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How to Mitigate Negative Attitudes Toward the LGBTQ+ Community: A comparative study using the Structured Democratic Dialogue process

Hasan Habes¹, Kaj Björkqvist¹, and Andreas Andreou²

¹Åbo Akademi University, Vaasa, Finland, ²Research & Innovation Center for Social and Educational Sciences, Larnaca, Cyprus

hasan.habes@abo.fi

Abstract. The article discusses the outcomes of two Structured Democratic Dialogues (SDD) held in Padua, Italy and Vaasa, Finland respectively, with the aim of exploring how to mitigate the negative attitudes and atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community in these two regions. The participants identified key areas for altering the negative attitudes and creating a positive atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community and suggested 77 action plans in Padua, Italy and 31 in Vaasa, Finland. The study reveals that both groups of participants emphasized the importance of education, media representation, and legal protection to combat negative attitudes and promote acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. However, due to the differences in the national legal systems, the Padua participants placed more emphasis on legal reforms, whereas the Vaasa participants focused more on cultural and educational action plans.

Keywords. LGBTQ+ community, Structured Democratic Dialogue process, inclusion, attitudes, social integration

1. Introduction

The LGBTQ+ community continues to face significant challenges for equality worldwide, including in Europe. Discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals persists in their workplaces, sports, law, and daily lives. While some European countries have made progress in protecting LGBTQ+ rights, there is still much work to be done to ensure full legal protection and equality (Ayoub & Kollman, 2021).

Although equality is legally protected in the European Union (EU), the actual rights and protections provided to LGBTQ+ individuals vary greatly among member states. Nordic countries have taken a progressive stance on LGBTQ+ rights, while some other European countries have not provided adequate legal protections. Despite efforts to ensure full equality and legal protection for all LGBTQ+ individuals across Europe, significant challenges and variations still remain to achieve this goal (Ayoub & Kollman, 2021; Holzhacker, 2012; Kollman, 2009; Kollman & Waites, 2009; Nyegaard et al., 2022).

Given that these challenges and variations in LGBTQ+ rights have a direct impact on the attitudes of the general public toward the LGBTQ+ community and its integration into

society, this paper aims to investigate action plans that can be implemented to improve negative attitudes and create a more positive attitude toward the LGBTQ+ community. For this purpose, two case studies were conducted in two different national contexts in Europe; one in Italy, where the society is generally more conservative regarding LGBTQ+ rights, protection and acceptance, and another in Finland, where the society is comparatively more progressive on this issue.

Despite recent progress in LGBTQ+ rights, Italy still poses significant challenges for LGBTQ+ individuals, who continue to face discrimination and violence. Although a law allowing civil unions for same-sex couples was passed in parliament in 2016, it falls short of providing equal rights and benefits to those enjoyed by heterosexual married couples. In addition, same-sex couples still are not permitted to adopt children together (Ioverno et al., 2019; Trappolin, 2017). Anti-discrimination laws in Italy are also limited in scope and enforcement is weak, resulting in a significant amount of hate crimes against the LGBTQ+ community (Roberts, 2021). In order to ensure greater legal protection and societal acceptance, Italy must take stronger action toward promoting equality for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Finland has made significant progress in protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, yet there is still space for further improvement. In 2017, Finland legalized same-sex marriage and allowed same-sex couples to adopt children (Sateenkaariperheet, 2019). Moreover, transgender individuals are permitted to change their legal gender without undergoing any medical treatment or surgery (Castagnaro, 2023). European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020) reported that 84% of Finnish participants would be comfortable having a gay or lesbian person in their family or circle of friends. Nonetheless, there is still work to be done to ensure full equality and inclusion for LGBTQ+ individuals in Finland.

Despite the existence of anti-discrimination laws in Finland that explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in various areas such as employment, education, housing, and healthcare, there have been reports of discriminatory and harassing incidents toward LGBTQ+ individuals in these domains (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020; Mannila, 2021; Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, 2023). These reports highlight the ongoing challenges that the LGBTQ+ community faces in achieving full equality and non-discrimination in Finland.

Moreover, Habes et al. (2019) found that negative attitudes toward minority groups, including the LGBTQ+ community, constitute one of the most significant obstacles to their integration in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia, Finland. As a result, the triggering question (TQ): "What actions (political, educational, financial, sociocultural, technological, etc.) can be taken to change the patterns of negative attitudes & a negative atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community (sexual/gender minority groups)?" was designed for these studies to investigate ways to improve the negative attitudes and atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community in Finland and Italy.

