



international
FINAL SEMINAR

**EMPOWERING
SCHOOLS FOR MENTAL
WELL-BEING:
RESULTS AND FUTURE
DIRECTIONS**

27 MAY 2025



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PROGRAMME

EMPOWERING SCHOOLS FOR MENTAL WELL-BEING: RESULTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- 1 Welcome & Project Overview
- 2 Understanding Mental Health and Mental Health Literacy
- 3 Introducing Virtual Camps: Concepts and Practices
- 4 Student Voices: Reflections on the Virtual Camp Experience
- 5 Looking Ahead: Opportunities for Future Development
- 6 Implementation Guide: Peer-Based Methods for Mental Well-being
- 7 Methodology Guide: A Framework for Implementation
- 8 Shaping the Future: From Local Practice to Broader Impact

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Elina Santala

About the project

Promoting mental well-being through online exchange in secondary schools

wExchange is an EU co-funded Erasmus+ Cooperation partnership project.

8
PARTNERS

4
COUNTRIES

Finland
Portugal
Slovenia
Greece

3
YEARS OF
COLLABORATION

Start: 1 September, 2022
End: 31 August, 2025



University of Novo mesto
Faculty of *Health Sciences*



UNIVERSITY OF
WEST ATTICA
ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΔΥΤΙΚΗΣ ΑΤΤΙΚΗΣ



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ŠOLSKI CENTER
NOVO MESTO



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About the project

Promoting mental well-being through online exchange in secondary schools

OVERALL AIM

- to develop peer-to-peer methods to support mental health literacy and
- to promote mental wellbeing.

This work was done together with pupils, so that the methods focus on everyday life of young people.

The project is based on previous projects that focused on youth participation (EDDIS, SHEHAP).

SUB-OBJECTIVES

- 1) to promote youth **mental health literacy skills**
- 2) to develop **peer-based activity** for promotion of mental wellbeing with young people
- 3) to develop **virtual exchange** methods for schools
- 4) to put the **knowledge** gained from the project **into practice**



KEY OUTPUTS OF THE PROJECT

Development of peer activity

- A research-based summary of young people's mental health literacy skills and methods
- A training package of peer-based methods for schools to support the mental health literacy of young people
- The methods are developed together with pupils online in international atmosphere



Development of virtual exchange

- A designed and tested framework for virtual student exchanges. The background of the framework is influenced by previous research and experiences in the implementation of virtual exchanges and virtual teaching
- A set of two virtual camps and two workshops design by schoolteachers, together their pupils and experts from HEIs
- A virtual implementing guide which is a manual for teachers for using these virtual methods

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY: FOUNDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENT WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS

Prof. Evanthia Sakellari



MENTAL HEALTH



Mental health is an integral part of our general health and well-being and a basic human right.

Having good mental health means we are better able to connect, function, cope and thrive

Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the other.

MENTAL HEALTH

**Did you
know?**



1

A growing crisis:
1 in 7 adolescents faces a
mental health disorder

Globally, one in seven 10-19-year-olds experiences a mental disorder, accounting for 15% of the global burden of disease in this age group.

2

**Mental health disorders are
now among the **top causes**
of adolescents' disability**

Depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.

3

**Ignoring adolescent mental
health has **lifelong**
consequences**

The consequences of failing to address adolescent mental health conditions extend to adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults

MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

aims to:

- 
- 1 Strengthen an individual's capacity to regulate emotions
 - 2 Enhance alternatives to risk-taking behaviours
 - 3 Build resilience for managing difficult situations and adversity
 - 4 Promote supportive social environments and social networks

A key component of effective promotion is **improving mental health literacy**, that is, equipping individuals with the **knowledge**, **understanding**, and **practical skills** to **recognize mental health issues** and to **seek appropriate help** when needed.

MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

“

The term mental health literacy was first introduced in 1997, and it was defined as: “**knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention**”

(Jorm et al., 1997).

”



Understanding mental disorders and their treatments, how to maintain positive mental health



Reducing stigma associated with mental illness



Improving help-seeking efficacy



MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION AMONG ADOLESCENTS



Protective and supportive environments: family, school, and broader community

School-based interventions are among the most effective mental health promotion strategies across countries of all income levels.

INTRODUCING VIRTUAL CAMPS: CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

Toni Pohjatalo



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INTRODUCTION

Virtual exchange and its potentials

Virtual exchange is an educational approach that connects participants from different cultural backgrounds through digital platforms. It promotes intercultural understanding, global competency, and meaningful interactions across geographic boundaries.

