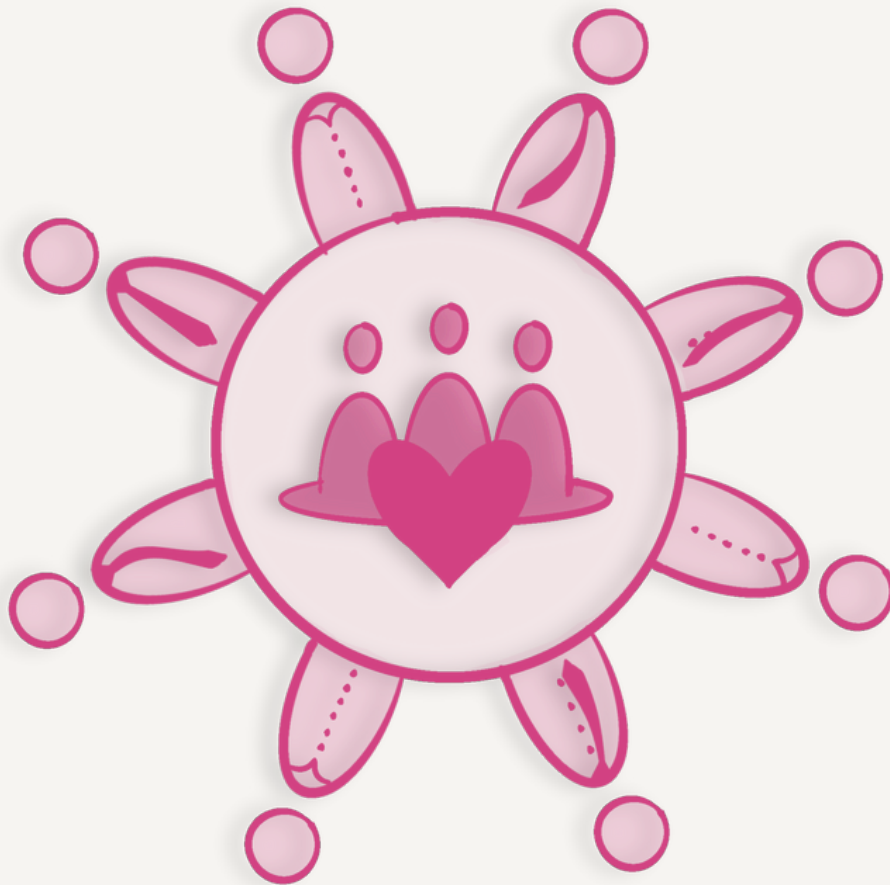


# **Empowerment through Understanding and Reflection: Student Associations In The Transition Towards a Socially Safe Environment**

Providing the tools needed to facilitate the process of creating a  
plan for action initiating long-term cultural change



DELFT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY  
MSC STRATEGIC PRODUCT DESIGN  
MASTER THESIS  
MEIKE MULDER  
JUNE 2025

# **Empowerment through Understanding and Reflection: Student Associations In The Transition Towards a Socially Safe Environment**

*Providing the tools needed to facilitate the process of creating a plan  
for action initiating long-term cultural change*

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Delft, June 2025

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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First of all, I want to thank my supervisors, Rebecca Price and Annemiek van Boeijen. You are the reason this project came to life. From the start, you believed in the topic, even though it was complex and sensitive. Even when things got tough, you were there to support me. You guided me through the challenges with patience, insight and care. Your expertise helped me break through barriers, and your way of thinking truly inspired me. You helped me grow as a person and a designer, and for that I'm incredibly grateful. Thank you for all your time, motivation, and thoughtful feedback, you really brought out the best in me.

I also want to thank the students who were brave enough to share their stories and perspectives with me. It was such an honor to earn your trust. This topic isn't easy to talk about, and your openness meant the world to me. You reminded me why this work is important and why something needs to change. Your courage and honesty gave me the motivation to keep going when things got difficult. Thank you for being a part of this.

To my colleagues at TU Delft, especially my team at the StudentHub, Alex, Dante, Thijmen, Tim, and Rebeca, thank you for creating an open, safe and supportive space. It's been amazing to work alongside you and to build something meaningful together. I've learned so much from your ideas, energy and openness. We created something students can rely on, and I'm proud of what we've done. Thank you for being such an important part of my experience.

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And finally, to my friends: thank you for making my student years unforgettable. There are too many of you to name, but you know who you are. I'm so lucky to have you in my life.

This project has reminded me how important it is to feel safe and supported. I'm so grateful to be surrounded by people who make me feel just that. I hope this project also inspires you to reflect on who your support system is, and how powerful it can be.



# PREFACE

This is it, the end of my time as a student at TU Delft. What began in 2018 with my bachelor's degree has now led me to this final phase: becoming a strategic designer. To be honest, that still feels a little strange to say out loud. It doesn't quite feel like "me" yet. But what I do know is how many valuable skills and insights this journey has brought me.

I never thought I'd be able to connect my personal passions with my academic work, but thanks to the support of my amazing supervisory team, I got the chance to do just that. I had the opportunity to work on the topic of social safety, something I'm incredibly grateful for.

Over the years, this topic has become deeply personal to me. During my board year at the Delftsche Studenten Bond (DSB), I tried to address social safety by writing policy on it. As a young student suddenly carrying that kind of responsibility, it was overwhelming. The topic felt heavy, and honestly, quite isolating. It's something many students don't feel connected to, until they somehow have to be. But we're all part of it, whether we realize it or not.

Later, during my time as a student assistant at the StudentHub, I got the chance to work on broader projects around social safety. One of the highlights was adapting the national 'Ben je Oké?' campaign for Delft. We focused on making support more visible and accessible, especially for first-year students who are even more vulnerable. My design skills came into play here, and it felt good to use them for something so meaningful.

On a national level, I've worked with projects and initiatives like Studentenpact, GELIJKSPEL, and the National Action Program on Sexual Transgressive Behavior. These experiences showed me that real change is possible, but only if we place trust and ownership in students themselves.

This topic also hits close to home for me. I've seen the impact that sexually transgressive behavior can have, not just on individuals, but also on the people around them. It's still surrounded by taboo, and the effects go far deeper than most people realize. This project gave me space to explore the issue more deeply, to understand how we talk about it, and more importantly, how we can change parts of our student culture.

Something I want to emphasize is that students, especially students who are a member of an association, are often misrepresented. Yes, problems exist, but there's also a large group working hard to create safer, healthier, and a more supportive environment. I've seen first-hand the power of student-led initiatives tackling everything from alcohol abuse and wellbeing to social safety and housing. When students are given the right tools and knowledge, they do incredible things.

I hope this thesis encourages others to reflect, speak up, and take action, because we all have a role to play in making our associations a safe and inclusive space for everyone.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

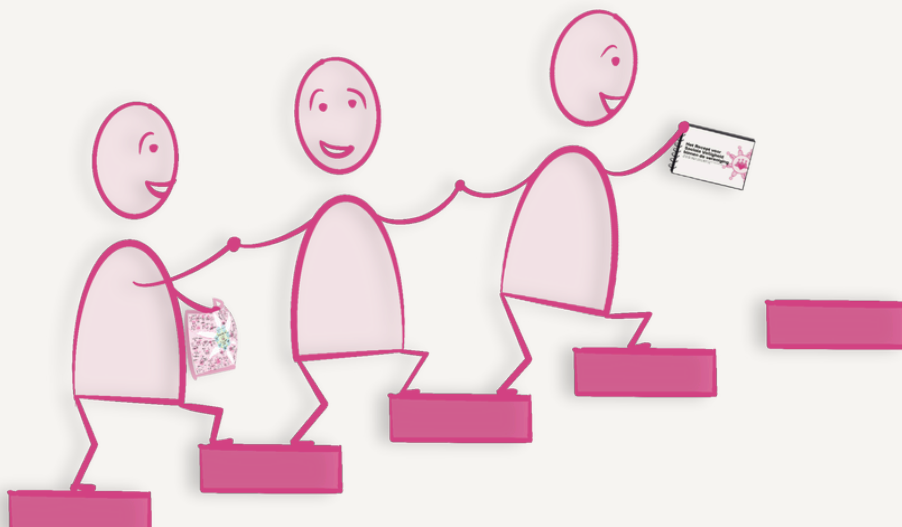
Over the past few years, the topic of social safety within Dutch student associations has become increasingly relevant. Since Amnesty International published a report in 2021 revealing that one in ten female students is raped during their time at university, the conversation around sexually transgressive behavior has slowly shifted towards taking the issue more seriously (Driessen & Polet, 2021). Different student-driven initiatives have been launched, including the Studentpact in 2023, and associations started to realize they play a key role in addressing this topic internally (Mariëtte Hamer et al., 2023). However, despite all the growing attention, motivation and awareness, achieving the necessary cultural change remains incredibly complex and difficult.

This thesis explores how Dutch student associations can transition towards a socially safe environment, diving into the complexity of the issue. It considers the core elements that define student culture. Through interviews with students from various backgrounds and roles at two associations in Delft, the impact of social norms and language on social safety within these associations was explored. The results revealed the complexity and multifaceted aspects of the topic. This research did not aim to find a one-size-fits-all solution, because such a solution does not exist. Instead, the goal was to develop a concept that could support, guide, and empower students who are trying to make their association a safer place.