2. Method

2.1. Structured Democratic Dialogue Process

The Structured Democratic Dialogue (SDD) process (Laouris & Christakis, 2007) was utilized as the chosen methodology to facilitate this study's dialogues. The SDD process is an effective way to engage participants with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, enabling them to develop a shared understanding of a complex social issue and create an action plan to address it (Laouris, 2012).

This particular methodology (Laouris, 2012) was selected because of its unique ability to actively engage participants in the process. It promotes the development of a common language and shared understanding of the complex issues at hand, enabling participants to formulate their ideas, suggestions, and strategies with clarity. Overall, the SDD process equips participants with the necessary tools to develop a coherent and effective action plan to overcome the problematic situation under investigation.

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) (Laouris & Christakis, 2007) is employed within the SDD methodology, which ensures that each participant has an equal opportunity to contribute their ideas, with authenticity and equal importance. Additionally, the Cogniscope™ system (Christakis 1996) utilizes Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) to prioritize the influence of each action on the others (Flanagan & Christakis, 2009; Laouris, 2012; Laouris & Michealides, 2017).

This approach was also adopted to avoid the Groupthink phenomenon (Janis, 1982; Whyte, 1952), where participants may feel compelled to conform to the majority's views and opinions during meetings. The methodology also aims to prevent the Erroneous Priorities Effect phenomenon (Dye, 1999), where the majority's perceived importance of actions dominates the solution strategy. By using the NGT and ISM techniques, the SDD methodology promotes a balanced and inclusive approach that ensures each participant's ideas and actions are given equal weight and consideration, regardless of their status or background.

The implementation of the SDD process (Flanagan & Christakis 2009) comprises six phases (Fig. 1). The first phase involves formulating a triggering question (TQ), which provides a framework for the ensuing dialogue.

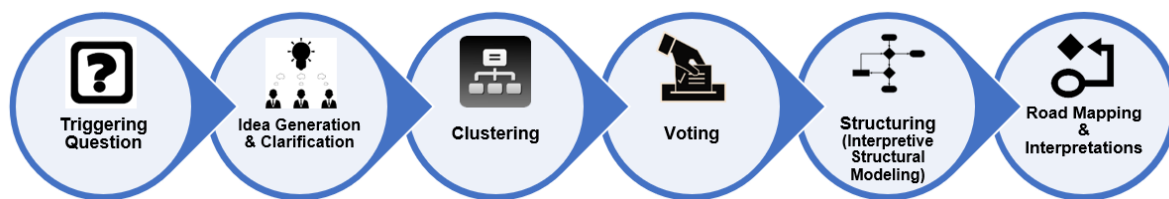


Figure 1. *Implementation of the SDD process*

During the second phase, participants are invited to generate ideas/action plans one by one with a single statement by responding to the TQ. The proposed ideas/action plans are recorded as they are uttered using the Cogniscope™ software and printed. These printed ideas/action plans are then displayed on a wall for everyone to see. Once all the ideas/action plans have been collected, participants are given the opportunity to clarify their ideas to prevent any misunderstandings.

The third phase focuses on organizing and grouping the ideas/action plans generated in the second phase. During this phase, participants engage in comprehensive discussions to identify common features and similarities among the proposed ideas/action plans. The participants work collaboratively to identify common themes and group the ideas accordingly by agree on names for each cluster. These cluster names are then registered on the Cogniscope™ software for record-keeping. This helps to create a clearer picture of the overall ideas/action plans proposed.

During phase four, the ideas/action plans are prioritized based on their perceived importance and feasibility by the participants. They are asked to individually vote for the top five ideas they believe are most crucial for solving the TQ. Any idea that receives two or more

votes, indicating its perceived importance by the participants, is then included in the ISM process.

Phase five involves examining two ideas or action plans at a time to determine if one significantly influences the other. Participants engage in discussions and vote to decide if implementing one idea/action plan would significantly facilitate the implementation of the other. They are asked the question “if idea/action plan A is implemented, will it significantly help to implement idea/action plan B?” for each idea. When a majority of the group (the two third of group) supports the idea, the relationship or impact is recorded on an influence map. In the case of an even split (50/50), participants engage in an in-depth debate before revoting. This process leads to the creation of an influence map that reflects the shared understanding of the participants. In the SDD methodology, "influence" refers to the implementation of action plans that will have the greatest impact on resolving the TQ.

