where insights, learning, connection and memorising can happen. The *informal moments* – before and after the seminar and during the breaks - are important cornerstones of the learning architecture. In this chapter, the focus is on resources that

can support participants' learning, connection and relaxation during *informal moments* in the on-site or online seminars and trainings.

First of all - no pressure: Informal moments are times when the participants are free to choose what they need or want to do at a specific moment. Socializing or having a moment on their own, reading or using some of the offered material, or staying online with some of the participants are options, and the decision is theirs. You can offer a frame (time, venue & activities) in which participants are free to choose.





## 5.2 OUR BRAIN NEEDS CHANGE

The best break for the brain is change, which means that you need to do something different from the formal session you were holding before. If you are sitting and looking into the computer screen for 30 minutes or more, movement such as going to the kitchen or outside helps to relax your eyes and body. If you have a walking outdoor session, food or drink will bring back energy to your body. If you have an intensive thinking session, a small chat, some laughs, and fresh air can bring change.

Materials such as games, sports, or musical instruments offer an opportunity to change and help to empty or recharge the mind after intensive sessions (like stretching helps to release cramps in your legs or fingers). These materials offer possibilities to connect and give people a reason to start talking. This helps especially shy people at the beginning, when they do not know the other participants.

Take into account the different needs of people. Introverts might prefer a moment on their own, while extroverts look for company. A kinaesthetic person, who likes movement, might like to get some exercises, which they can try out, while a musical person prefers some music. Important are the free choice and the balance. "I experienced that joint meals in the evening after several days together exhausted me. I think it is about the balance of joint group experiences", explained one of the participants of our iMOtion-laboratory.

Classical resources offered for breaks are any type of drinks and food. This is frequently offered by the seminar venue, where snacks are provided close to the seminar room.

Activities in an informal moment are not necessarily connected to the content of the training. The goal is to offer either relaxation, connection, or further learning. Many of the activities suggested below can be done in online and on-site situations:



## 5.2.1 AUDITIVE

- Music can create a time-frame to your informal moments. As long as the music plays, the break lasts. When it stops, it is time to come back to the seminar room. We recommend preparing a playlist on your computer or mobile phone so that you have the music close by when you need it.
- Play different types of music during the breaks. The choice is big and you need to be aware that music creates atmosphere and emotions. The selection needs to fit the specific training and/or the session and can support learning and relaxation.
- Soft background music can support reflection. Be careful with the volume, as it should not disturb the thinking!
- Relaxing sounds of nature help to chill and unwind
- Dance music e.g. after an intensive content session brings energy and helps participants to move. For a few minutes, this music can also have full volume in order to really enter into the sound. Younger participants usually prefer the music a bit louder in comparison to a more mature audience. If you have a

mixed group, try to find a balance.

- For international groups, a mix of music from the cultures of the present participants can connect participants with different cultures
- Tipp: Ask participants to bring and play their favorite song or music during the break!
- Put some musical instruments at the table including drums, triangles, flute, and rattle and let participants know that they are there to be played.

### Online: Music versus silence.

- You can share music online during the breaks. If you put on the music, just check with your participants, if the music arrives in decent quality.
- On the contrary, you can also invite participants to have some moment of silence, e.g. sitting down for a few minutes and concentrating on breathing or sensing the surroundings – or enjoying their coffee/tea without any background music and no use of the mobile phone. They can also use their drink or food to smell, taste or enjoy with their eyes the moment.

## EXPERIENCE WITH MUSIC IN THE TESTING PHASE:

This training showed me that the expectations you have are not always met. I chose the music in the morning to initiate a happy and lively jiggling feet mood. However, my client (she always checks the room, trainer and technique in the morning), said that she gets a "shudder" from this music. She told me about a very old and ongoing music conflict in her country of origin Serbia between Eastern-style and Western-style music with various ideological and political implications. The music triggered a lot with the client. I was neither prepared nor qualified for this conversation and felt uneasy. I offered to play another playlist, but she said it was OK. The moment lasted maybe three minutes (But it felt much longer).