The interview results show that many students struggle with knowing where to begin. While they recognize the need for change, they feel overwhelmed by the complexity and sensitivity of the issue. A lack of understanding, reflection and structure creates a barrier. What is often seen as 'normal' behavior within association culture does not always align with what is safe, inclusive or wanted. Because these behaviors are often deeply rooted in traditions, rituals, subcultures, hierarchies and other cultural elements, they are difficult to question, let alone change.

The research revealed many interesting insights that make the complexity of the topic more easy to understand. It showed which factors, elements and conditions play a role in creating a socially safe environment within student culture, like hidden hierarchies and the influence of gender. These insights formed the basis for the final concept, 'The Recipe for a Socially Safe Association.' The concept consists of two main elements, a discussion board ('praatplaat') and a workbook, that aim to make the topic more accessible and encourage action. The concept is designed to support students in initiating open conversations, developing a shared understanding of social safety within their unique culture, and creating an action plan so they can take the first steps towards positive cultural change within their own association.

Rather than focusing on ready to use rules or policies, the concept centers on reflection and empowerment. It encourages students to work together and critically evaluate their own culture, speak up, and take responsibility for shaping the community they want to be a part of. After all, lasting change doesn't come from the outside; it happens when students feel empowered to take the lead.

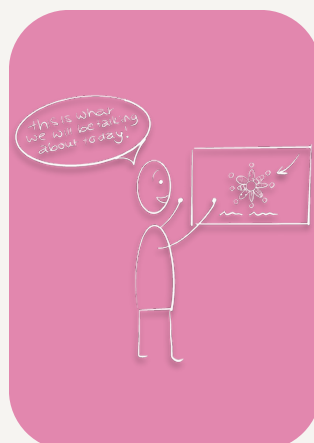


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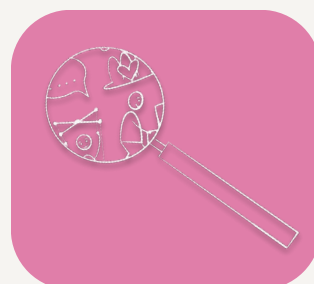
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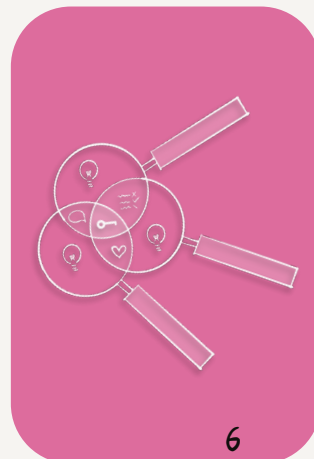
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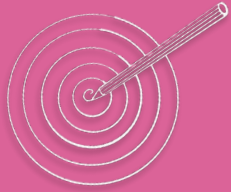
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# Glossary

Here you find relevant concepts that will be used throughout the report.

## Student association / *Studenten gezelligheidsvereniging*

A student association is an association consisting of a group of students who have joined this association. The purpose of a student association is to connect and unite. It offers students a second home and space to develop as individuals. Each association is built on core values, customs, traditions and internal structures.

*Een studentenvereniging is een vereniging die bestaat uit een groep studenten die zich heeft aangesloten bij deze vereniging. Het doel van een studentenvereniging is verbinden en verenigen. Het bieden van een tweede thuis voor studenten en ruimte om te ontwikkelen als individu. Elke vereniging is gebouwd op kernwaarden, gebruiken, tradities en interne structuren.*

## Subcultures / *Subculturen*

These are groups within a broader culture that develop their own norms, values, customs, rituals and traditions. Within student associations, for example, subcultures may form around specific year groups, subgroups, committees or houses. These subcultures often play a significant role in association life. As a member of a student association, you will find yourself committing to one or more of these subcultures during your time as a student.

*Groepen binnen een bredere cultuur die eigen normen, waarden, gebruiken, rituelen en tradities ontwikkelen. Binnen studentenverenigingen kunnen subculturen ontstaan rond specifieke jaarlagen, dispuuten, commissies of huizen. Deze subculturen zijn vaak een groot onderdeel van het verenigingsleven. Als lid van een studentenvereniging verbind je je in je studententijd aan een of meerdere van deze subculturen.*

## Social control / *Sociale controle*

Social control plays a significant role within student associations. It is embedded in the unspoken expectations and group behavior that determine what is considered 'normal'. It is not only the rules, but also daily interactions that determine who belongs and who does not. While this can bring people together, it can also hinder change. As social control is deeply intertwined with traditions, behavior is difficult to question. This is precisely why students often feel they have little opportunity to set boundaries or discuss inappropriate behavior.

*Binnen studentenverenigingen speelt sociale controle een grote rol. Het zit in onuitgesproken verwachtingen en groepsgegedrag die bepalen wat 'normaal' is. Niet alleen regels, maar vooral de dagelijkse omgang bepaalt wie erbij hoort en wie afwijkt. Dat kan verbinden, maar ook verandering remmen. Omdat sociale controle diep verweven is met tradities, is het lastig om gedrag ter discussie te stellen. Juist daardoor voelen studenten vaak weinig ruimte om grenzen aan te geven of misstanden bespreekbaar te maken.*

## Social safety / *Sociale veiligheid*

Social safety means being able to be yourself, free from fear of exclusion, judgement or inappropriate behavior. It means feeling free to speak your mind, show vulnerability and feel like you belong. Without it, situations arise in which discrimination, bullying and aggression are ignored or normalized. Creating a socially safe environment requires awareness, responsibility and active involvement from everyone.

*Sociale veiligheid betekent dat je jezelf kunt zijn zonder angst voor buitensluiting, oordeel of grensoverschrijdend gedrag. Het gaat om ruimte voelen om je uit te spreken, je kwetsbaar op te stellen en erbij te horen. Wanneer die veiligheid ontbreekt, ontstaan situaties waarin discriminatie, pesten of agressie wordt genegeerd of genormaliseerd. Een sociaal veilige omgeving vraagt om bewustzijn, verantwoordelijkheid en actieve betrokkenheid van iedereen.*

## Sexual transgressive behavior / *Seksueel grensoverschrijdend gedrag*

Sexually transgressive behavior is a type of transgressive behavior with a sexual nature. It can be divided into three categories: Non-verbal: staring; sexually suggestive gestures; displaying explicit images. Verbal: sexually suggestive comments, inappropriate questions or jokes. Physical behavior ranges from unwanted touching to serious sexual violence. The important thing is not intention, but impact: boundaries are where people indicate they are, and crossing them constitutes transgressive behavior.

*Seksueel grensoverschrijdend gedrag is een vorm van grensoverschrijdend gedrag met een seksuele lading. Dit gedrag is onder te verdelen in drie vormen: non-verbaal gedrag, zoals staren, seksueel getinte gebaren of het tonen van expliciete afbeeldingen; verbaal gedrag, zoals seksueel getinte opmerkingen, ongepaste vragen of grappen; en fysiek gedrag, variërend van ongewenste aanrakingen tot ernstig seksueel geweld. Het draait niet om intentie, maar om impact: de grens ligt waar iemand aangeeft dat die ligt, en als de ander daar overheen gaat spreken we over grensoverschrijdend gedrag.*



# Phase 1

## Project introduction



This chapter introduces the project. First, it presents the unique culture of Dutch student associations and discusses the topic of sexual transgressive behavior within this context. Next, the project's assignment, goal, and scope will be outlined. And then, lastly, the problem statement and approach will be presented.

# 1.1 Introduction to student culture

Student culture in the Netherlands is something that is and always has been something with a large mystery around it. In the Netherlands there are around 600 different and unique student associations spread amongst 15 student cities (Studentenverenigingen in Nederland, n.d.). With a large variety of members and types of associations. From study to sports to social and community focused. But more importantly, all these different associations have their own traditions, history, structures and goals, creating a unique culture within their association. To create a community where their students feel connected, be and discover themselves and have a good time. Although these association cultures differ, there are some core elements that you can find in each of them.

## Characteristics of a student association

Student culture is characterized by a strong sense of belonging, community and tradition. Social norms and other unspoken rules (like 'mores') play an important role, with older members often guiding and mentoring younger ones. Traditions such as weekly drinks and dinners or special events such as galas and lustrum activities are important in creating a strong community. Physical spaces, such as shared club houses (sociëteiten) or association buildings, act as central hubs for connection and activity.

There are clear, often hierarchical structures, with board members and other senior members holding respected positions. Younger members often see these senior members as someone they want to become, or have to live up to, to become a part of the association. Students seek personal growth through committee participation, forming lifelong friendships whilst balancing studies with social activities. Symbols such as logos, objects, language and rituals further reinforce their culture. While unspoken rules (like 'mores') ensure that members conform to expected behavior.

Competition, both internal (e.g. between groups and committees) and external (with rival associations), adds a dynamic element to this community. The culture of the association is also shaped by external factors, such as financial pressures and societal expectations, which have an influence on long standing traditions and behaviors.

Overall, student culture revolves around community, shared experiences and personal development, creating a sense of belonging and identity that extends beyond study life. It provides a 'home away from home' for students, combining tradition with opportunities for exploration and growth.

## The flip side of the coin

As we see there are always two sides to the same coin, these characteristics can also create tensions within the culture and association. Personal or societal beliefs that do not level with the cultural beliefs that live within the association might create miscommunications or other problems. But we often see that these unique cultures are strong in multiple ways, where the rich history and long-standing routines have created the foundation for new members to flourish in. These routines containing specific activities, traditions, stereotypes, values & norms and hierarchical structures are all connected to different expectations, goals and outcomes.