The potential benefits include:

- Enhanced intercultural competence
- Improved communication skills
- Collaborative learning
- Global awareness



wEXCHANGE VIRTUAL EVENTS

2
VIRTUAL CAMPS

2
WORKSHOPS

20
STUDENTS/event
FROM 4 DIFERENT COUNTRIES



The main goal was to spread knowledge about mental health and well-being.

The structure of the camps were based on the **HAND OF MENTAL HEALTH**



ACTIVITIES



Food, sleep and rest

- Collecting data on students' mood and sleep patterns
- International discussions: What helps you sleep better?
- Taking photos of school lunches
- Guessing the nutritional content of different meals
- Designing a personal food challenge for healthier habits



Emotions and relationships

- Finding music that reflects different emotions
- Small group discussions about real-life situations that commonly trigger anxiety or psychological stress in teenagers
- Proposing and sharing possible solutions for those challenges

ACTIVITIES



Physical Activity

- Exploring different forms of exercise for mental well-being
- Sharing personal routines and motivations for staying active
- Engaging in movement-based challenges during the virtual camp
- Reflecting on how physical activity affects mood and focus



Creativity



- Expressing emotions through art, writing, or photography
- Creating personal mood boards or visual journals
- Participating in creative workshops (e.g., drawing, storytelling)
- Discussing how creative expression supports mental health

FEEDBACK

- **Students want to interact and build real connections** across countries
- **Interactive and engaging activities** proved to be the most effective
- **Thorough content planning is crucial** – prepare well in advance
- **The beginning matters** – focus on introductions and ice-breaking

Virtual vs. Live Meetings: What We Learned

Virtual meetings are not equal compared to live meetings.

However, virtual meetings were able to fulfill their purpose:

- Connecting with peers from different nationalities,
- Learning from other cultures,
- Using diverse working methods,
- Gaining insight into the main topic.





STUDENT VOICES: **REFLECTIONS ON THE** **VIRTUAL CAMP** **EXPERIENCE**



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STUDENT VOICES

Final comments

Our peers were very co-operative and enjoyed participating in these learning activities.

We enjoyed ourselves a lot.

We felt a more trusting educational environment and increased motivation.

We became more open to new experiences.

We improved our language and personal skills like self-confidence and maturity.

We upgraded our teamwork and collaborative skills.

LOOKING AHEAD: OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Barbara Cesar



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What can be future development opportunities?



1

Global expansion and accessibility

- Involving participants from all parts of the world regardless of their social status,
- Participants of different age groups: not just secondary but also higher levels of education
- The aim is to develop cross-cultural communication, critical thinking, teamwork, argumentation, public speaking.



2

Enhanced learning with AI

- The use of AI tutors or chatbots
- It allows discussions about the role of technology, critical thinking about privacy and ethical use of technology.



3

Integration in formal education

- Developing hybrid models (part virtual, part physical travel)

What can be future development opportunities?



Long-term community

- Platforms supporting long-term partnerships,
- Development of teacher networks across countries for international (cross-border) collaborations (co-designing & co-leading virtual camps and exchanges),
- Peer help and monitoring between past and new participants