This Informal Moment is something I can value now, but right before the seminar, it disturbed me and did not contribute to my concentration at the start of the training. In retrospect, I am very happy that I prepared three very different music playlists, which might be as well the "lesson learned" from this experience.

Participants were happy with the music though; some were indeed jiggling with their feet.

## 5.2.2 BODILY - KINAESTHETIC

- Balls, frisbee or jumping string: If there is enough space you can offer some sports equipment. In our laboratory meeting, participants found the activity with the frisbee very refreshing for the mind.
- Encourage participants to go outside for a walk in the close surroundings, e.g. the city or a garden or park.
- Invite participants to some mindful moments: e.g. Ask them to find a quiet space for themselves, close their eyes for 2-5 minutes and concentrate on breathing or to focus their attention on a specific part of their body (e.g. the feet, the belly, the hands). This can be organized in the group or they can do it individually
- Otherwise you can start a session with:
  - a mindful activity (e.g. breathing or listening to some sounds) to bring coherence to the group
  - an energizer, e.g. inviting participants to form pairs, two by two facing each other. One person is leading, the other is mirroring the leader's movements.

### Online

Finish or start your online session with 2-3 small movements – e.g. finger exercises, bend your knees, move your shoulders, move your belly in circles. You can find many ideas for activities online. This is one link for a set of easy gym-brain-exercises with the fingers:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWvS1\\_IJS9Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWvS1_IJS9Y)

## 5.2.3 VISUAL

- Create posters during the workshop and decorate the room with them. It helps participants to connect to the topic and they can always revisit the posters during their breaks.
- Decorate the room with metaphors, (provoking) questions, or cartoons on

the wall related to the topic for sparking discussion. Colourful pictures – connected to the training or not – can cheer up the mood.

- Offer comic books related to the topic for the participants to browse through them.
- Put interesting reading material, books and articles, connected to the topic of the seminar on a table. This is an opportunity to go deeper into the content.

### Online

- Share one comic picture connected to the training during the break

## 5.2.4 SOCIAL

- Invite participants to talk to someone they have not yet talked to. If it is an international setting, invite them to use the opportunity and to dare to speak a foreign language.
- Finish your session with an open question to stimulate communication during the break and to connect people. This is useful, if participants do not know each other so well, as it gives them an entry point for talking. Some ideas:
  - What are you taking from this last session?
  - How do you plan to use the content of the session in your work?
  - Find out one fact about another person in the group.
  - Why did you decide to take part in this course?
- You can hand out a 'Get-to-know-bingo' and let participants ask for a signature when they can answer "yes" to one of the questions. The questions can be adapted to your target group and training. See how many they can get during their informal moment or where they have something in common.
- Decide together with the participants, where to go for lunch and let them discuss it during the break.

## Online Example:

- “During my second day, I framed an “Informal Moment” right in the morning after I introduced the agenda and the topic of the day. I offered the participants a 20-minute break within a Zoom breakout room in absence of the trainer. I labelled this moment a “coffee talk” and introduced it with a PowerPoint slide suggesting two icebreaker questions to talk about (one of them slightly content related). But I made it clear that they do not have to relate to those questions at all. And they did not. There was one rule for the group: to make sure that everyone who wants to contribute can contribute, as 20 minutes is not much time for 6 people. The questions were:
  - Where can you be creative?
  - Do you already have an Erasmus+ project idea for the future in your mind?
- Alternative you can also start by giving them a sentence, which they have to finish, e.g. When I travel, I like to... / When guests knock on my door, I tend to... / When I am working, I prefer to...
- Leave the online room open for an online chat or open an extra room without the trainer, where participants can connect and have a chat.
- Many online platforms offer message or chat functions, where participants can choose with whom they would like to talk and where they can leave a message.

of women and men, e.g. how to take off a pullover or what are their favorite drinks. Participants deepen their knowledge and have a bit of laughs.”