## Stereotypical Dutch student

If we look at how the Dutch student is represented in the media and movie industry we would see the beer drinking, partying student who has sex whenever he wants, and has all the time and freedom to do whatever he wants to do. Living in a student house, being social, having the best time of his life and living by their own rules. This is obviously not what a 'student' is, but it is what some students strive to be. Because this is what people expect a student to be or what the student expect himself to be. This stereotype differs from the female perspective, the core of drinking beer and partying applies for all students, but the reality often differs for any of the genders.

## Sense of belonging

Being part of a group is something that every human being desires, something we call sense of belonging (Gere & MacDonald, 2010; Raman, 2023). The interesting thing about the sense of belonging amongst students is that being part of a group often results in the culture and identity of this group becoming part of their own identity. They become part of the group (association, sports team, committee etc) and the group becomes part of them, making it more than just part of student life. This manifest itself in many ways, like clothing, language and pronunciation, behavior and many more manifestations of the student culture.

## Do you speak 'student'?

This language is especially something that plays an important role within the different student cultures. Overall, there is a consensus amongst Dutch students that the use of abbreviations for specific words become part of the culture. But also, different words for day-to-day activities like agenda, club house, gender identifications, specific items, meetings etc. It is the way that they communicate in their own unique way. For example, the associations with their own club house always have a specific name for it that all other students know. Like 'de soos', 'de tent', 'de zaak' or 'de club'. But there are also words that are used for first year members, 'feut' or 'sjaarsch' that show their hierarchical place within the association.

But this specific language also brings a tension. Because it often normalizes the use of words that might affect or hurt others. Words that are used in discrimination, sexism, denigration for example. This is something the research of Van Huis (2024) focused on in the context of male students in traditional Dutch student associations.

The language used within the associations is often also reflected through their songs, sayings and rituals. (recurring events to celebrate, for example, a beginning, an end or an anniversary) As these have often been around for a long time, often from the moment the association was founded, they have become a core part of the association culture. And because it has always been like this they are often not at the center of attention, let alone discussion. Making structural changes is therefore even more difficult. So, the question remains, how do we achieve cultural change without damaging the core of these associations? And where do we start if all these elements are hidden behind years of doing as it has always been?

## The role of student culture in this project

In this project I will explore the assumption that there are more aspects at play within the core of the average student culture. I imagine these aspects to be pieces of the puzzle that create the norms, values and beliefs that have made the foundation of the association and its culture as it is.

Using the Cultura (Hao, 2019) I visualized and analyzed the culture of Dutch student associations using previous knowledge, gathered through my own experience being a member of a student association and working with other student associations during my time at the TU Delft, I found that there are a lot of underlying patterns and characteristics that create the complexity of these unique cultures. I also saw a lot of different dilemmas that could have an influence on the long-term cultural change that is desired (appendix B).

In this project I aim to dive deeper into these dilemmas Specifically focusing on the effects of language and social norms on sexual transgressive behavior and social safety. Keeping in mind the importance of long-term cultural change. But also, being mindful on the sensitivity of the topic, making the need for a tailored and careful approach. Respecting everyone involved and their (personal) needs and beliefs. And although, there are more and more students and associations willing to change, the fact that they are scared to lose the core of their existence seems to keep it from exceeding further than the baseline.

In the first phase of the project a mind map (figure 1) with themes that are connected to the concept of student culture was made to organize previous knowledge and information gathered at the start of this project.

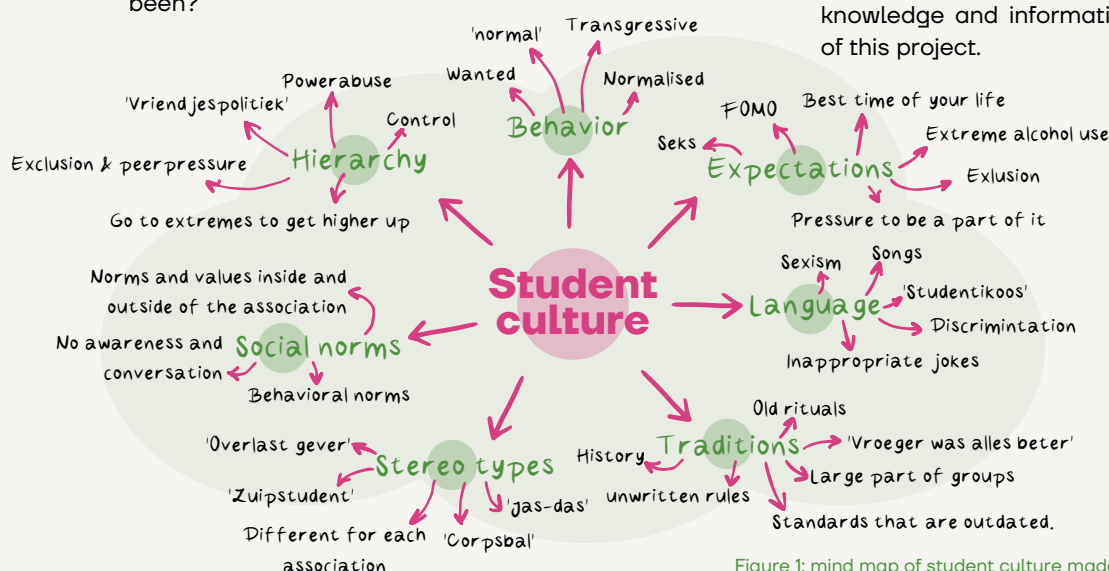


Figure 1: mind map of student culture made in the first phase of the project

## 1.2 Sexual transgressive behavior within student culture

The issue of sexually transgressive behavior has risen higher on the agenda within student culture since the publication of the report on sexual assault amongst students by Amnesty International in 2021. This research revealed that 1 in 10 female students are raped during their time at university and that these students often do not know where to turn for help (Driessen & Polet, 2021). Following the publication of this report, several initiatives were launched within the student community. Associations began to work internally and with each other to discuss the issue, but it proved to be an extremely difficult and complex topic. There was, and still is, insufficient knowledge and understanding of the issue and what it means within the context of student culture. Progress depends on the intrinsic motivation and time of board members, and a lot of progress is lost due to annual changes of the board.

### Initiatives on social safety

There are also national initiatives such as GELIJKSPEL, the Student Pact and the Code of Conduct of the National Chamber of Associations (LKV). Universities consider the issue to be important, but do not feel responsible for what happens off campus. Due to a lack of understanding and knowledge on both sides, both professional organizations and student associations are in the dark about how to proceed.

Although initiatives such as the Studentpact (Mariëtte Hamer et al., 2023) or the Code of Conduct of the LKV (2024) contain a lot of information, these initiatives often miss the point by failing to connect with the target group. Organizations such as the Centre for Sexual Violence (centrum seksueel geweld), Fairspace and the GGD try to provide knowledge and tools through workshops and bystander training, but the bridge to the student associations does not seem to have been built yet, which makes cooperation extremely difficult.

### Overwhelmed and going for the quick 'fix'

In addition, the large number of organizations, institutions and initiatives is overwhelming for board members or other students who want to work on the issue. Where do you start when you have no idea what you are asking for?

As a result, work has often been done in the moment and little attention has been paid to long-term cultural change. And although the intrinsic motivation of associations to work on the issue has only grown bigger, there is still no clear and concrete tool to support those students. Something that can unravel the complexity of the issue and work in small steps towards long-term cultural change.

The topic of social safety within student associations is relevant because students seem to be victims of sexually transgressive behavior more often than non-students (Seidler et al., 2018). Although many incidents take place outside of the association, on the street, at other associations, or in the private environment, the association offers a unique platform to positively contribute to awareness, prevention, and the establishment of clear norms through social control and group dynamics. Student associations can thus provide a secure base from which to promote socially safe behavior.

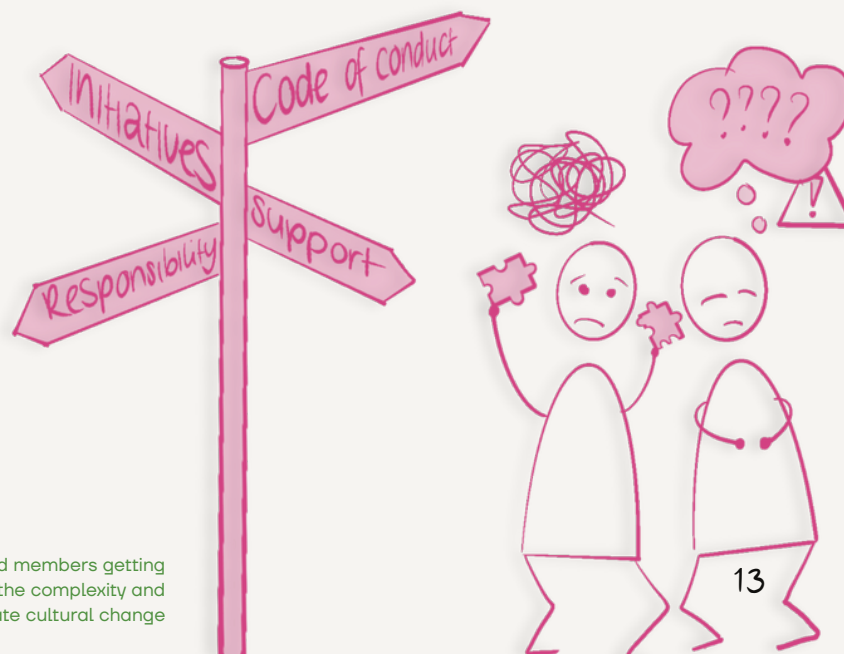


Figure 2: Board members getting overwhelmed by the complexity and responsibility to initiate cultural change

## 1.3 Initial problem definition

In the project brief (appendix A), marking the starting point of this project, the initial problem definition was described to guide the project through the first phase.

