

“Creating a safe space to play like children and learn like adults.”

A seven-day international course in critical thinking and media literacy that taught 21 youth workers from 7 countries to recognise manipulation, verify information and make evidence-based decisions.

CEFIG INTERNATIONAL · ERASMUS+ KA151 · KOLÍN, CZECH REPUBLIC · JANUARY 2026

4.8/5	+35%	21/21	100%
SATISFACTION	COMPETENCE SHIFT	WOULD RECOMMEND	EVALUATION RESPONSE



THE BRIEF

Three things made the brief demanding

The audience was extremely uneven. Participants from eighteen to forty-seven years old, from students to NGO directors, coming from Poland, Romania, Slovakia, North Macedonia, Spain, Malta and Germany. Self-assessed competence at the start spread across the entire five-point scale.

The topic slides easily into moralising. Courses on disinformation often end at “check your sources”, which moves nobody anywhere. I needed participants to experience manipulation from the inside rather than hear about it.

Participants are multipliers. They go on to run their own workshops, so they needed a method, not just content. Every tool was therefore handed over with its methodological frame.

I joined the project as co-author of the programme and lead trainer. The critical thinking strand was led by Lukáš Hána (Skeptik.cz); I led media and information literacy.



Four decisions before a single slide existed

1 · Experience before theory

Every block opens with an activity in which participants mostly fail; only then is the phenomenon named. A Kolb cycle applied strictly: experience, reflection, conceptualisation, application.

2 · Active inoculation, not warnings

Instead of warning about manipulation, I had participants manipulate, first in a game and then for real. Controlled exposure builds resistance, much like a vaccine.

3 · Your own problem as the through-line

Everyone built a "bug list" of media problems that personally bother them, and applied every tool of the week to it. No practising on someone else's examples.

4 · Rules only once there is a reason

The learning contract came only after a team challenge collapsed into chaos. Nine agreements, including an "I don't understand" signal the group genuinely used all week.

"The difference comes from the structured debrief afterwards, not from the game itself."



38 hours of programme across seven training days

With a free day in the middle that is deliberately part of the design: the content needs to settle between the media literacy strand and the tools strand.

- 01 Safe learning environment, learning contract, experiential team challenge, decision-making under pressure (System 1 and 2)
- 02 Algorithms and the dopamine loop, personalisation, media history as a sequence of technological panics, the personal bug list, cognitive biases
- 03 Mis-, dis- and mal-information, active inoculation, manipulation techniques, producing and assessing participants' own articles
- 04 Free day, the content needs to settle
- 05 Four critical thinking tools: working with evidence, decision-making, group judgement and the limits of intuition, testing assumptions
- 06 Robust planning, pre-mortem, a five-hour systems simulation and its debrief
- 07 The Erasmus+ ecosystem, Youthpass, dissemination plans, reflection and closing



THE TOOLS

What participants took home

Not as concepts, but as worksheets filled in with their own content. Plus twelve subject handouts.

3C

Testing claims: challenge, consider alternatives, gather targeted evidence

GF

Goal Factoring: decisions with alternatives and opportunity cost

FS

Failure Simulator (pre-mortem): planning that holds up against the unpredictable

DM

Deliberate Mistakes: testing your own hidden assumptions

PT

Problem Tree: reframing a problem and finding root causes

FC

Media quality criteria and a three-step fact-checking routine

IN

A map of inoculation games with documented research effects



THE PEAK OF THE WEEK

The simulation where everything met

A five-hour systems simulation: five teams run fishing companies on a shared fishery, and rational individual decisions lead to collective collapse. Participants discovered that their own feedback had been misleading them: at the moment of the highest catch, the resource was already collapsing. Every tool of the week met here under pressure.

12 of 21 participants named it as the strongest experience of the course, often as the only thing they wrote.



RESULTS

The evaluation was completed by 21 of 21 participants

Overall satisfaction with course outcomes

4.8 / 5 · nobody below 4

Self-assessed competence before the course

3.1 / 5

Self-assessed competence after the course

4.2 / 5

Would recommend a similar course

5.0 / 5 · 21 of 21

Methods for verifying facts and reliability of information

4.6 / 5

Assessing information critically across media platforms

4.4 / 5

Constructing and evaluating hypotheses

4.4 / 5

Identifying logical fallacies

4.3 / 5

On the fact-verification objective, not a single participant scored below 4 out of 5.



HOW I MEASURED IT

Honest about the method

The evaluation covers the first two levels of the Kirkpatrick model: reaction and learning. The behaviour level is tracked indirectly through the dissemination plans built on the final day. These produced school workshops, volunteer training, club sessions for schoolchildren and a meeting with a city council.

Alongside the final questionnaire, reflection groups ran every evening, and a mid-term evaluation fed into the second half of the programme.

What they valued

Quotes from the anonymous final evaluation, January 2026.

Games as a method

"I really liked how she uses 'children's' games to explain something as important as manipulation or fact-checking. Her creativity is her greatest asset."

A safe environment

"Great facilitator, gave time, acknowledged opinions and created a no judgement environment. At the same time there was clear time keeping."

Practical tools

"Gaining practical tools for media literacy, critical thinking, and understanding how misinformation and algorithms influence our decisions."

Transfer into practice

"I gained a lot of practical information, learned many new games and workshops that I will apply in my work."



COMPETENCE FRAMEWORKS

Designed against European frameworks, not by intuition

DigComp 3.0

Area 1: information search, evaluation and management. Area 4: safe and responsible conduct in digital environments. The current version integrating AI.

LifeComp

L2 critical thinking as the core of the course, L1 growth mindset, S2 communication and S3 collaboration across seven cultures, P2 flexibility.

Youthpass

The eight EU key competences for lifelong learning. Each participant formulated their own learning outcomes and mapped them to the framework.

The multiplier layer

Participants are youth workers and teachers, so every method was handed over with its methodological frame so they can pass it on to their own target groups.



The core transfers

The programme is not tied to Erasmus+ or to youth work. I already use it in various forms with corporate employees, civil servants, teachers and librarians.

For Erasmus+ organisations

A training course from the Activity Programme through daily dramaturgy and methodology to evaluation design and Youthpass. Including multilingual groups with a wide spread of competence.

For companies and institutions

A half-day to two-day programme on recognising manipulation, verifying information and making evidence-based decisions. For settings where an error in judgement carries a cost.

For schools and educational organisations

Methodology for teachers and trainers who want to teach media literacy themselves: a frame, activities and debrief questions to build their own lessons on.

For programme designers

Bespoke learning design: needs analysis, learning outcomes, dramaturgy, choice of methods, evaluation design against Kirkpatrick.

Planning an international course, a corporate programme or a methodology? Write to me at veronikagabor.cz.