Career programmes involving local and international community

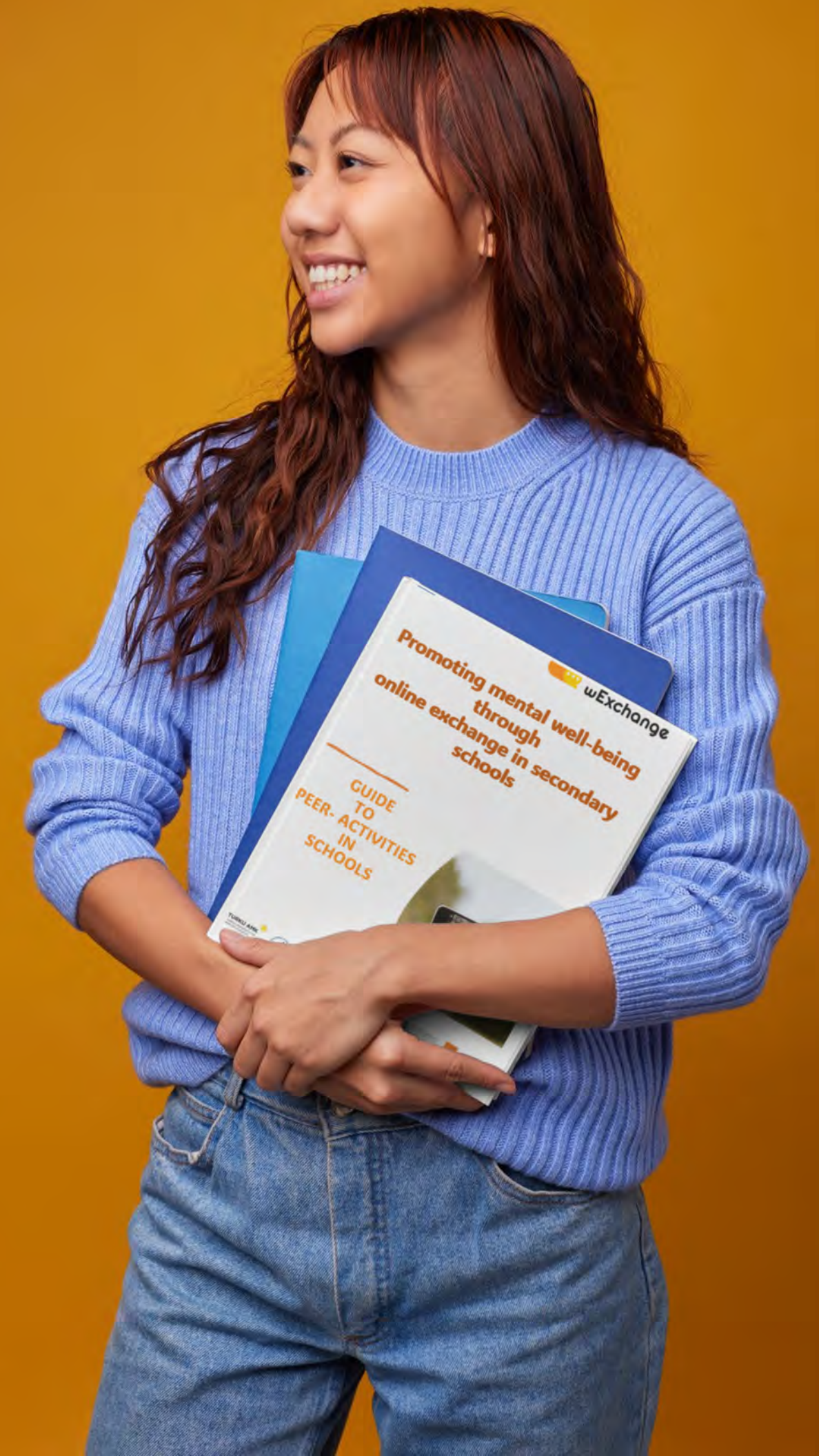
- Virtual camps involving mentors from industry or entrepreneurship (international career days),
- Developing future career readiness skills in real-world projects (startup teams) or how to prepare for global workforces

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE: UTILIZING PEER-BASED METHODS TO PROMOTE MENTAL WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS

Cláudia Bacatum



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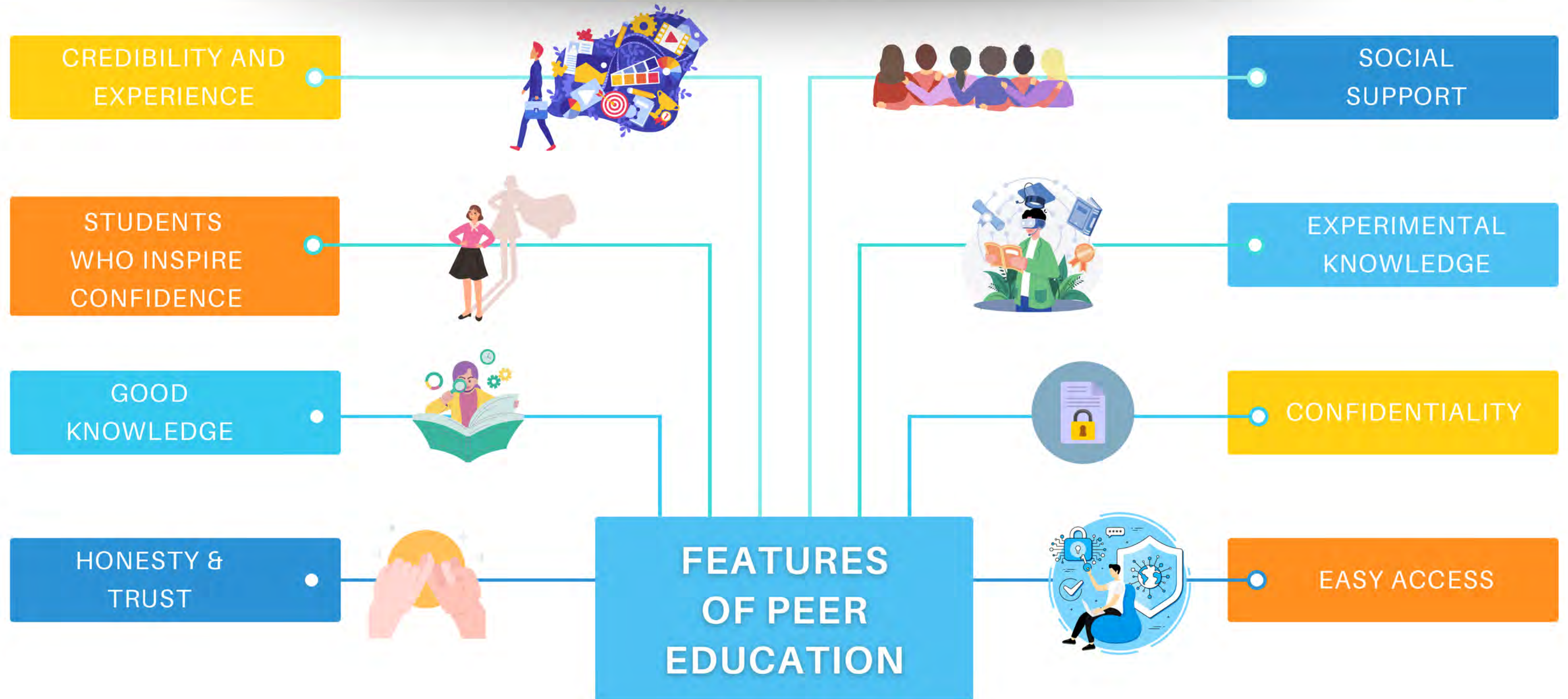


WHAT IS PEER EDUCATION?



BAPTISTA, I., TOMÉ, G., MATOS, M. G., GASPAR, T., & CRUZ, J. (2009). A ESCOLA. EM M. G. MATOS, & D. SAMPAIO, JOVENS COM SAÚDE - DIÁLOGO COM UMA GERAÇÃO (PP. 202-214). ALFRAGIDE: TEXTO EDITORES.

WHAT IS PEER EDUCATION?



GUIDE TO PEER-ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS



PROMOTING MENTAL WELL-BEING THROUGH ONLINE EXCHANGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

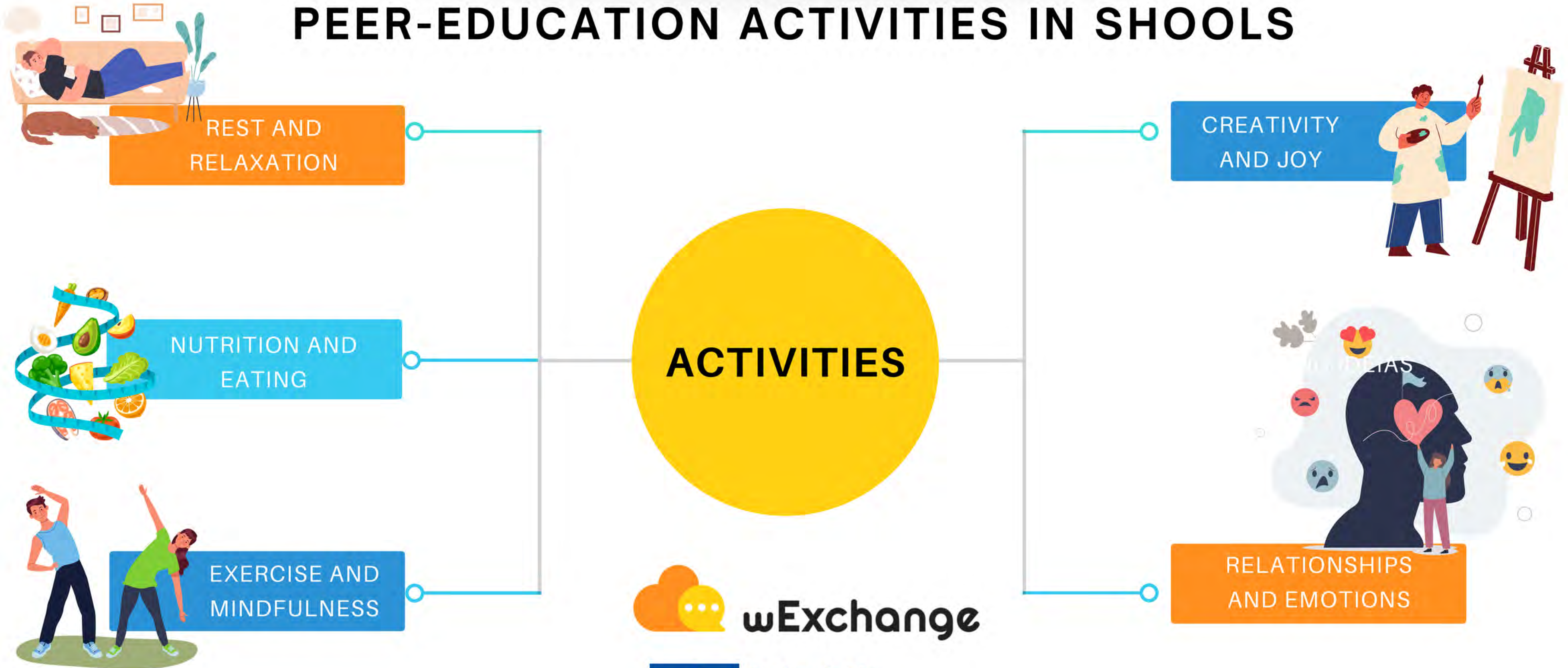
WHY THIS GUIDE?