During the final phase, participants engage in a detailed discussion of the influence map, focusing on the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-Specific) goals to address the PEST (Political, Economic, Social, and Technological) analysis for the proposed action plans. This discussion involves a thorough consideration of the feasibility and impact of the proposed plans, as well as the potential challenges and opportunities posed by the political, economic, social, and technological factors that may influence their implementation. By having the PEST analysis take the SMART goals into account, participants aim to ensure that the proposed action plans are well-defined, practical, and tailored to the unique context of the TQ.

2.2. Participants & Co-Laboratories

For this study, two separate SDD Co-Laboratories (Co-Labs) with a total of 41 graduate students studying social sciences at Padua University, Italy (31 students) and Åbo Akademi University in Vaasa, Finland (10 students) were organized. The first Co-Lab, called the Padua Co-Lab, was held face-to-face in December 2019 and lasted for around 10 hours. The 31 students, who had expressed an interest in the topic, were invited to participate, and had an average age of 24 years.

The purpose and scope of the study were presented to the participants at the beginning of the Co-Lab through a presentation. The first phase of the SDD methodology began with the introduction of the triggering question (TQ), which had been formulated by the facilitators prior to the workshop. The TQ provided a framework for the successful dialogue. The other phases of the SDD methodology were then followed in sequence.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, the second Co-Lab (Vaasa Co-Lab) was conducted virtually. Twenty graduate students from Åbo Akademi University in Vaasa, Finland, who were studying social sciences were invited to attend the virtual Co-Lab in November 2020. However, due to personal reasons, only ten students with an average age of 27 were able to take part in the Co-Lab. The virtual format allowed for continued collaboration despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

To accommodate the virtual format of the Vaasa Co-Lab, participants were given the TQ and asked to submit their ideas/action plans anonymously, along with explanations/clarifications, through the Padlet platform prior to the online meeting. This allowed for the completion of the first two phases of the SDD process, which involved introducing the TQ and generating ideas with action plan clarifications, in advance. By doing so, the Co-Lab was able to save time and ensure that the virtual session remained productive and efficient.

The virtual meeting began with the third phase, which involved clustering the action plans. As the first two phases had been completed in advance, the participants were able to save time and jump straight into the clustering process. After the clustering, the participants voted for the 5 most important action plans, and the plans that received enough votes were discussed in depth to create the influence map for the next phase. The virtual meeting, which lasted approximately 4 hours, concluded with the PEST analysis.

Given that the topic of LGBTQ+ issues can be sensitive and personal, participants of the Co-Labs may have concerns about confidentiality. In order to address this, the researchers made it clear to the participants that their anonymity would be ensured throughout the study and during the publication of data. This measure was taken to mitigate any potential risks or concerns that participants may have had regarding the sensitivity of the topic.

3. Results

In the Padua Co-Lab, participants identified 77 action plans in response to the TQ “What actions (political, educational, financial, sociocultural, technological, etc.) can be taken to change the patterns of negative attitudes & negative atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community (sexual/gender minority groups)?”. Following this, the participants were asked to provide clarifications for each of the 77 action plans. However, the details of these clarifications are not included in this paper.

The participants in the Padua Co-Lab used a bottom-up approach to cluster the 77 action plans into eight categories based on their similarities. These categories were given names that captured their overarching themes. Of these categories, the Socio-Cultural, Education, and Social-Mass Media clusters were the largest, containing 18, 24, and 16 action plans, respectively. The Politics cluster contained seven action plans, while the Law and Health-care clusters had five and three action plans, respectively. The Technology and Language clusters had the smallest number of action plans, two action plans each.

The participants were asked to vote on the 5, according to them, most important action plans following the clustering process. The Education cluster received the highest number of votes, with a total of 47. This was followed by the Social-Mass Media cluster, which received 36 votes, and the Socio-Cultural cluster, which received 23 votes. The Law and Technology clusters also received considerable support, with 16 and 15 votes, respectively. The Politics and Language clusters received the same number of votes, 8 each. Finally, the Health-care cluster received the lowest number of votes, only 2.