Identifying the key challenge of this project to be in the complexity and multifaceted nature of encouraging long-term cultural change and improving social safety within student associations is the goal of this project. Initially, the problem was difficult to define because of its many interconnected elements. Over the course of the project, it became clear that several structural and cultural factors contributed to the difficulty of initiating and sustaining change. For example, the annual rotation of student boards limits continuity and hinders long-term commitment to change and improvement of a socially safe environment.

In addition, different levels of awareness, motivation and lack of clarity about responsibilities and expectations among board members and other members play an important role. In addition to individual behavior, deeper cultural aspects, such as traditions, unwritten rules and social dynamics within the associations, influence how and whether durable change can take place. There is also uncertainty about the kind of support associations need, how transparent their processes are and how open they are to change. At this point, the core problem is a lack of understanding of which elements are most critical in this complex web of factors. Without a clearer understanding of these factors, it remains difficult for associations to take effective and sustained responsibility for a socially safe environment, especially given the vulnerability of many of the students involved.

## 1.4 Project assignment

At the start of the project the following assignment was defined out of the problem statement. This was the starting point of the project, and created a focus on the steps and decisions made along the way:

***“Design a strategy to empower and support student associations in creating a more socially safe environment. Enhancing the understanding, prevention and handling of sexually transgressive behavior, initiating long term behavioral and cultural change within student associations in the context of student culture.”***

This assignment was used as a guideline through the first phases of the project. After the research was done the goal of the project was redefined to adjust the project according to the focus of the final phases. The redefined design goal can be found in phase 5 of this report.

## 1.5 Initial Design Goal

In this project explored the factors and elements that play a role in cultural, and behavior change when it comes to creating a social safe environment in the context of Dutch student associations. With the goal to empower and provide the tools needed to take the step towards long term change within the association.

I explored what the current situation is when it comes to the perception and experience of transgressive behaviors in the context of Dutch student associations. Looking at unwanted behavior and the different drivers that empower certain behavior within the context of student associations. For this study I asked students from different places within the association to participate to create a more diverse image of what the role of social norms, language and culture is within the association, and more importantly, how the different students perceive this in context of (sexually) transgressive behavior.

With the complexity of the problem this project aimed at understanding and defining the elements that create the complexity and look for elements to focus on. Since this is not a topic that is solvable, the goal of this project was to understand and create to empower the students that are in charge of these associations. Making them the leader in cultural and behavioral change that will start but continue after they hand over their responsibilities to the next board.

## 1.6 Scope and limitations of the project

Due to the complexity of the problem the first phase of the project focused on exploring and narrowing down the scope. Using the Cultura method (Hao, 2019) two key themes were defined, language and social norms, to scope the project (appendix B). But it is important to note that this project, and these themes, is the tip of the iceberg. There is a lot to explore, learn, change and do within this field but with the limited time it was necessary to narrow this down early in the project. Something to keep in mind while reading this report is the fact that the limitations this scope brings could have had an influence the results from the research done in the exploration phase.

Next to the narrowing down of key themes the scope for the project was set to student associations in Delft (student gezelligheidsverenigingen), leaving out all study, sport and culture associations. This decision was made to make the project feasible within the time limit. But it also created the possibility to project possible results from the research over the full concept of student associations within the context of this project. This smaller perspective on Dutch student culture could leave out information that could come up for student associations from other Dutch cities or other types of associations.



## 1.7 Project approach

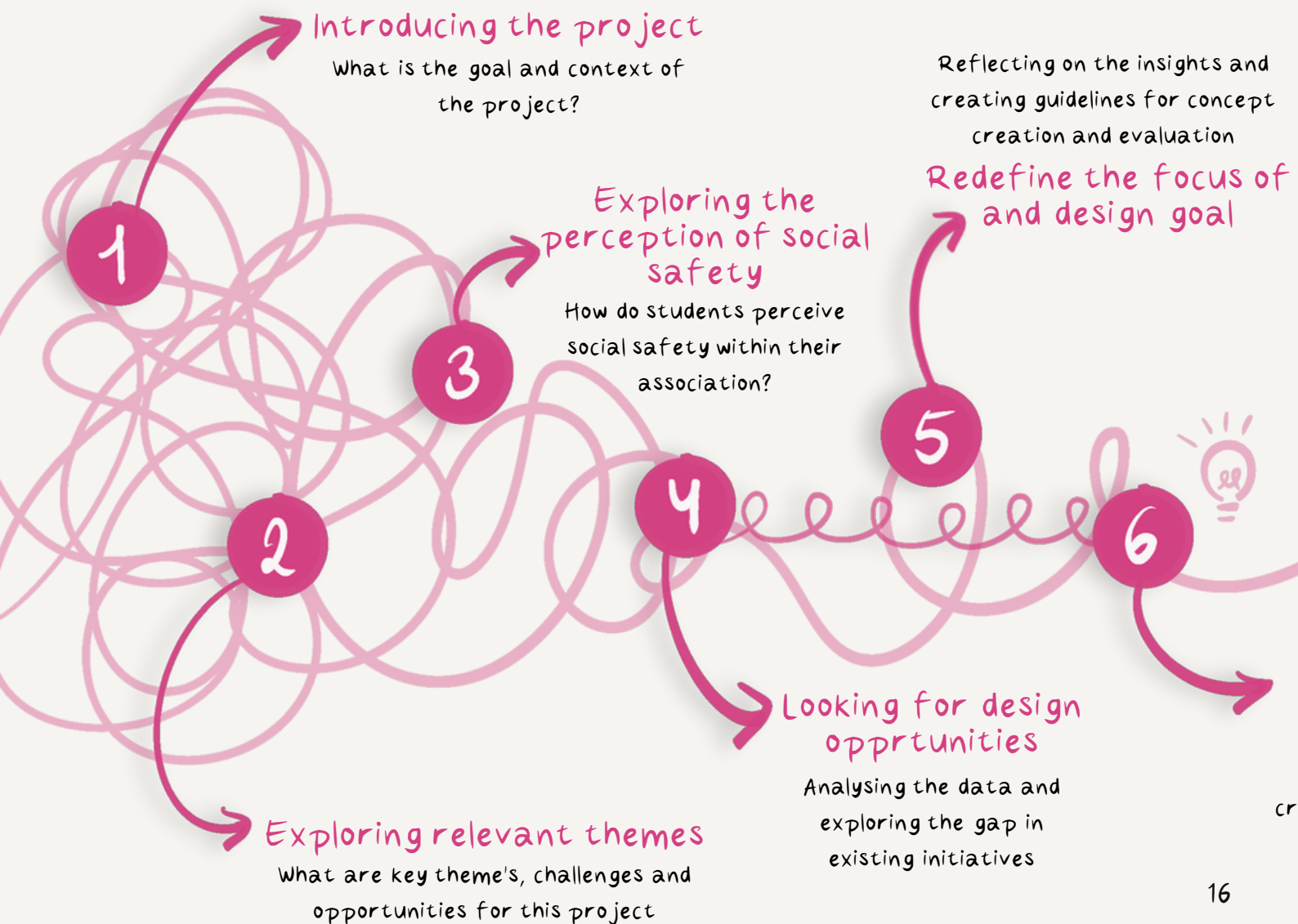
The first phase of this project focused on understanding the full context of the problem. Although the topic was complex, I used various methods to gather insights into different elements of student culture. One of the key tools I used was the Cultura framework (Hao, 2019). In addition, I took a closer look at the current situation regarding social safety within student associations.

After gaining a general understanding, it was time to scope the project by analyzing the insights gathered. At this point, the decision was made to focus specifically on student associations ('studenten gezelligheidsverenigingen') in Delft. During this phase, I defined and redefined the

project goals. The next steps were mapped out, with a clear focus on gaining deeper insights into the factors that contribute to creating a socially safe environment within these associations.

Given the limited time available, the scope was further narrowed down to focus on social norms and language, two elements that play a significant role at both the group and individual levels within the associations. And elements that the students in the association have a direct influence on.

The next phase was about exploring the current situation in more depth. Since both the topic and the context of the project are complex and sensitive, it was crucial to ensure a solid



foundation for the research. This phase consisted of the main research activities, including the design and testing of the interview design. Once finalized, I conducted multiple in-depth interviews.

After collecting the data, I moved on to the analysis phase. The insights from the interviews were discussed and using existing literature to add depth to the insights. This helped develop a deeper understanding of the various factors influencing perceptions of social safety within the associations.

The analysis led to the identification of five different design opportunities, each based on the insights from the interviews. Using these opportunities and the data gathered, a clear design goal was formulated, along with guidelines for evaluating future concepts.

In the following phase, I explored these design opportunities further and developed a concept. This concept consisted of two main elements, each designed based on multiple criteria. Once the concept was finalized, I created an implementation strategy to ensure it connects effectively with the target group and other stakeholders.

The project concluded with an evaluation of the concept, resulting in several recommendations for future development. Lastly, I reflected on the entire process, summarizing the steps taken and considering potential next steps going forward.

The process of this project involved a lot of uncertainty, insecurity, barriers and complexity. A lot of going back and forth and exploring complexity. Something the Design Squiggle by Damien Newman visualizes perfectly. This visualisation was therefore used as inspiration for visualizing my personal project approach (figure 3).