The guide includes **various activities**, implemented and piloted in virtual camps and workshops

The aim of this guide is to present a set of activities that use peer methods to support mental well-being in schools.

GUIDE TO PEER-ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

PEER-EDUCATION ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS



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EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

REST AND RELAXATION



Relaxation; Sensing;
Describing feelings



10-15 min



Finding what relaxes you,
relaxation, observe describing
own feelings



Bingo grid (or paper to do it),
pencil

FIND DIFFERENT WAYS TO RELAX



EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

EATING AND NUTRITION



Know your food, what food consists



15-30 min



Calories in food, ingredients in food, what is healthy and what is not



Pictures from different types of common foods



WHAT FOOD CONSISTS OF



EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

EXERCISE AND MINDFULNESS



Promote overall well-being



15 min



Mental well-being: daily routine



Mobile; Computer.
Digital tools: Tik Tok; padlet

EXERCISE AND MINDFULNESS - TIKTOK



EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

CREATIVITY AND JOY



Promote mental health and well-being through creativity



30-45 min



Well-being, Creative writing, Poetry, Collaborative activity



Computer or paper & pens/pencils

BEING A POET FOR A DAY



STUDY CASES

RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS



Self-help, recognition of emotional states, team work



45 min (group work 15 min, 30 min reporting and discussion)



Recognizing emotional states, developing empathy and peer-to-peer help, team work



Paper, pens



SELF-HELP GROUP



CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

A peer education activity has an impact that goes far beyond the activity itself.

It involves **knowledge, confidence, autonomy, decisions** and **promotion** of wellbeing and makes a lasting difference to peers' lives.



METHODOLOGY GUIDE: A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Sofia Moreira



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PRACTICAL ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