Following the voting, 30 action plans that received two or more votes were selected for the ISM process. Based on the discussions among the participants, these action plans were structured into 10 levels on the influential map (Fig. 2). Action plan #57: On television more movies and TV series talking about LGBT world, especially teenagers’ problems, was located at the root of the tree. This indicates that it was considered the most influential action plan among all.

Among the 30 selected action plans that received two or more votes in the Padua Co-Lab, four action plans stood out as the most popular among participants. Action plan #22: Quoro (an interactive digital reindeer that loves diversity) project received the most votes, 14. Close behind was action plan #3: Laws contrasting crime of homophobia and bullying, with 13 votes.

The other two most popular action plans were #6: Improve LGBT representation in films and television, promoting a normalization of sexual minorities, and #25: Not distinguish in education and politics between male and female. Both of these action plans received 9 votes

each. Notably, all four of these plans were located at the bottom of the influence map, indicating that they were considered the most influential among all others by the participants.

According to the influential map created during the Padua Co-Lab, the action plans located at the root of the map, specifically at levels X, XI, and VIII, are considered the most influential. These plans have the greatest impact on the top levels of action plans and are thought to be able to significantly facilitate their implementation.

Upon examining the influential map, it is clear that some action plans are located within the same box. This indicates that these plans are mutually influencing each other, and their successful implementation may depend on the implementation of the other plans in the same box. On the other hand, at Level I of the map, action plan #40: Do a social research that is aimed at elder people is not connected to any other action plans. This suggests that this particular action plan is not influenced by other plans on the map, nor does it appear to be influencing them in turn.

During the Vaasa Co-Lab, participants generated a total of 31 action plans aimed at improving attitudes and creating a more positive atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community. These action plans were further classified into 5 clusters based on their content. The largest cluster, Community Building & Representation, contained 10 action plans, followed by Education and Training with 9, and Media with 8. The remaining action plans were divided between Legal Actions and Business, with each cluster containing 2 action plans.

Participants were asked to provide clarifications for these action plans prior to the virtual Co-Lab on a Padlet platform. However, these clarifications are not included in this paper.

Out of the five identified clusters during the Vaasa Co-Lab, the Education and Training cluster, received the highest number of votes, 22. The Community Building and Representation cluster also gathered a significant number of votes with 10 as well as the Media cluster. In contrast, the Legal Actions and Business clusters received the smallest number of votes, only 4 each.

During the voting phase of the Vaasa Co-Lab, a total of 23 out of 31 action plans received at least one vote from participants. Of these, 13 action plans that received 2 or more votes were selected for inclusion in the ISM process. This resulted in the creation of the influence map (Fig. 3) with 4 distinct levels. Especially, the implementation of the action plans located at the lower levels of the map are expected to significantly facilitate the implementation of those situated at the upper levels.

Action plans #11: Including this issue about prejudice on sexual minority groups in the “sex education curriculum” in Finland and #27: Involving more LGBTQ+ people in movies, TV series and talk-shows were located at the bottom of the influence map, indicating that they are highly influential in facilitating the implementation of other action plans. In fact, they were among the most influential plans, along with action plans #1: Legal and cultural reforms and #12: Exposure to the LGBTQ+ surrounding/learning from personal experience. Action plan #11 received the highest number of votes (5), while action plans #16 and #27 received 4 votes each.