## Online Example:

- In our project, we tested an online platform called Mibo, which is a virtual world with a beach and a bar, where participants are offered different activities, which they can try out. It works similarly to a real meeting place, where you hear people talking when you get close to them and do not hear them anymore when you move away. They also offer quizzes or other online games.
- Suggest to participants to wear something with a specific colour close to the face, e.g. a scarf or a hat, or glasses (this could also be used to shape groups by the colour later in the session)



## 5.2.5 ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY

- Offer quick games, which people can play alone or in teams.
- Provide riddles or tricky activities one can solve. This can be Sudoku, quizzes, jigsaw or puzzles.
- Humorous stuff: This can be cartoons, stories or funny pictures. Example: “In the seminar on Gender, I always show a book with pictures about typical habits

## 5.2.6 MOMENTS FOR ONESELF

- Offer a space, where people can be alone, e.g. a comfortable chair or sofa or a bench outside and explain that this place is for an individual moment
- Invite participants to have a small walk alone before getting a coffee/tea in order to let them digest the content of the training. This can also be organized online

### Online

- Some meeting platforms have a 'reaction button' saying that one is gone for the moment (e.g. teams of Microsoft). If you are willing to allow this during your training session, then explain this at the beginning.
- Invite participants to a mindful moment for their eyes. Ask them to sit down or lie down and to move their eyes in circles very, very slowly for 2 minutes. This can be done online or on-site, but it is especially relaxing after an online session.

## 5.2.7 BEFORE THE TRAINING SESSION

Welcome gifts can be a good ice-breaker at the start. They can bring an extra touch to the training

- In our first meeting one of the partners brought seeds of kitchen herbs from India, Vietnam, Tanzania and Lebanon to the meeting. Participants could share them or take them home and plant them. The seeds can be an ice-breaker at the beginning, but can also be a reminder of the seminar once you are back home. (see the full blog article on Epale: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/grow-and-flow-added-value-informal-moments-adult-education>)
- Place different colorful notebooks on the chair and let participants choose the seat according to the type of notebook they feel more attracted to.


- Put postcards, stickers, a flower, or other material on the seats that can be connected to the training or to the organization running the training
- Offer participants to smell or take a drop of essential oil at the beginning of each session (e.g. Wild orange for motivation, peppermint to create energy and wake people up)

### Online

- This can also be organized for online training. If you have the address of all of the participants, you can send them some small gifts before the training or materials they need to use during the training.
- If you have more time you can decide to cook online together. You send a recipe to all participants before and invite them to cook it themselves and then eat online together or you decide to cook parallel at the same time and enjoy the process of cooking together.

## 5.2.8 AFTER THE TRAINING SESSION

For seminars, which last more than a day, and where participants need to stay overnight, trainers can provide them with options for spare time activities. This can be restaurants, which are close, sightseeing opportunities or other cultural activities.



# T

## CHAPTER 6

# TARGET GROUP

### THERE IS NO ONE FITS ALL SOLOUTION

The trainers and organizations that were invited to participate in the project iMOtion cover a wide range of target groups within the field of adult education. From people that are disadvantaged by structural discrimination, such as unemployed people, people with a migration history, people seeking refuge, economically vulnerable people or LGBTQI\*. Those identity markers might intersect. We work as well with people that are generally perceived as successful, such as team leaders or managers of companies. Moreover, all organizations are involved in training their own peer group(s) in train-the-trainer approaches or projects and trainings for educators, coaches and teachers. We found out that different target groups will respond differently to informal moments and you, as a trainer, should consider the personal and professional background of your learners, to be prepared to handle curve balls.