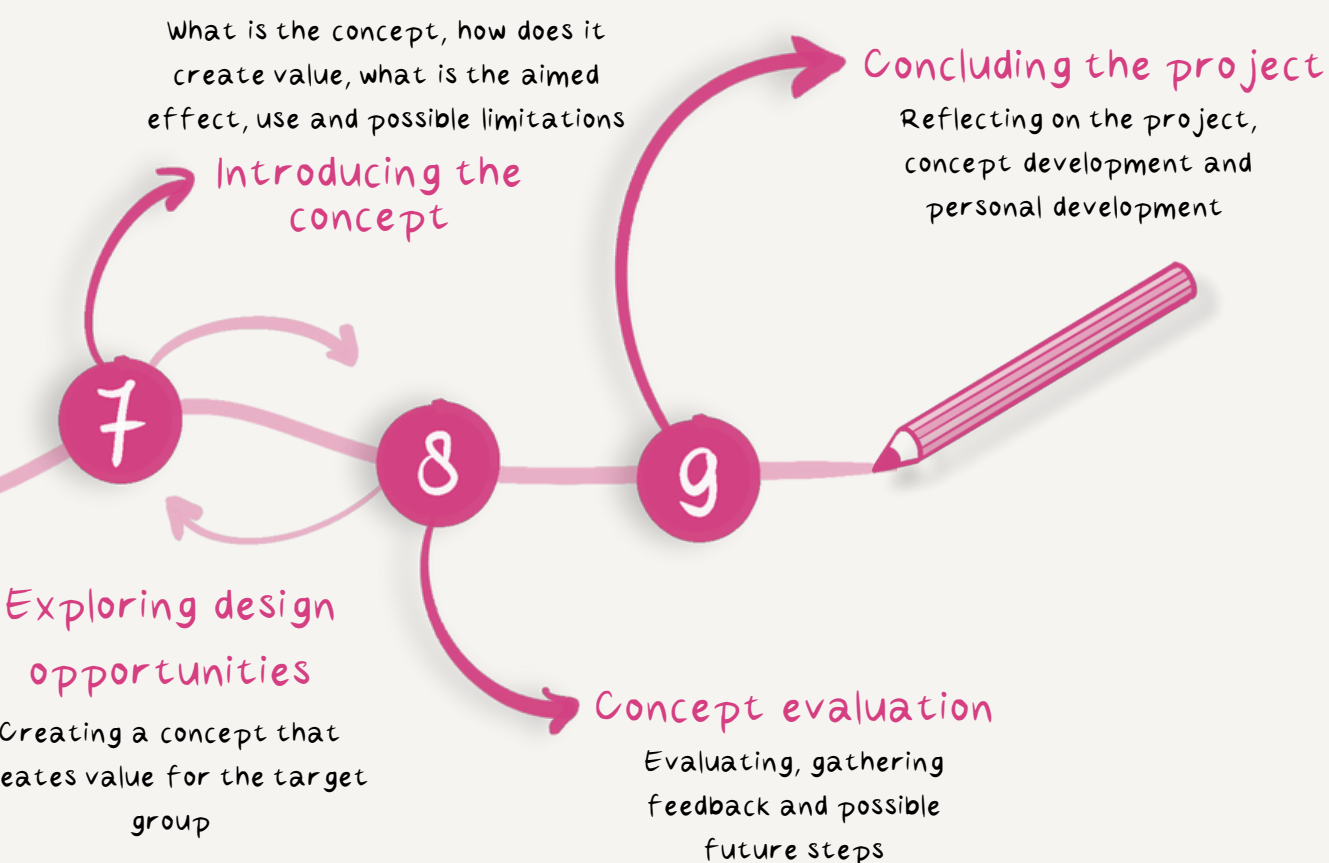


Figure 3: Visualisation of the project approach, showing all phases of the project and the core of each phase

## 1.8 Relevance of the topic

On 24 April 2025, Mariëtte Hamer, the Government Commissioner against Sexual Transgressive Behavior and Sexual Violence, organized a meeting on the role of higher education institutions and student associations in tackling sexual transgressive behavior in student life (Ministry of General Affairs, 2025). Several student organizations and representatives from student life, including myself, and representatives from universities were invited. A round table discussion was held on the subject. King Willem-Alexander was also present at the meeting and engaged in a discussion with the participants about their contribution to tackling sexually transgressive behavior. I got the opportunity to share my vision on the topic, how we are working on it in Delft in relation with the University and how proud I am to be a part of the process (figure 4/5).

It was a very special and inspiring afternoon, which made it clear to everyone that many steps have already been taken in the right direction. But the enormous attention the meeting received also underlined the importance of this commitment and the responsibility that all those present have taken on.

The reason for the meeting was the report presenting the results of the research conducted by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), commissioned by the office of Mariëtte Hamer. The research shows that 52% of female university students are victims of sexually transgressive behavior (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2025). One in five male students will also be victims of sexual misconduct during their time at university.



Figure 4: Round table conversation to discuss the responsibility of educational institutions in the approach of sexual transgressive behavior, April 2025 (foto credit: Frank van Beek)

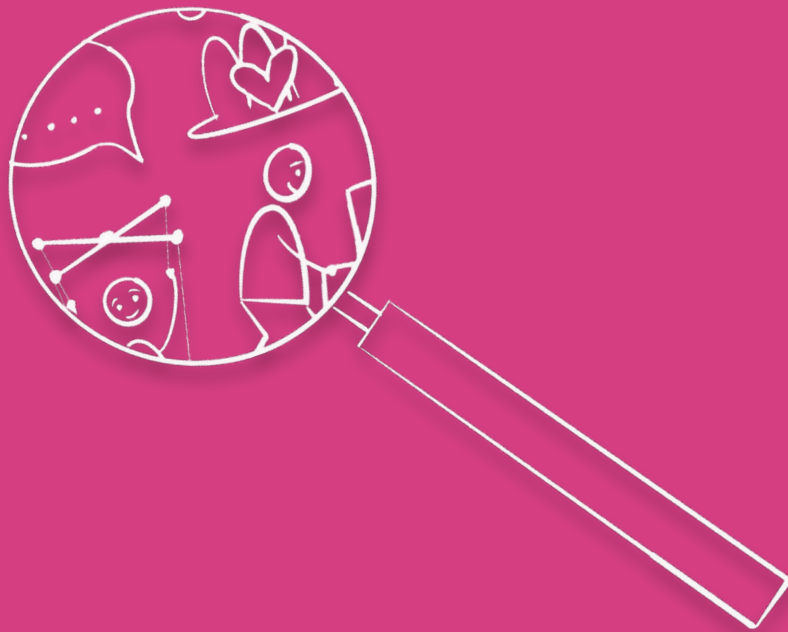
In addition, it was announced on 22 April 2025 that a large national research project called T@ckle, which focuses on both online and offline sexually transgressive behavior in five different focus areas, has been awarded a grant to work in a large collaborative network. 'The aim of the project is to take responsibility for sexually transgressive behavior away from the victim and to examine and change norms around victimblaming, masculinity and alcohol consumption.' It looks beyond the individual and seeks to challenge the culture that SGOG promotes. (Bijna 3 Miljoen Euro Naar Onderzoek Grensoverschrijdend Gedrag, 2025). The size and scope of this project shows that there is increasing attention to this issue, but also that there is still a long way to go. Something that this project, as a small dot in the big network, could contribute to.



Figure 5: All participants for the round table conversation within the context of student associations (foto credit: Frank van Beek)

# Phase 2

## Exploring relevant themes



This chapter dives deeper into the key themes connected to this project and explores the broader scope of social safety within student associations. Topics such as sexually transgressive behavior, social norms, language, and long-term behavioral and cultural change are discussed, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities for creating lasting impact

## 2.1 Sexual transgressive behavior & social safety

Over the past few years, the topics of sexual transgressive behavior and social safety have become more relevant. The report of Amnesty International pointed out what the negative effects are for those students and in what way the university should take responsibility for this (Driessen & Polet, 2021). But this report also started the conversations amongst the student associations. Opening the discussion on what the role and responsibility of student associations is or should be when it comes to the topic of social safety.

### Social safety higher on the agenda

In the time that followed a lot of different initiatives were initiated and expert organizations like Rutgers, Centrum Seksueel Geweld and Fairspace started connecting with these student bodies where possible. The 'Ben je oke?' campaign was integrated into the student associations and student initiatives were created to educate other students on the risks and responsibilities (Ben je oké?, 2024). Themes like consent and sex started to become more of a topic, making both positive and negative impact.

In 2022, led by Mariette Hamer, government commissioner for sexual violence and sexually transgressive behavior, the Studentpact was launched (Mariëtte Hamer et al., 2023). This document was created in co-creation with students and experts to help and support the student associations with an action-oriented student approach to positive sexuality in student life (Mariëtte Hamer et al., 2023). The document points out different key topics that help guide the board members towards long term behavior change.

### Lack of effectiveness

Even though this topic has national wide attention and there are a lot of different stakeholders that provide knowledge, tools and products that can be implemented and used to start the cultural change towards a more social safe environment it is still proven to be hard to turn the page. One of the factors that plays a big role in this is the fact that the board of the association changes every year, causing a lack of continuity (Van Huis, 2024). This obviously makes it difficult to start long term change and often leaves the initiatives started by one board be gone by the time they change.

### What is social safety?

When we look at social safety, it is broader than just sexually transgressive behavior. It includes all forms of unwanted behavior, like bullying, discrimination and other forms of violence, and ensures that people feel free and protected to be themselves. The two issues are very much related, and both are addressed in the student world.