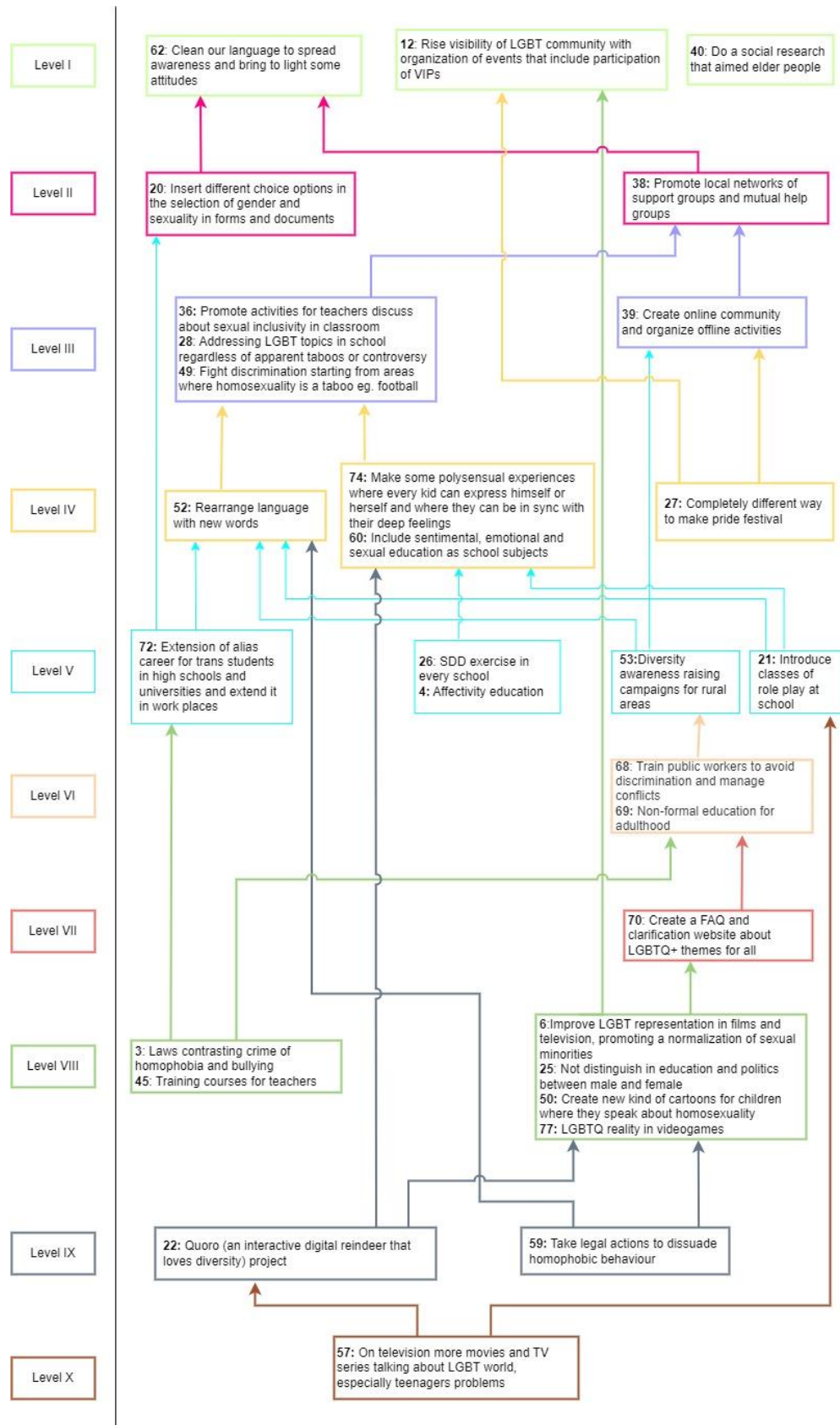


Figure 2. Final Influence Map Produced by the Padua Co-Lab Participants

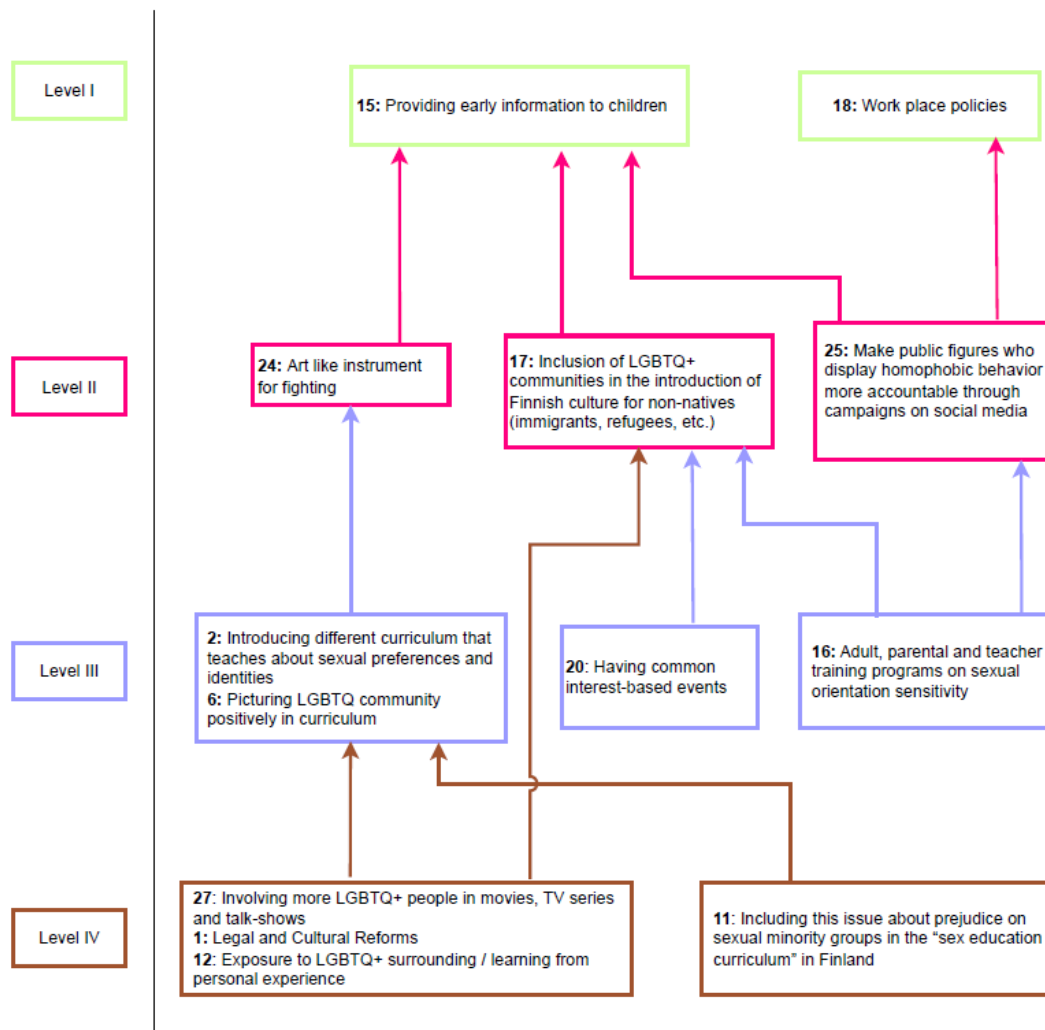


Figure 3. Final Influence Map Produced by the Vaasa Co-Lab Participants

4. Discussion

During the Padua Co-Lab, participants generated 77 action plans aimed at improving the negative attitudes and atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community. These plans were categorized into 8 distinct clusters, each focusing on different areas of impact. The clusters are as follows: Socio-cultural, Law, Education, Social-Mass Media, Health-care, Politics, Language, and Technology. Each cluster represents a specific area where action can be taken to create positive change and promote inclusivity for the LGBTQ+ community.

The Education cluster emerged as the most important category at the Padua Co-Lab, based on the participants' votes. This cluster gathered the highest number of action plans, indicating that the participants recognized education as a key tool for changing attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community. By providing individuals with exposure to diverse viewpoints and ideas, education has the potential to broaden their understanding and foster a more open-minded approach to different people and ideas. This, in turn, can help cultivate empathy and compassion toward others and raise awareness of social issues, such as social inequality and injustice.

Furthermore, the Social-Mass Media cluster was also deemed important by the participants, receiving a considerable number of votes and action plans. Media has a powerful influence on shaping public opinion and attitudes toward social and political issues (Koltay, 2011; McQuail, 2014). Moreover, it can also