### 6.1 FREEDOM OF CHOICE - A CONCEPT WHIT LIMITS TO BE AWARE OF

One of the conclusions we as trainers agree upon is that framing informal moments implies the individual learner's free choice to join or leave the informal moment. All trainers prefer to facilitate trainings where

participation in the program is voluntary and the specific topic has been chosen by the participants. After all, this is the advantage of adult education. But we face other situations as well. Specific technical or software trainings are often mandatory for employees of a company to maintain their position, status and job. At least in some European countries classes for the unemployed are "semi-free choice" as unemployment assistance and allowance are interlinked with a "duty to cooperate" regarding further education. Those participants sometimes take the personal decision to only deliver a minimum performance even before the training starts. Accordingly, they might resist letting the informal enter the learning experience – as the informal moments are optional. This affects especially online trainings, where the trainer is much more limited to break the ice and stimulate a trusting group atmosphere and intrinsic motivation. Thus, one of the most important preparatory questions to ask a client and yourself always is if the participation is optional and what kind of obstacles there are. Obviously, it is more difficult to create informal moments in a mandatory class but it is not impossible either as we tried during our testing phase and we very much encourage you to do so.



## 6.2 WALK IN YOUR LEARNERS' SHOES:EXPLORE YOUR TARGET GROUPS AND THEIR NEEDS

In the following, we give some examples of how the target group influences the perception of informal moments in education. Firstly, in adult education, we must take into consideration that our learners won't have had the same experiences with regard to formal educational systems. Some enjoyed their respective learning experiences, while others had discouraging experiences under similar or entirely different conditions. Some dropped out of school or college. Not all participants will enter a training with an exclusively positive set of expectations. Depending on their country-of-origin, refugees and/or migrants might come from rather traditional knowledge-based educational systems and need a little bit longer to adapt to the ideas of choice, rest, distraction or mind wandering as an integral part of formal learning.

Including informal moments in your training takes space and time. You need to be willing and able to sacrifice content. But if the target group is expected to pass a formal examination, your learners have a higher perceived need and, in many cases, a justified expectation to get all the necessary content delivered by you. Thus, you should tread lightly and be self-aware when it comes to the decision of which part or aspect of the content can be sacrificed. This is extra difficult if you are hired for a very formal certified class and the number of training hours and break times cannot be influenced. However, it is not wrong to point this out in front of the learners. Make your choices and reasoning known. This is an example of professional self-care. A trainer is not a simple tool to be exposed to everybody else's standards and expectations.

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If your training is labelled as fully accessible and suited for people with disabilities make sure that the informal moments are as well. In fact, make it your mission to always make implicit as well as explicit exclusions known to participants. Again, this is an act of professional self-care. Making participants aware of your professional reasoning and your conscious choices gives them a backdrop for the learning offer you host and thus also your reasonings for including conscious informal moments.

Activities outside the seminar room require special preparations from your side. Be aware that people in general do not owe you to tell you beforehand if they expect a "classic seminar" or an "inclusive seminar". Citizen learners have equal claims to access to education. Thus, it is smart to check if the place is in a barrier-free building. Activities in nature and the surroundings should not come as a surprise, so make sure you communicate them prior to the training. Not only but especially if they require preparations from the participant's side, such as for instance sturdy shoes or specific physical abilities. Don't make assumptions about what you consider "normal".

Visiting a restaurant together is a very suitable way to initiate an informal moment. It however requires a specific financial ability. This does not establish a barrier in a group of managers or team leaders but is not the right choice in a group of unemployed people or in a mixed group where you are not familiar with the financial backgrounds of the participants. One possibility is to find a funding scheme or pricing system that covers the costs of catering.

We might be tempted to think that informal moments are per se a very enjoyable and fun experience for everyone. But as the formal parts of learning, informal moments also have the potential to push the learners out of their individual comfort zone. Introvert people, for instance, are challenged much more by an informal moment including group activities as by any part of the formal schedule of a training. Thus, we need to have a good balance between informal moments that give space for retreat and alone time and informal moments that frame joint actions and initiate connections. Thus, make sure that both introverts and extroverts are offered opportunities that either serve them or challenge them.