Technological infrastructure

Ensure reliable internet and access to necessary digital tools

Time management

Coordinate across different time zones

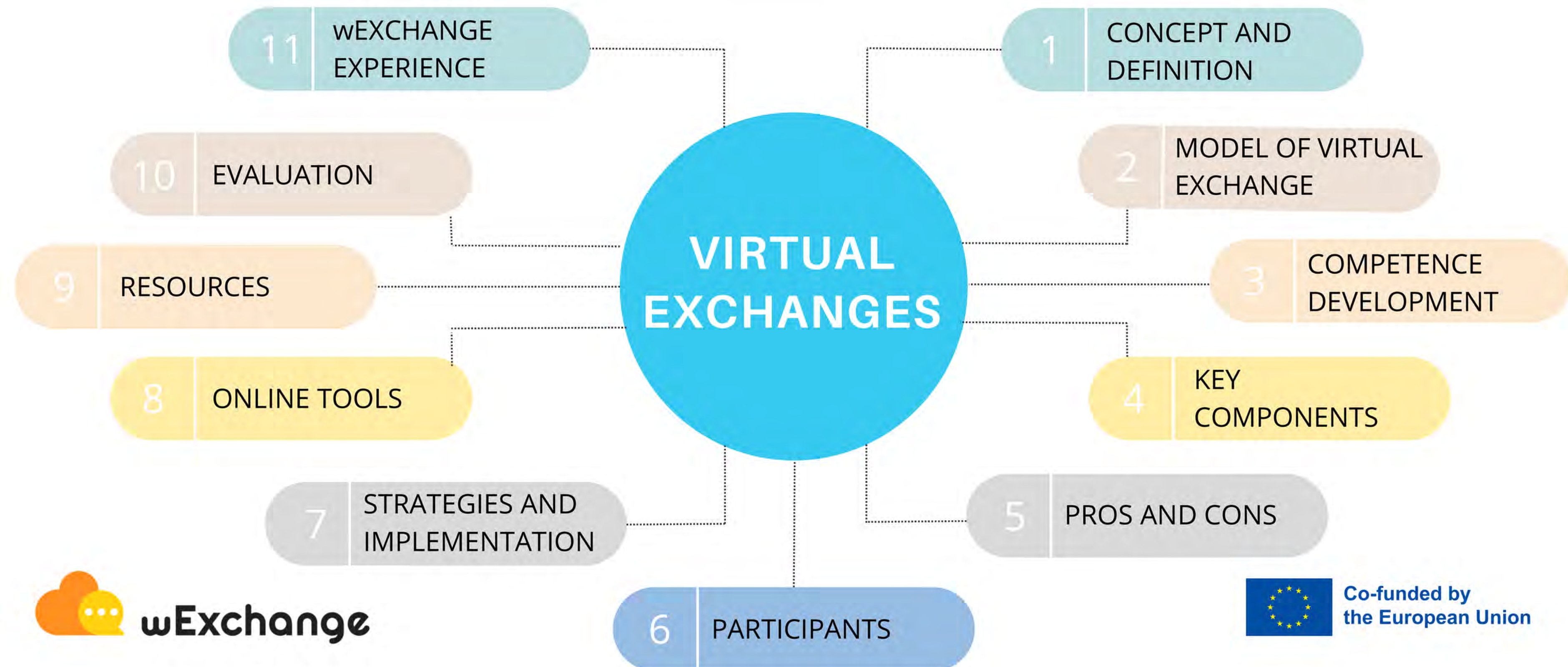
Cultural differences

Be aware of and sensitive to diverse communication styles and norms

Support and training

Provide adequate training for both educators and students

VIRTUAL EXCHANGE METHOD GUIDE



CONCEPT AND DEFINITION



Virtual exchanges are educational programs that facilitate cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and learning among participants from different countries or cultural backgrounds through virtual platforms and digital technology. These exchanges aim to promote intercultural understanding, global competency, and meaningful interactions across geographic boundaries.

MODEL OF VIRTUAL EXCHANGE

Virtual exchanges can be facilitated in various ways to suit different team needs. Some methods include synchronous exchanges, peer-to-peer interactions, and group collaborations.

1

Synchronous Exchanges

Are real-time interactions where participants from different countries engage directly with their peers through video conferencing platforms to facilitate immediate dialogue and feedback through collaboration and discussion.

2

Peer-to-Peer Exchanges

Involve participants from different countries or backgrounds being paired or grouped to engage in collaborative, small-group interactions.

3

Group Collaborations

Participants from different countries collaborate in virtual teams to complete projects, solve problems, or achieve common goals and collaborate on tasks.

COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

Virtual exchanges help develop the skills for effective cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and learning.

Key aspects include:

- Intercultural competence
- Communication skills
- Collaboration skills
- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving skills
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Digital competence
- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Global awareness
- Reflective practice



These elements prepare participants to be effective global citizens, capable of navigating and contributing in a globalized world.

KEY COMPONENTS

The key components of a successful virtual exchange program include:

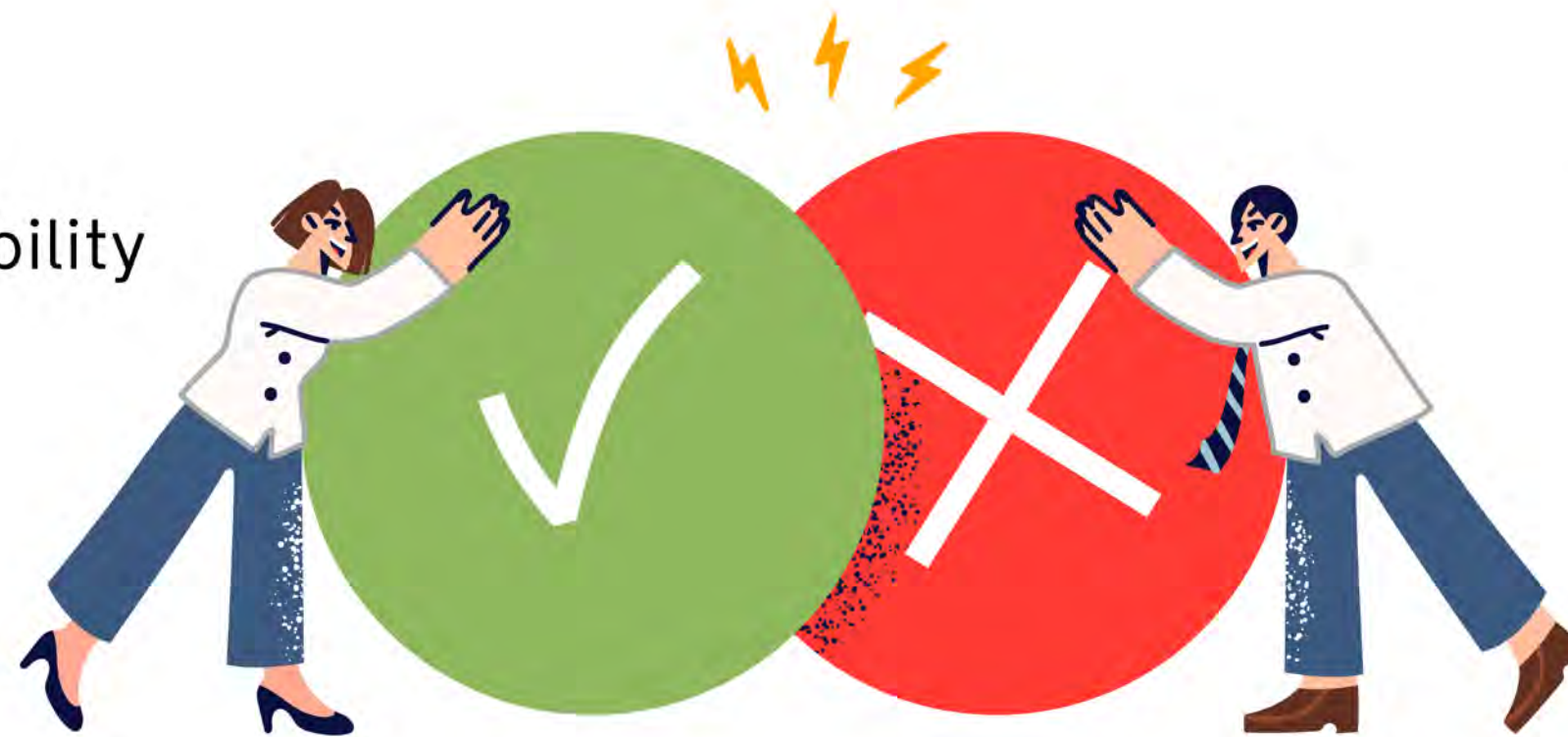
- Participants
- Aims
- Curriculum and content
- Technology and platforms
- Facilitation and support
- Cultural competence
- Language learning
- Assessment and evaluation
- Community building
- Sustainability and scalability



By integrating these elements, virtual exchange programs enable meaningful experiences that promote intercultural understanding and global collaboration.

PROS AND CONS

- Convenience and Flexibility
- Affordability
- Cultural Awareness
- Language Skills
- European Citizenship



- Technological Issues
- Technological Gap
- Limited Social Engagement
- Cultural Misperception
- Time Zone Differences
- Limited Cultural Immersion

