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D6.6: A set of recommendations for how to establish multi-actor Dialogue Forums

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Executive Summary

The CO-CREATE project aims to educate and empower youth to develop policies that promote healthy food and physical activity environments for young people across Europe. In support of this objective, EAT has developed a Dialogue Forum model which aims to bring together youth, policymakers and business representatives to discuss and refine policy ideas for healthier food and physical activity environments. Between June 2020 and March 2022, 20 Dialogue Forums were implemented and evaluated at the local, national and regional level. Reports were subsequently developed on each Dialogue Forum, including examining the outcomes and impacts of the Dialogue Forums.

This deliverable provides a series of recommendations on how to establish multi-actor Dialogue Forums, which are informed by the evidence and data gathered from deliverables 6.1-6.5, from discussions with young people and adult stakeholders about their experiences in the Dialogue Forums, and from the process of executing and evaluating 20 Dialogues Forums. This deliverable will also present the final published Dialogue Forum model, and discussion opportunities for application beyond CO-CREATE.

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Introduction

Deliverable description

As outlined in the grant agreement number 774210 for Confronting Obesity: Co-creating policy with youth (CO-CREATE), Deliverable 6.6 is described as follows:

D6.6. A set of recommendations for how to establish multi-actor Dialogue Forums and a brief report putting the findings of the project in a greater policy and co-creation context [40]. A set of recommendations for how to establish multi-actor dialogue forums and a brief report putting the findings of the project in a greater policy and co-creation context will be provided, possibly taking the form of a joint public-private publication.

This report is one of three deliverables associated to the implementation and evaluation of the Dialogue Forums. Deliverables 6.5 (*Reports from each Dialogue Forum on the actions and commitments from policymakers and businesses*) and 6.4 (*Documentation on twenty Dialogue Forums established across Europe, including the regional, national or local level*) are closely linked with 6.6 and are all informed by one another. All three deliverables should be examined as a set.

WP6 objectives directly addressed by this deliverable

- O6.5: Develop a set of recommendations for how to establish multi-actor dialogue forums, including a section on conflicts of interest and strategies for counteracting possible power disparities in the public- private-adolescent nexus.

Objectives of deliverable

The objectives of this deliverable are to 1) provide a set of recommendations for how to establish multi-actor Dialogue Forums, based on the experience and learnings from the 20 CO-CREATE Dialogue Forums, and 2) discuss the implications of the tool and the Dialogue Forum outcomes on the greater co-creation and obesity policy context.

Background

CO-CREATE aims to educate and empower youth to develop policies that promote healthy food and physical activity environments for young people across Europe. To support this objective, EAT set out to develop an intergenerational dialogue tool, the Dialogue Forum, to facilitate the co-creation of policies across generations and sectors. In 2019, EAT began this process by creating a prototype of an easy-to-use, safe, scalable, and youth-led Dialogue Forum model. After three years, multiple prototypes, a digital adaptation, and 20 Dialogue Forums, EAT has published the final digital and physical tools. In deliverable 6.4, we describe the process of implementing and evaluating 20 Dialogue Forums, and in deliverable 6.5, we provide reports on each Dialogue. These deliverables, as well as previous ones, have helped inform the recommendations provided in this report.

During the development of the first prototype of the Dialogue Forum tool, EAT identified some key questions we hoped the tool and process would be able to address. First, given that the Dialogue Forum gathers different stakeholders with different interests, how do we promote a dialogue that is both a safe and empowering space for all participants, especially youth. Second, how do we balance safeguarding youth with empowering and enabling them to take ownership of the Dialogue, promoting a proper co-creation process. Finally, how do create a tool that promotes action after dialogue, enabling participants to continue to work together and increase the overall impact. Some assumptions were made about how the tool would help address these issues (see deliverable 6.2), but the feedback received from participants, organizers and the tool designers, as well as our own observations, have helped shape the final Dialogue Forum tool and recommendations.

The central focus of this deliverable is to provide a series of recommendations for how to establish multi-actor Dialogue Forums. These recommendations are informed by the initial assumptions we made (and how they were challenged), by the learnings and evidence we've gathered from deliverables 6.1-6.5, from discussions with young people and adult stakeholders about their experiences in the Dialogue Forums, and perhaps most importantly, from the process of organizing 20 Dialogue Forums. This deliverable also frames the outcomes and learnings from the Dialogue Forums in the broader co-creation and youth obesity context in Europe. Based on these learnings, the final Dialogue Forum package is presented, as well as initial thoughts on how to promote its sustainability beyond the project.