### 6.3 BEING AWARE OF STRUCTURAL DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION

With more homogenous groups it appears easier to frame informal moments. In particular, if structurally discriminated against people are involved. Structural discrimination refers to how groups are marginalized and disadvantaged, due to discriminatory practices that are embedded and normalized throughout (the majority) society. Structural discrimination involves public or private institutional policies. Especially at school or university, it has a long history. Structural discrimination is less about individual acts of prejudice and

conscious decisions but rather about a series of unconscious biases. Thus, it manifests more subtly and is often invisible to those who have the advantages or privileges of that system. At the time being educational institutions provide advantages for some members and produce disadvantages for other members of society. As a systemic problem, educational staff tends to be recruited from the group that have enjoyed their respective learning experiences and flourished in the system given and not from marginalized groups. This group is at risk to repeat embedded patterns. However, due to its often informal character the sector of adult education is more permeable and has more potential to address marginalized learners and trainers. It has the power to bring forth the people affected by structural discrimination and see them as valuable resources, who might take the decision to train peers. To take the decision to frame a training offer as target-group specific can contribute to create safer learning environments. Being among peers makes marginalized groups feel safer, and the trainers will have to put less effort into the creation and maintenance of a trustful atmosphere during formal and informal moments.



Migrants, LGBTQI\* or women feel relatively safe in homogenous groups. Meanwhile they often have already experienced discrimination during informal parts of public education or in mixed groups. We must remember that low status people in school are more vulnerable and stressed-out during breaks than during formal teaching. One might be inclined to think that this behavior is not common in adult education, but unfortunately it is not absent either. Informal moments should not be used by the participants to live out or learn any unsocial behavior as soon as the more formal frame is loosened, and the trainer is more absent – but this might exactly be the current need of a participant full of anger.

Thus, whatever utopian thought we have, even during informal moments we cannot escape our role as a trainer, and the expectations participants have towards that role. Especially if we acknowledge our own responsibility to contribute to the creation of safer informal moments. If toxic behavior occurs during informal moments, you will still have to intervene in the same way as you would during the formal moments of a training.

Even we know that full employment is unachievable in nowadays society. The mantra of full employment and “everybody can get a job if they want to” has been inscribed on the banner of all industrial societies for at least a century. As a result, unemployment comes with a stigma. Job loss can bring a person a range of emotions such as shame, anger or fear and long-term health issues such as sleeplessness or anxiety. Job applications naturally result in rejections leading to a general low mood. For people that have neither experienced unemployment of a family’s breadwinner during their childhood or youth nor have been marginalized because of another reason it might be their first experience of being excluded or dependent. On the other hand, times of unemployment – being

outside the career hamster wheel - open the chance for further own development and reflection. Providers of adult educational training offers often recruit among the unemployed. Some government money is dedicated to help to train the jobless.

As trainers, we prefer when this money is not tied to specific training purposes, but the learner is given the freedom to choose their own path and goals of further qualification. If adult training offers a space to think about things that are not directly job-related, it can support the participants to free themselves from the pressure of expectations and to rediscover the fun of learning. Informal moments in training can hereby contribute to strengthening the well-being of our learners.

We have to consider that members of marginalized groups have a double agenda when participating in group trainings. Often, if not always, energy is put into thoughts and actions not related to the subject matter of the training. For instance to find a place in the group, to communicate in a foreign language, to hide or show the personal sense of one's own gender, to disguise or share class status. The list of these scenarios can go even further. In general energy is spent to ruminate on a social performance that is appreciated, or to take the decision to do without the appreciation this time, or to choose to educate your fellow humans on their blind spots. These learners get drained and have a particular need for breaks, distraction and recreation time and we can try to address this need through informal moments.