Also, within TU Delft we can see that in the last two years a lot of attention has been devoted to the topic of social safety. The Integrity Office has now also written a 'Plan for Change' to improve social safety within TU Delft, for which the following definition has been written (Plan for Change Social Safety, 2024).

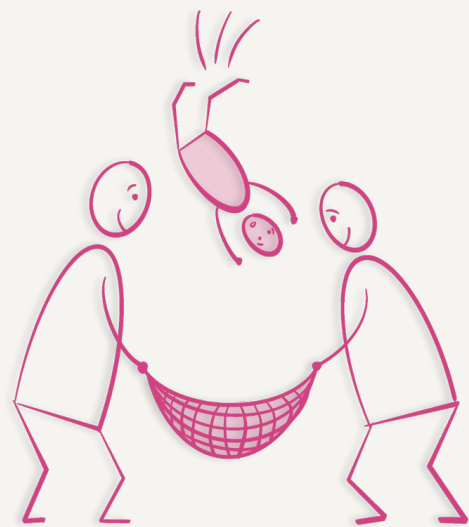


***For us, social safety means that we as staff and students treat each other respectfully. That we treat each other equally and that we belong regardless of our origin, position, gender or identity. Social safety also means that we dare to speak to each other and that we can fearlessly say what we think. Even if we have a different opinion. This is especially true for people in a dependent position. Finally, social security means that we feel protected from undesirable behavior."***

*(Plan For Change Sociale Veiligheid, 2024)*



This definition is something that all students at TU Delft should be able to measure up to and thus serves as the basis for this concept in this project. The research will further explore students' perceptions and experiences of social safety.



## The pyramid of violence

In 2025, the Act4Respect alliance, a multi-party collaboration including Rutgers, COC and Atria, published a report on the Pyramid of Violence (Act4Respect, 2025). The pyramid of violence shows how microaggressions and comments and attitudes about sex, sexuality, relationships and gender can have a constructive impact (figure 6). It highlights the importance of intervening at the bottom of the pyramid to remove the breeding ground for an environment where sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence are normalized and downplayed.

To complement this report, the new campaign 'Little things become big things' was also launched on 10 April 2025 (Hester, 2025). It focuses on the 'small' comments that often have a much greater impact on the victim than is realized, especially if an individual must deal with them more often. Research also shows that the normalization of these often 'harmless' comments is a breeding ground for more serious transgressive behavior (Act4Respect, 2025; Hester, 2025).

This suggests that both language and normalization play an important role in tackling sexually transgressive behavior.



Figure 6: The pyramid of violence shows how microaggressions can lead to other types of intimidation, violence, or even murder. (Act4Respect, 2025)

## 2.2 Social Norms

### Social norms as a behavior driver

Ostrom (2000) describes social norms as shared understandings about actions that are mandatory, forbidden or permitted. These understandings create the unwritten rules that guide behavior within the specific culture the social interactions take place. They emerge from shared beliefs about common (descriptive) and approved (injunctive) behaviors, shaping individual and collective actions through social sanctions and rewards (UNICEF, 2021). Understanding those unwritten rules and the role they play in social behaviors is the key to designing interventions for long term behavioral change (UNICEF, 2021). But it is also good to keep in mind that not all behavior is driven by social norms, unwanted behavior can also be the result of a lack of knowledge (UNICEF, 2021).

### Different types of norms

In the report of UNICEF (2021) different types of social norms are described, including descriptive norms (what people do), injunctive norms (what is approved), moral norms (personal beliefs), and expected outcome (anticipated consequences). Reference groups and social networks influence norm compliance, while ignorance and the lack of awareness and conversations can sustain harmful norms. Related to this are gender norms, that UNICEF (2021) defines as the behavioral expectations based on sex, that often reinforce inequalities within these social contexts.

### Norms as a part of the strategy

UNICEF (2021) also suggests that effective interventions assess whether behaviors are norm-driven and use strategies like community dialogue, media campaigns, and policy changes. This something that is also reflected upon by Petit (2019). Therefore, a deeper understanding of social norms could enable targeted efforts to promote positive behavioral change and challenge unwanted behavior.

***“Stereotypical norms around masculinity, femininity and sexuality can contribute to sexually transgressive behavior.”***

(Van Huis, 2024)

### Influence of harmful norms

In the research of Van Huis (2024) we see how the stereotype gender norms still play a big role in the Dutch student culture and how these can and do contribute to the problem of sexual transgressive behavior within student associations. This could be seen as an example of how rigid gender expectations create environments that foster unwanted behavior. It also shows how harmful norms contribute to such behavior, and that changing those norms should be central to prevention strategies.

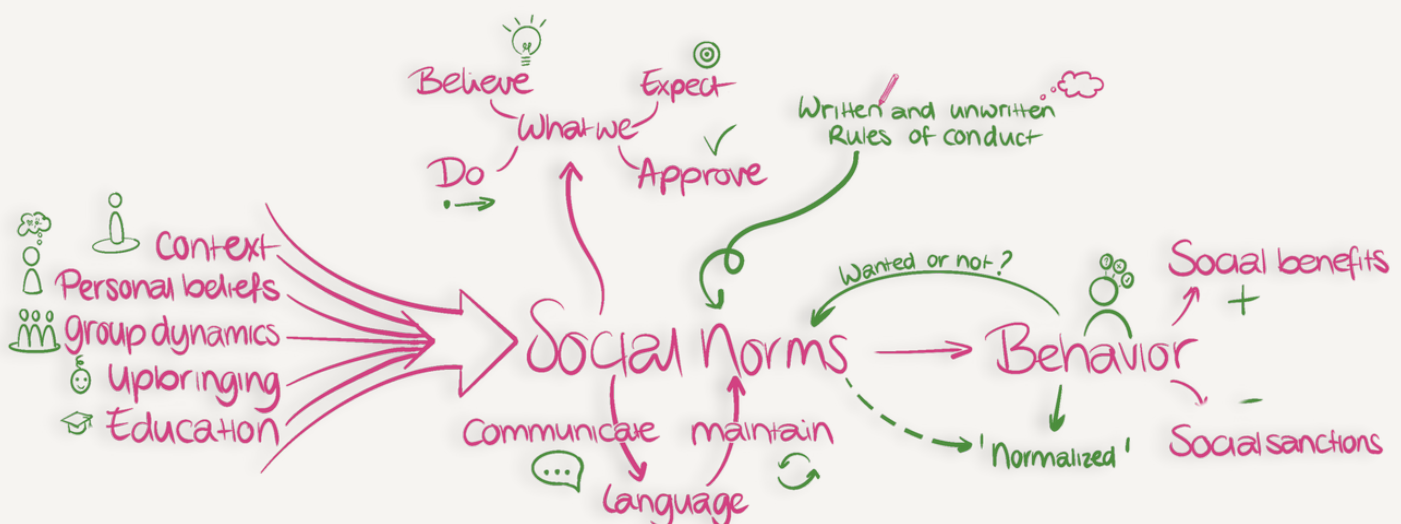


Figure 7: Visualization of how social norms are shaped, what effect it can have and how it influences behavior.

## 2.3 Language use

### The relation between culture and language

Language plays an important role within the association. Zhou (2023) states that language and culture are closely related. In the context of this project, this could imply that the culture of the association also has a unique form of language use. This can range from songs and slogans to more subtle forms of code-switching and commenting (Nilep, 2006; Van Huis, 2024), with the way of talking depending on the social context. This can contribute to social control and group cohesion but can also be harmful if certain words and expressions perpetuate sexually transgressive behavior or exclusion.

The way people communicate with each other can create a sense of connection and belonging to a group. The use of language is seen not only as a means of communication, but also as a means of structuring thoughts and beliefs (Zhou, 2023). Within student culture, there are many different terms and words that are used to refer to certain unique things. Examples include abbreviations, nicknames and words used to refer to women, societies or groups. These words are often directly linked to the association, creating a unique form of language within each association that is shaped by the individuals, practices and traditions within that association.

### Key influences on language

Factors that play a role in this issue include miscommunication, language use based on upbringing and norms, word choice and (mis)interpretation, and the influence of emotions on language use (Bamberg, 1997; Van Huis, 2024). Harmful forms of language use also play a role, including sexist and derogatory language, but also, for example, swear words. The report of Act4Respect (2025) also underscores the effects and impact of small, gender related, jokes and comments. Showing that both positive and negative effects and factors of language should be taken into account.

### Code-switching and masculinity

Van Huis's research (2024) also explores norms of masculinity within student associations, where 'code-switching' is an element of contextual language use. In this context, 'code' refers to a way of communicating with each other that varies depending on the situation, often depending on who you are talking to, which is also referred to as situational code-switching (Woolard, 2005). But why do people switch their language use in different contexts? Changing language or word use can have different functions, such as making a social connection, creating distance or fitting in with the humour or atmosphere of a group (Van Huis, 2024).