shape cultural norms and values by promoting certain lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors, which can lead to the normalization of certain ideas and behaviors (Carpenter & Amaravadi, 2019; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020; Solomon & Kurtz-Costes, 2018; Yan, 2019). Additionally, social media has become an integral part of modern life and has had a significant impact on attitudes and behavior. Social media platforms have provided a space for members of the LGBTQ+ community to share their stories and experiences, increasing their visibility and raising awareness about their issues.

The influence map created by the Padua Co-Lab participants reflected the importance of the Social-Mass Media cluster. Specifically, action plan #57, which called for more representation of the LGBTQ+ community issues in movies and TV series particularly those faced by teenagers, was identified as the most influential action plan at the bottom level of the map (Level X). This indicates that implementing this action plan could have a significant impact in facilitating the implementation of other action plans on the map, ultimately leading to improvements in the negative attitudes and atmosphere surrounding the LGBTQ+ community.

The Socio-Cultural cluster has emerged as a significant category in promoting a positive attitude and atmosphere for LGBTQ+ individuals among participants. This cluster received the third highest number of votes and has a significant number of action plans associated with it. With a notable number of action plans and high levels of participant engagement, it can be observed that, this cluster has the potential to make a meaningful impact on reducing prejudice and discrimination toward the LGBTQ+ community.