Finally, as a trainer, you must keep an eye on the fact that the frame “freedom of choice” is clearly communicated over and over and that this mantra is not undermined by the group dynamics itself. Our experience is that some members of a group feel that they must insist on somebody to take part and perform in a specific way. Hereby some groups develop some sort of group pressure. During our testing phase we observed a case where a group developed a merely competitive dynamic with the various skill games offered and one participant clearly felt gradually uncomfortable and left out. In these scenarios it is important you are attentive and intervene in order to comfort the respective participant.<sup>19</sup>

## 6.4 ONLINE - TRAININGS: SETTING THE LIMITS FOR EVERYDAY USE

If you carry out online-trainings within the European Union, it might be that you are in a privileged training environment. Your target group could be described as: western, educated, industrialized, rich and developed. Otto Petrovic, professor at the faculty of economics and social sciences at the University of Graz, sums this up with the acronym of WEIRD. Petrovic rightly points out that impact research on E-learning is overwhelmingly done using WEIRD learners, who are particularly unsuited to drawing conclusions about the remaining 88% of the world's population.

A part of the people that enter the EU as refugees or migrants originate from this 88%. During an unwanted worldwide experiment, Covid-19 has shown us that remote learning exacerbated inequities. Students from low-income families faced more obstacles regarding learning access, driven by gaps in access to the internet and an own laptop/device in an undisturbed learning environment. Informal moments during remote trainings should strive to close those gaps instead of widening them. But the

very least we can do is to address those gaps and raise awareness.

Within the privileged field of European adult education, we can nevertheless reflect on which learners deserve closer attention from the trainer's side. The age of our learners is surely one of the characteristics that influences our options significantly. Many elderly people fail to adapt to the online-environment and have barely mastered the “Zoom-format” even though this differs strongly from country to country. If we wish to create informal moments through alternative software as e.g. Mibo ([www.mibo.com](http://www.mibo.com)) or a combination of different technical applications we quickly reach our limits with the elderly or other people with limited digital literacy. In this case the informal moments we create will not outweigh the stress, frustration and exclusion we also generate. The learners will feel stress caused by an unpleasant feeling of inadequacy and slowness. In this case we better stick to the instruments adaptable to zoom-like conference tools like ad hoc videos, breakout sessions or breaks that involve movement. In addition, many trainers in adult education choose their profession as a second career after they obtained expert knowledge in a specific field. So given, at a certain age many trainers are much less equipped to explore technical possibilities as the so-called digital native generations which are much more into virtual reality and game-based learning.

## 6.5 VIRTUAL WORLDS: NOT YET HARVESTED FOR THE LEARNERS IN ADULT EDUCATION

We wish not to downplay discrimination or misogyny in cyberspace, but virtual worlds offer attractive training opportunities if we think of the possibilities to move and do the sorely missed Smalltalk during online trainings and to make physical limitations disappear. The thought of an online training that allows people to participate with a random avatar that does not expose any of the signifiers such as age, ethnic origin, or gender is fascinating. Imagine a kangaroo talking to a dinosaur free from the visible characteristics that would allow others to put you into a box and the prejudice and division this engenders. Berlin-based online platform Wondder [www.wondder.io](http://www.wondder.io) exploits the chances of virtual reality one step further addressing the topic of structural discrimination directly. They set up virtual

leadership or diversity trainings where you are a different person - maybe of a different gender or another skin color than your own - and you experience the world through this perspective.

The obvious thing is that most online learning takes place totally informal. It occurs incidentally as a by-product of all activities we carry out on the internet. During this learning, a classic trainer is totally absent and not necessarily wished to be present either. How come that we have multiplayer online games very much suitable for collaborative work, team building and informal moments such as small talk and giving gifts but hardly ever multiplayer online learning rooms? When it comes to online environments, to exploit the possibilities for adult education, we could definitely benefit from an intergenerational exchange. Maybe this could be an idea for another Erasmus+ project... .