Recommendations for how to establish multi-actor Dialogue Forums

The process of implementing and evaluating 20 Dialogue Forums has provided unique insight into best practices for establishing multi-actor Dialogues. EAT has developed eight recommendations that should be considered in the planning, execution and follow-up phases. These recommendations can be used by anyone looking to hold a Dialogue Forum, but are particularly relevant for youth looking to engage decisionmakers and conversely, decisionmakers looking to meaningfully engage youth.

Process

In 2019, a series of design principles were developed to inform the first prototype of the Dialogue Forum model. Some of the recommendations listed below were included in these initial design principles, which reaffirms their relevance after 20 Dialogues. The recommendations were developed in consultation with two youth participants of the Dialogue Forums, as well as select CO-CREATE partners.

1. **Meaningful co-creation means collaborating on every step:** involve youth or the target group in the planning, execution and follow-up of the dialogue. Shared responsibility and decisionmaking can increase the sense of ownership, accountability and desire to engage on a longer-term basis, and reduces the risk of 'tokenistic' engagement of youth or other under-represented groups.
2. **Diversity is key:** inviting a wide range of participants across ages, sectors, ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic status, and geographies can promote a better understanding of the issue from different perspectives and allows unique considerations and solutions to be raised. Diversity also includes engaging members of society who are often not included in decisionmaking, such as people living with disabilities, in remote areas, refugees, ethical/racial/religious minorities, etc. This diversity can also help bring a systems-level framing to the discussion and allow participants to develop more holistic solutions.
3. **Ensure equal representation to create equal ownership:** ensure equal representation of youth and adults (or other under-represented group) at the table. This will help reduce tokenism, promote plurality of perspectives, and help mitigate any power imbalances. Equal representation can also increase shared ownership and responsibility for the discussion and outcomes.
4. **Don't rush it:** give all participants ample and equal time to be listened to. This includes structuring the dialogue in a way where participants are allowed to both contribute individually, and partake in group discussions. The ideal dialogue should last around 2 hours.

5. **Collaboration is key, but building consensus should not be the goal:** a multi-actor Dialogue suggests that you are bringing participants together from different sectors, with different viewpoints. The activities and questions of a Dialogue should enable participants to collaborate, discuss and debate, but should not force consensus building. Putting participants in a position to compromise on their viewpoint for the sake of consensus can decrease desire to engage after the dialogue or support of the idea.
6. **Relationships are built during dialogue; impact can happen after:** Dialogue Forums create a space where people can connect and build relationships. It is through these relationships that people remain engaged and can take action on a longer-term basis. To help facilitate this, a Dialogue should allow people to get to know each other on a personal basis, beyond their formal titles (this also helps level the playing field). Be sure to integrate an opening activity that allows participants to understand who they are, what they enjoy doing, and why they've joined the discussion. The Dialogue should also carve out time for participants to network and get to know one another, as well as easy tools for participants to connect afterwards.
7. **Conflicts may arise, but using frameworks can help minimize risk:** power imbalances can arise between different groups, for instance between youth and adults or between different sectors, which can create an environment where comfort or the feeling of being able to freely speak is compromised. In the case of working with young or disadvantaged people, safety is also a key risk that needs to be minimized. While unanticipated risks and challenges will always happen, it is important to put in place frameworks to safeguard against conflicts of interest. These can include ground rules and a code of conduct, a stakeholder risk assessment, equal participation and representation.

These recommendations will be used in our targeted dissemination to policymakers and youth organizations, to encourage them to keep these principles in mind when organizing a Dialogue Forum. They will also be presented more broadly at upcoming conferences and workshops, as the recommendations also reflect our learnings from the CO-CREATE project. EAT will work with World Obesity Federation and the Norwegian Institute of Public Health to disseminate these on the project website, Healthy Voices and EAT's own website.

Implications in the obesity policy and co-creation space

Over the last three years, two parallel processes have taken place: 1) EAT has developed and tested an intergenerational and action-oriented Dialogue tool, and 2) youth, policymakers, business representatives and other stakeholders have used the tool to discuss and refine youth-led obesity prevention policy ideas. The following section aims to put the findings of these two processes in a greater obesity policy and co-creation context.