The participants' perspective on the activities, campaigns, and cultural events aligns with the existing literature that suggests that such initiatives promote acceptance and understanding of the LGBTQ+ community, reduce prejudice and discrimination toward LGBTQ+ individuals, and foster mental health and well-being (Ayoub et al., 2021; Dhaenens, 2018; Liang & Alimo, 2005; Rostosky et al., 2007; Susan & Christin, 2014). Furthermore, these efforts can facilitate the integration of the LGBTQ+ community into the broader society. Thus, action plans under the Socio-Cultural cluster can play a vital role in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals.

The four most popular action plans among participants, namely #22: Quoro project; #3: Laws against homophobia and bullying; #6: Improved LGBT representation in media; and #25: Gender neutrality in education and politics have been identified as highly influential in improving the negative attitudes and atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community. These action plans received 14, 13, 9, and 9 votes, respectively.

As being located at the bottom of the influence map, these action plans are likely to have a significant impact on creating a positive and accepting environment for the LGBTQ+ community. The participants' support for these action plans highlights the importance of promoting diversity, criminalizing discriminatory behaviors, and normalizing sexual minorities in mainstream media.

The Quoro project, for example, using interactive digital media would promote inclusivity and diversity, and provide a fun and engaging way to educate individuals about LGBTQ+ issues. Similarly, laws that criminalize homophobia and bullying would create a legal framework to combat discrimination and create a safer environment for LGBTQ+ individuals. Improving LGBTQ+ representation in films and television can also play a vital role in promoting normalization and acceptance by reducing prejudice toward the community. Finally,

eliminating gender distinctions in education and politics can foster a more equal and inclusive society, promoting equality and understanding toward LGBTQ+ community.

It can be perceived that the participants have shown strong support for these action plans and according to them, these have the potential to bring about real change in societal attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community. A more accepting and inclusive world for LGBTQ+ community can be created by implementing these action plans.

Action plans #22, which focuses on the digital project and #59, which focus on taking legal actions to discourage homophobic behavior, have been identified as two of the most influential action plans by the participants. These plans are located at Level IX in Figure 2, which indicates their significant impact on improving the negative attitudes and atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community, following action plan #57.

Based on the influence map, Participants emphasized that implementing digital projects to increase awareness among younger generations and adopting legal measures to prevent homophobic behavior can facilitate the acceptance and successful implementation of educational and socio-cultural activities. This demonstrates their recognition of the need for a comprehensive approach that involves both legal measures and digital projects to create a more accepting and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals.

During the Vaasa Co-Lab, participants generated a total of 31 action plans aimed at improving attitudes and promoting inclusivity toward the LGBTQ+ community. These action plans were grouped into five key clusters, namely: Legal Actions, Education and Training, Media, Business, and Community Building and Representation.

The Legal Actions cluster focused on implementing legal measures to prevent discrimination and homophobic behavior. The Education and Training cluster included plans to educate individuals about LGBTQ+ issues and promote acceptance through training programs. The Media cluster emphasized the importance of promoting diversity and eliminating negative stereotypes through representation in both mainstream and social media. The Business cluster focused on fostering a more inclusive and accepting environment within workplaces. Finally, the Community Building and Representation cluster aimed to empower individuals, to create a more inclusive and accepting society through community building initiatives and improving representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in various fields.

By categorizing the action plans into these clusters, the participants were able to identify different areas where action plan was needed to create a more accepting and tolerant environment for the LGBTQ+ community.

Based on the participants' voting in Vaasa Co-Lab, Education and Training, Community Building and Representation, and Media were identified as the three most important clusters for improving negative attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community. Among these, the Education and Training cluster received the highest number of votes (22). This result indicates that, similar to the participants in Padua, the Vaasa participants also recognize the importance of education in promoting inclusivity and diversity. By educating individuals about LGBTQ+ issues and promoting acceptance through training programs, it is perceived possible to create a more tolerant and accepting society.

The Community Building and Representation cluster was identified as a crucial area for improvement by the participants in the Vaasa Co-Lab, receiving 10 votes and the highest number of action plans. Like the participants in Padua, the Vaasa participants recognized the importance of campaigns and activities that promote representation and awareness of the LGBTQ+ community. Such initiatives can foster acceptance and understanding of the community, leading to a reduction in negative prejudices and perceptions.