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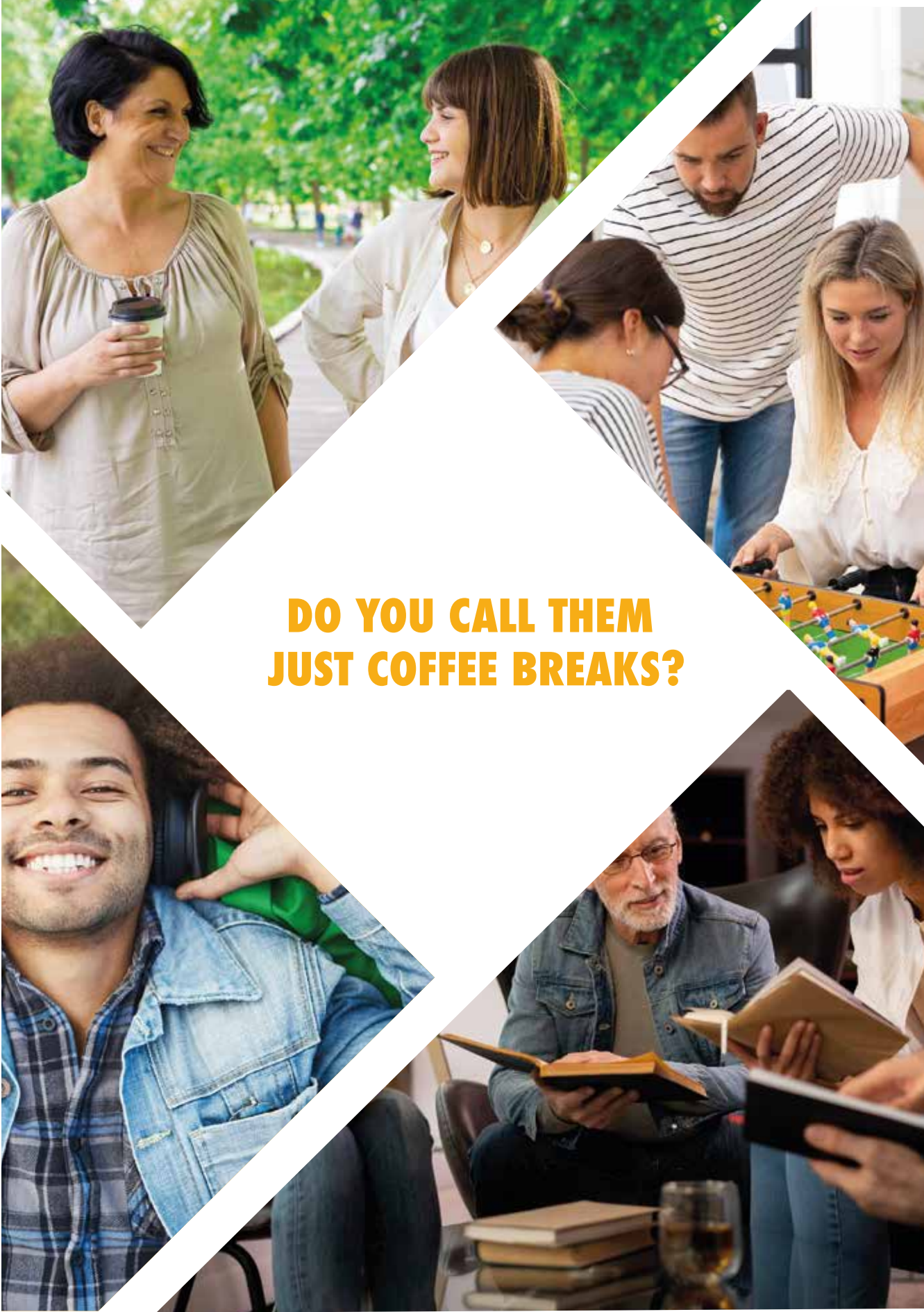
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**DO YOU CALL THEM  
JUST COFFEE BREAKS?**