Implications and value of the Dialogue Forum tool

In today's world, young people are more connected, mobilized and politically engaged than ever. They are active members of society who work to influence policies and decisions through advocacy, grassroots movements, and action. However, they are often invited to decisionmaking tables or high-level meetings in a tokenistic capacity; as a one young person expected to represent "the youth perspective". In the initial design phase of the Dialogue Forum, two things became evident, 1) young people wanted to be taken seriously in these venues and lacked concrete, tangible and user-friendly tools to proactively engage decisionmakers, 2) decisionmakers lacked a structured tool and discussion framework to engage youth. The Dialogue Forum model aimed to solve both issues.

Through the CO-CREATE project and beyond, the tool has been used to connect people across generations and sectors, in an effort to co-create solutions to build healthier environments. While the tool has been translated, adapted, shortened, and lengthened, this primary goal of allowing people to connect and collaborate on actions has remained consistent. While other dialogue tools exist, the CO-CREATE Dialogue Forum is novel in that it is the product of a three-year long testing, prototyping, and refinement process. The tool has been used in local schools and in high-level UN meetings, by 14-year-old youth and by CEOs, and by participants in Malawi and Portugal. Feedback from these different people and settings has been incorporated throughout the project. The tool has multiple strengths including:

- It's broad applicability for any stakeholder looking to bring together participants across generations and sectors, and to facilitate decisionmaking and action.
- It is a tool designed with and for youth, and has particular value for young people or youth organisations looking to engage decisionmakers to increase awareness and action on an idea.
- For decisionmakers in the public or private sector who are looking to engage and meaningfully involve young people in the design, implementation or evaluation of interventions. This tool, accompanying Guidebook, and instructional videos provide all the steps and guidance needed to engage youth.
- It is accessible, free, and available in both a physical and digital format, which means people can use it to connect around the world or in their local community.
- The tangible nature of the tool is valuable to participants as it provides an interactive and engaging dialogue, and to organizers, as all contributions are documented on the canvas and can facilitate reporting.
- Each step of the Dialogue Forum is centered in co-creation and collaboration is only amplified as the session progresses.
- The design and simplicity of the tool, including visual aids and pictures, prompt concise and specific statements/conclusions.
- The Dialogue Forum is incredibly flexible and can be translated and adapted (more on that below).

Based on user feedback, there are many opportunities to build on this tool. One such example is to increase its accessibility for people living with disabilities (i.e. including Braille code version as an example). Another is making the translated versions of the tool available online to broaden international use.

Implications of the Dialogue Forums for youth obesity policy in Europe

Through the CO-CREATE Dialogue Forums, young people have presented, discussed and refined their policy ideas on building healthy food and physical activity environments. While the aim was to bring a structured policy to the Dialogue, often, the policy was simply an idea, an intervention or a solution to an issue young people were facing in their daily lives as it relates to food and physical activity. Upon reflection, by asking youth to formulate and discuss a policy, CO-CREATE may have set unrealistic expectations on youth to deliver, and mismanaged expectations for Dialogue Forum stakeholders and experts who were expecting to discuss policies. The feedback provided by stakeholders may have also differed if we framed it as a discussion on an idea/problem/solution in its initial stages, rather than a policy, which introduces budgetary, regulatory, and other considerations.

Based on these experiences, and participant and organizer feedback, the scope of the tool was broadened beyond policy refinement, to allow for discussions on ideas, questions, solutions or interventions. The tool has moved away from building consensus on a "refined" policy idea, and

recognizes that two hours may not be sufficient to formulate a new idea. Rather, these two hours can be spent to discuss why the issue matters, its obstacles and opportunities, the external factors that influence the feasibility of the idea, actions that need to be taken by others and that can be taken by yourself as a participant. Broadening the scope of the tool, and eliminating the need for consensus will hopefully increase applicability.

Thematically, three policy issues were discussed most frequently in the Dialogue Forums:

- Restricting marketing of unhealthy food to children
- Increasing nutrition education and implementing a school food programme
- Increasing physical activity access

These were also echoed in the [Youth Declaration](#) developed by the Youth Task Force, which outlines CO-CREATE youth's demands to EU policymakers for a healthier environment. The recurrence of these topics clearly demonstrates that they are policy priorities for young Europeans, and interventions they deem necessary to live a healthier life. The European Commission should further engage youth across Europe on the development of the next EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity, so that it is reflective of young people's wants and needs. In future work, it could also be valuable to present youth obesity as it links to climate change, COVID-19 and other major events, mental health and wellbeing, and social media, so that young people can understand how these systems influence one another. Making these connections could lead to proposed policy solutions that help solve multiple problems.