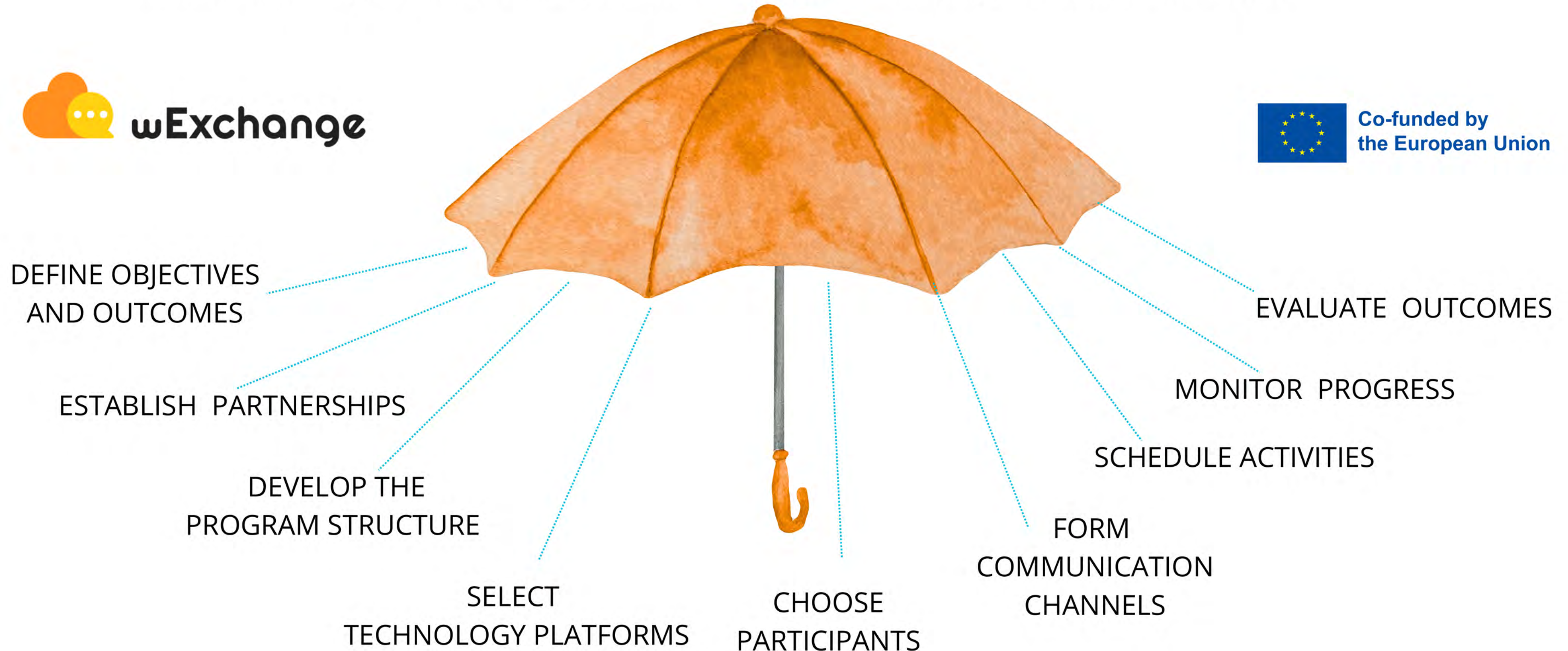
PARTICIPANTS

Virtual exchanges are designed for diverse groups, including **school students**, **educators**, **other professionals**, **community members**, and **youth organizations**.



STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

Virtual exchanges involve careful planning, coordination, and implementation:



VIRTUAL TOOLS

There are various virtual tools and platforms available to facilitate virtual exchanges.
Here are some commonly used:



RESOURCES NEEDED



EVALUATION TOOLS AND TIPS FOR SCHOOLS



- Feedback meetings after every Virtual Session day with the teachers/organizers.
- Collecting feedback from school students.
- Setting targets before Virtual Session and assessing, how the targets were reached afterwards.
- Finding different ways to collect feedback from school students.
- Reflection and creating a development plan for the next Virtual Session.

OUR EXPERIENCE

- High engagement in activities
- Interactive use of technology
- Group work improved teamwork

Positive
outcomes



- Some struggled with fast pace
- Tech issues disrupted lessons
- Limited support for learning needs

Challenges
Encountered



Recommendations
for future
implementation



- Adapt teaching to learning speeds
- Update and maintain digital tools
- Train teachers in tech troubleshooting
- Support pupils with learning needs
- Promote inclusive teaching practices



SHAPING THE FUTURE: FROM LOCAL PRACTICE TO BROADER IMPACT

Prof. Karmen Erjavec



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THE IMPORTANCE OF TODAY'S EVENT



- This event brought together partners from different countries to share **knowledge**, **experiences**, and **innovations**.
- **The main focus:** strengthening youth mental health through digital, participatory, and peer-based approaches.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND INSIGHTS

- **Virtual camps** have proven to be an effective practice for empowering young people and fostering open dialogue on mental health.
- The **active involvement of students** highlighted the importance of including their voices in co-creating meaningful solutions.
- **Developed materials** (guides, methodologies) serve as concrete tools for broader implementation.



KEY FUTURE DIRECTIONS



Cross-sector collaboration:

Building sustainable networks that connect schools, healthcare institutions, and communities.



Support for education professionals:

Providing continuous training, mentorship, and tools for confidently delivering preventive activities.



Further development of virtual camps:

Increasing accessibility, using new technologies, including vulnerable groups, and ensuring regular evaluation of impact.

Questions

Please feel free to
ask any questions
you may have.



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Would you like more
information about the
project?



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