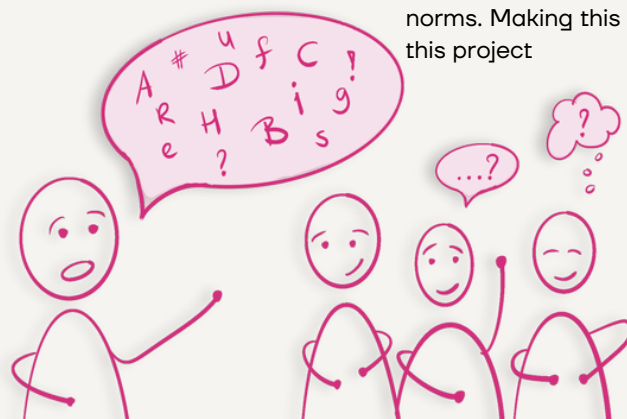
***“There is group pressure to drink, to be socially active, to ‘score’, and to go along with (women’s)unfriendly language.”***

*(Van Huis, 2024)*

This highlights how social dynamics within student organizations reinforce problematic behaviors and language use. It's interesting to consider how these fit into broader theories of masculinity. Group pressure often pushes young men toward aggressive, competitive, and sometimes harmful behaviors. The fact that sexist language is framed as a bonding mechanism raises questions about how deeply ingrained such norms are and how difficult they are to change.

### Tool for creating and maintaining norms

According to Kuang & Bicchieri (2024) Language plays a crucial role in shaping and communicating social norms. Where Language framing can affect perception of norms and motivate positive behavior and social change. (Kuang & Bicchieri, 2024). Highlighting five different mechanisms that use language framing to shape the perception of social norms. This shows that, next to the direct influence of language on situations, language is also essential in creating and maintaining social norms. Making this an important topic to involve in this project



## 2.4 Long term behavior and cultural change

### Absence of long-term changes

If we look at social safety and sexual transgressive behavior within the student culture, we can see that there is a growing will to create change when it comes to unwanted behavior. But it seems to be extremely difficult to initiate and create systemic change. This is due to a lot of different factors like loss of impact due to change of boards, changes in motivation and difficulty in finding the right approach and setting the steps into the right direction.

### Change the group norm and then the behavior will follow

Even though a lot of the associations already have multiple initiatives they do to create a more socially safe environment, it has proven to be difficult to get to the core of unwanted behavior and what drives this. Centola et al. (2018) state that within a group of people, about 25% of the group must share the new opinion on what is accepted behavior to change the social norm and behavior within the group. This implies that for change to be initiated, not all individuals within the association need to share the same level of knowledge and awareness. If there is a minority group of around 25%, they are able to turn the norm and behaviors, initiating long-term changes.

### Behavioral drivers

In this project the behavior drivers model created by UNICEF was used to structure and guide through the complexity of the topic (Petit, 2019). In this behavior drivers model they look at two things, first they look at why do people what they do and secondly, they look at how we can effectively influence these behaviors (Petit, 2019). The behavior is explained to consist of three elements. These elements being psychology, sociology and environment.

***“The thinking is simple: one must investigate behavior to understand why it is happening and then try to figure out what may influence these drivers no matter what they are. This problem-solving mindset is the key to moving away from pre-conceived ideas and go-to communication interventions, and instead approach behavior change as a holistic effort addressing all possible psychological, social and structural factors that the diagnosis puts forward. Start by assuming you know nothing, make no assumptions, and then study the behavior to crack the code.”***

*(Petit, 2019)*



To better understand what factors, influence behavior within student unions, I used UNICEF's Behavior Drivers Model as framework for my interview structure (Petit, 2019). This model identifies three main components that drive behavior: psychology, sociology and environment. By linking these three perspectives to the context of student associations, I was able to systematically examine how behaviors related to social safety are created and maintained.

Within the **psychological** domain, I looked at how individual attitudes, perceptions and self-efficacy play a role. For example, to what extent do (board) members feel responsible for social safety and do they believe they can actually influence it? But also, what is perceived as 'normal' behavior, what are expectations and how do they influence behavior?

From a **sociological** perspective, I looked at peer pressure, social norms, traditions, hierarchies and power structures within associations that influence behavior, such as unwritten rules or pressure to 'get involved'. And the influence of personal beliefs or prejudices.

Finally, within the **environmental** factors, I identified elements such as the structure and culture of associations, communication channels and existing policy initiatives. These help to determine whether socially safe behavior is encouraged or hindered within the association.

By analyzing the behavior and perceptions of members and boards at these three levels, a broader and multi-layered picture emerged of how social safety is influenced within associations, and where opportunities for change lie.

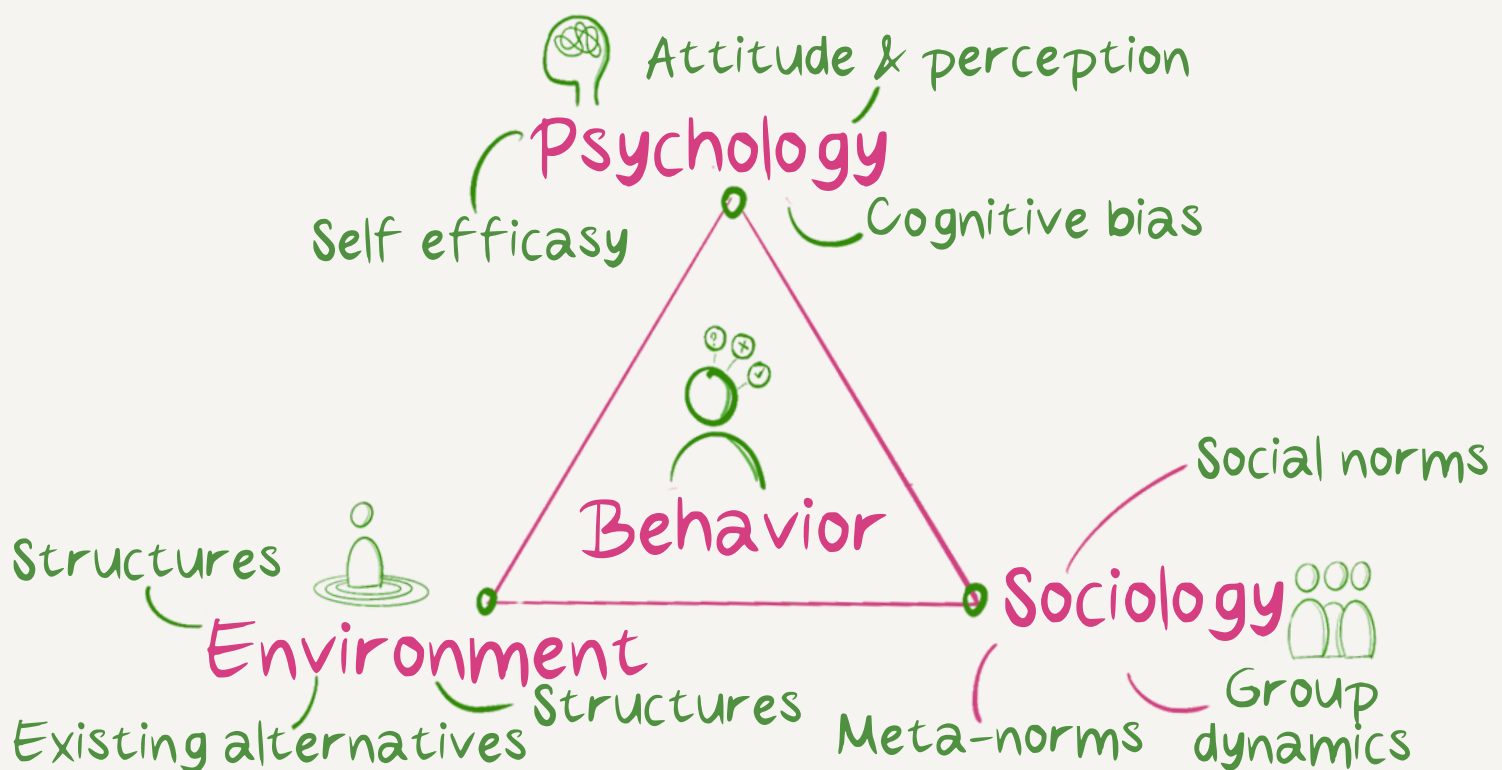


Figure 8: Contributing factors that shape behavior within the context of student culture. Based on the 'behavior drivers model' (Petit, 2019)

# Phase 3

## The perception of social safety



This chapter outlines the research conducted through in-depth interviews with students from student associations in Delft. The study explores how language and social norms influence perceptions of social safety. The goal is to gain insight into individual experiences and broader behavioral patterns related to transgressive behavior on both the individual and cultural levels.

# 3.1 Exploring students' perceptions of social safety

## Exploring behavioral drivers

The goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of what factors influence social safety within student associations. And in that specifically what the perceptions and experiences are of students about social safety within student associations. This was done by exploring a broader perspective of elements that play a role in the behavior of individuals and how these themes emerge within the perceptions and experiences of the students who were interviewed. This was done using the behavior drivers' model (Petit, 2019) and the results of the first phase as the structure of the interview. After defining the core themes of this project, it was decided in this study to expand the focus a bit more and look at the components that may influence student behavior within the student association.

## Translating back to key themes

In this study, the analysis then returned the focus back to the core themes of the project. Because the results of these interviews are too large and complex it was decided to use the results from the first phase as a framework for analysis. Namely the role of language and social norms in the perception of social safety in the context of student associations in Delft. In this way an attempt was made to get the richest possible picture of these themes and where it all comes back. For both key themes three **research questions** were drawn up to look at the role of these themes on the perception of social safety within student associations.

To get a deeper understanding of how these elements have an influence within the student associations in Delft in depth interviews were performed to answer these research questions (Boyce et al., 2006). In these interviews the goal was to gather insights and explore the perception different members within the associations have on the themes social norms and language within the context of sexual transgressive behavior.