By building a sense of community and promoting representation, individuals from the LGBTQ+ community can feel more included and valued, contributing to a more accepting and tolerant society. Therefore, the emphasis on this cluster highlights the need for creating safe spaces and promoting visibility for the LGBTQ+ community. The recognition of Community Building and Representation cluster by the Vaasa participants demonstrates the importance of creating a more inclusive society, where diversity and acceptance are celebrated.

Similarly to the Padua participants, the Vaasa participants also recognized the importance of media as a tool for changing attitudes toward a positive direction. Media was identified as a powerful platform to increase visibility through representation and to provide access to resources, support groups, and other services that might not be available in local communities.

The participants recognized that media plays a vital role in raising awareness about LGBTQ+ issues and generating a significant impact on society. By providing individuals with access to the latest news, current events, and important information related to the LGBTQ+ community, media can promote understanding and acceptance.

In this way, media can serve as a powerful tool in combating negative prejudices and stereotypes toward the LGBTQ+ community, while also providing a platform for LGBTQ+ individuals to share their stories and experiences. Through media, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of the issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community, which can lead to increased support and advocacy for the community.

The Vaasa participants identified three action plans as the most influential for creating positive change in attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community. These action plans are #11, #16, and #27, which received the highest number of votes and are located at the bottom of the influence map. The first action plan, #11, suggests including education about sexual minority groups in the sex education curriculum in Finland. The second action plan, #16, involves training programs for adults, parents, and teachers to increase sensitivity toward sexual orientation. Lastly, the third action plan, #27, proposes involving more LGBTQ+ individuals in movies, TV series, and talk shows. These action plans highlight the importance of education, and media as the most influential tools for changing negative attitudes and creating a more accepting atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community.

Despite the fact that the number of participants in the Vaasa Co-Lab was lower than the recommended number (15) for the SDD process, the results they reached were consistent with those of the Padua Co-Lab. Both groups placed emphasis on the same key areas, including representation of the LGBTQ+ community in media, more inclusive education curricula, and legal and cultural reforms to protect the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. This suggests that these issues are crucial and widely recognized among different groups, regardless of the size of the participant group.

A noticeable difference between the Padua and Vaasa Co-Labs was their emphasis on different aspects of LGBTQ+ rights based on their respective legal systems. As Italy's legal system is considered to be less progressive in protecting LGBTQ+ rights compared to Finland, the Padua participants focused more on legal issues, such as implementing laws to combat homophobia, bullying and inequality. The Vaasa participants concentrated more on education, cultural activities, and representation in media, since Finland's legal system is relatively more advanced in protecting the LGBTQ+ community.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Vaasa and Padua Co-Labs provided a valuable platform for participants to voice their opinions and ideas on how to improve the negative attitudes and atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community in their respective societies. The Co-Labs also demonstrated that there are common challenges and issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community in different regions of Europe. Despite the differences in the number of participants and legal systems, both Co-Labs identified similar focal points such as education, representation in media, and legal and cultural reforms as important tools for creating positive change in attitudes and atmosphere toward the LGBTQ+ community.

It is important to note that despite the differences in the legal systems of the two countries, the participants' attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community were similar, and the proposed action plans had significant overlaps.

In addition, it must be pointed out that the participants in both Co-Labs recognized the significant role that education plays in changing negative attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community. The participants of both Co-Labs agreed that an inclusive curriculum, and adult and parental training on sexual orientation sensitivity are crucial.

Participants also acknowledged the importance of representation in media in raising awareness and the involvement of more LGBTQ+ individuals in movies, TV series, and talk-shows can contribute to the understanding and the promoting acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.

Furthermore, the legal and cultural reforms were also identified as crucial for improving the protection of LGBTQ+ individuals' rights. However, the Padua participants gave more weight to legal issues, while the Vaasa participants focused more on cultural and educational action plans. This difference may be attributed to the differences in the legal systems protecting the LGBTQ+ rights in the respective countries.

The results of these Co-Labs also highlighted the need for continued efforts toward promoting diversity, inclusion and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. It is crucial that policymakers and community leaders listen to the voices of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies and take action on their recommendations. The action plans proposed by the participants in both Co-Labs offer tangible measures toward achieving a more accepting and equal society for the members of LGBTQ+ community.

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