Final Dialogue Forum package

In deliverable 6.2, EAT presented a comprehensive model for planning, executing and following-up on multi-actor dialogue forums, with the aim of co-creating policies across generations and sectors. Through the insights gathered from 20 Dialogue Forums, and from deliverables 6.1-6.5, EAT in collaboration with global design consultancy, Designit, developed and published a final version of the Dialogue Forum tool.

Revision process

In September 2021, EAT engaged Designit to use the feedback gathered from the evaluation survey and process of implementing 20 Dialogue Forums (see D6.4) to do a final revision of the Dialogue Forum tool. To supplement this data and gather more in-depth feedback, two additional evaluation workshops were organized with EAT and CO-CREATE partners. Through a continuous prototyping, testing and refinement process, a final digital and physical Dialogue Forum tool were developed and published.

Dialogue Forum package

The final open access Dialogue Forum package includes the following:

- [Guidebook](#): provides step-by-step instructions on how to plan, execute and follow-up on a Dialogue Forum
- [Physical Dialogue Forum tool](#) and downloadable Drive with all accompanying materials
- [Digital Dialogue Forum tool](#) and downloadable Drive with all accompanying materials
- [Frequently asked questions](#)
- [Four-part video series](#) on the Dialogue Forum: 1) concept video on "what is a Dialogue Forum", 2) how to execute a physical Dialogue Forum, 3) how to execute a digital Dialogue Forum and 4) impact video describing the power and potential of the tools

The Dialogue Forum package was published on April 7, 2022 on the [CO-CREATE website](#), on the [EAT website](#) and on the [Healthy Voices website](#) to broaden dissemination and reach.

Looking beyond CO-CREATE

With the Dialogue Forum tool and package now open access, EAT has reflected on how these can be become independent and sustainable products beyond the life of the project. Below are some initial thoughts:

- **Adaptability:** While the steps of the tool are broad enough to address a range of issues, policies or interventions, the limited text on the tool makes it easily adaptable. Given the adaptable nature, it's application and use it quite broad. EAT is currently working with EU Horizon 2020 project Best ReMaP to adapt the tool to fit the national stakeholder dialogue needs. In the public Guidebook, people are invited to engage EAT if they have an interest in adapting it. Having the tool be tried and tested in different forums, with different goals, can help make it a sustainable product beyond CO-CREATE.
- **Translation:** Through the CO-CREATE project, the Dialogue Forum tool and affiliated materials were translated into Dutch, Polish and Portuguese. Members of the public are currently invited to engage EAT if they would like to translate the tool ([see FAQs](#)). In the coming months, EAT will explore publishing translated versions of the tool on the open access websites, to increase global reach and usability.
- **Build partnerships and train the trainers:** develop a network of organizational users and trainers who could sustain implementation. Another option could be try to identify an existing organization that could “adopt” the Dialogue tools and incorporate into their activities.
- **Building on youth engagement infrastructure:** Meaningful youth engagement is not a novel concept, however, the degree to which governments and decisionmakers implement this varies significantly. The Dialogue Forum can help build on existing infrastructure for youth participation by providing decisionmakers with a tangible tool and process by which youth can be meaningfully engaged in decisions that affect them.
- **Power and potential of organized youth:** Throughout the project, engagement with youth organizations has proved incredibly valuable in broadening outreach to youth, and increasing impact beyond the Dialogue Forums. Going forward, EAT will conduct targeted outreach to youth organizations to share the tool and will explore hosting free training sessions for this target audience.

Over the coming months, EAT will be also communicating and disseminating the tool through various digital platforms, partner newsletters conferences, workshops, etc.

Concluding remarks

The process of implementing and evaluation 20 Dialogue Forums has provided valuable insight to suggest recommendations on how to hold multi-actor Dialogue Forums. These recommendations and the tool have broad implications across the co-creation, meaningful youth engagement, child rights and obesity policy landscape. Opportunities for adaptation and translation will promote and secure the sustainability of the tool and impact of the Dialogue Forum and project.