## Participants & Recruitment process

Participants were selected through **two different student associations** in Delft. In the selection process there was specific attention for the sampling of participants. Because the sample should create a comprehensive overview over the overall situation within the association that can be projected over the larger context of student associations in Delft. Therefore, the sampling strategy that was used focused on participants within different roles in the association, differences in length of membership and different gender identification. With implementing this strategy, the research aimed to create an even distributed and representative sample of the association. The selection process was done by using board members as contact point to recruit students from within the association. When a student was recruited, they were contacted to schedule the interview.

To mitigate the risk of **pressure to participate**, all students that were recruited by the board were informed before the interview and asked again if they wanted to participate or not. In the case of no participation the board was not informed of this decision to create an open space for the student to decide for themselves if they want to participate as an individual.

Ultimately, two associations participated in the research and assisted in the recruitment process. This resulted in a total of **eight potential participants, six of whom eventually took part** in the research.

## Language

**RQ 1.1:** What language is specific to student associations?

**RQ 1.2:** What aspects of language are threatening to social safety?

**RQ 1.3:** What aspects of language contribute positively to social safety?

## Social Norms

**RQ 2.1:** What social norms exist within the association, which ones are explicit and which ones are implicit?

**RQ 2.2:** In what ways are these norms maintained, cultivated?

**RQ 2.3:** What is the role of subcultures on social norms?



## 3.1 Exploring students' perceptions of social safety

### Interview Design

Because of the sensitivity of the topic the interview was designed in a **semi-structured** way. Using the behavior change model (Petit, 2019) the interview was structured into different themes. These themes create the foundation of the interview. One of the key elements of the interview was the interaction with the participant and the template. Since the goal of the interview was to gather personal experiences, perception and other implicit information it was important to create an interactive setting in which the participant was nudged to dive deeper into the themes at hand.

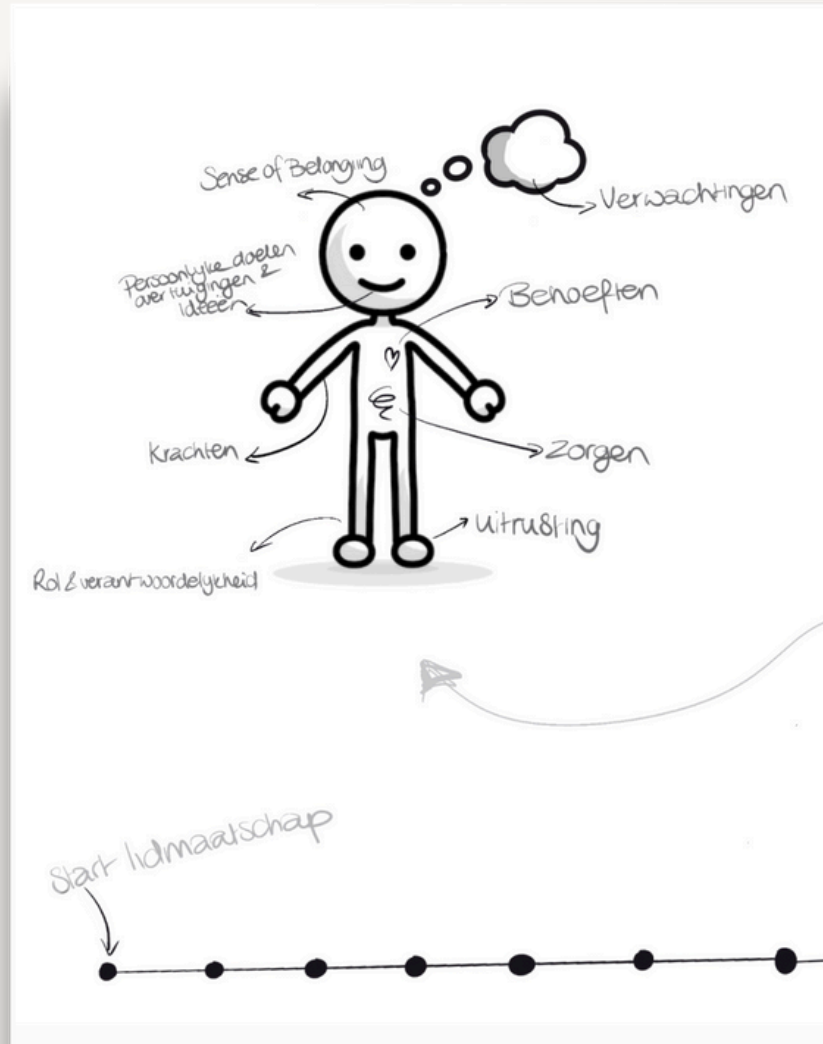
This was done by creating the **interview template** that consists of three elements (figure 9, appendix C). The first element is the **persona**, where the participant is asked to reflect on themselves and talk about who they are as a student and member of their association. Taking the personal beliefs, needs, worries, expectations and perspectives on responsibility in account.

On the right side of the template the **iceberg model** is illustrated. This iceberg model was used to go below the surface and to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of the problem at hand. Where the part of the iceberg that is above the surface shows the visible parts of the association (activities, traditions, structures), and the part below the surface focusses on things that are less visible (beliefs, norms, language, needs and behavior). Where there is a relation between the individual (participant) and the iceberg (association). The participant is asked to reflect on the elements and talk about their personal experiences and perception of what is at hand. Making it possible for both the participant and researcher to be the lead in the conversation using the template as an interactive tool.

On the bottom part of the template there is a **timeline** that can also be used in the interview to ask the participant about their journey and experiences. All three elements can also be used to interact with each other and reflect on both association and personal perspectives and the themes at hand. The full template can be found in the appendix C.

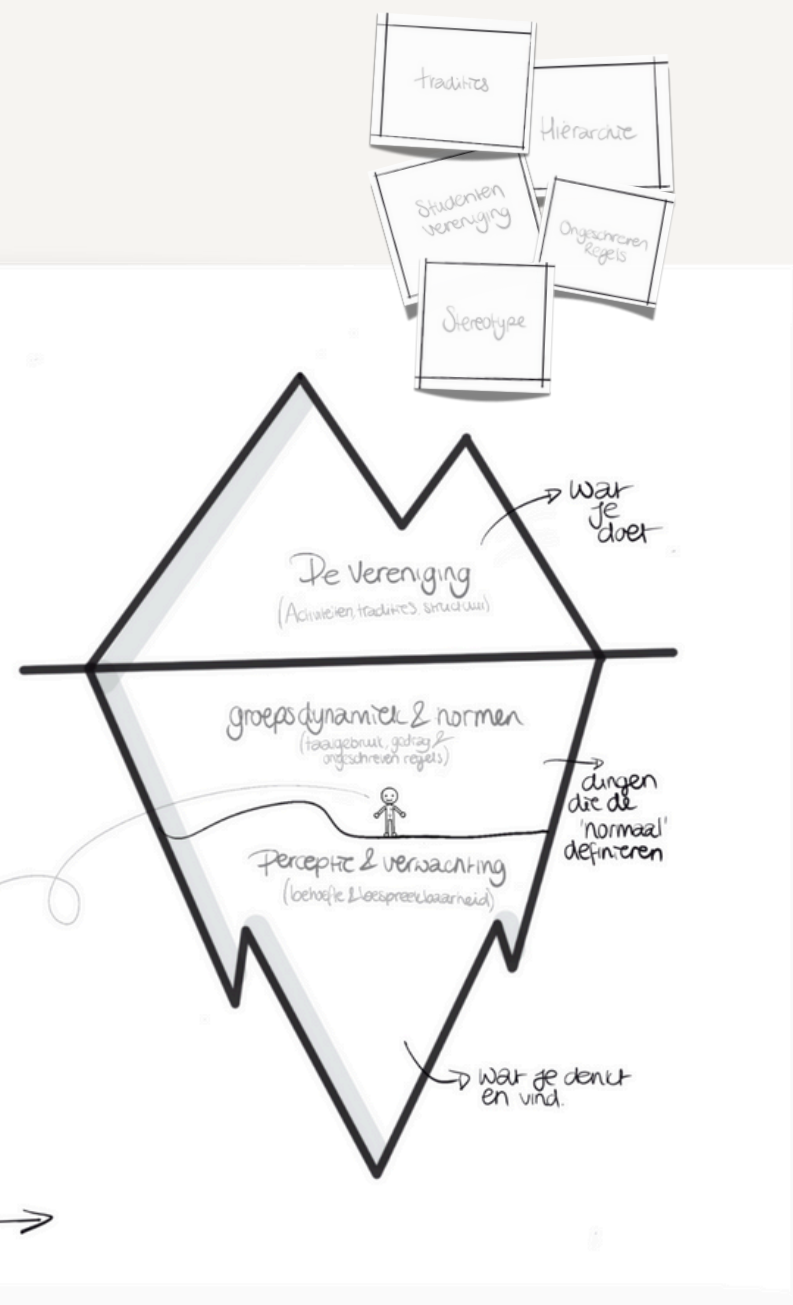
Next to the template separate **cards with keywords** were designed to give the interaction a

Figure 9: Template and word-cards used during the interviews to stimulate interaction.



more dynamic feel. The cards were showed at the end of the interview as a reflection and closing off activity. The keywords consist of words that are on the template and some extra words, creating a **reflecting** opportunity. Where the participant can reflect on what they have said, what they think is the definition and what comes to mind when they see the word.

Next to this those keywords also provide crucial **information on the perception** of the participants when it comes to these words. As it is almost impossible to formulate a concrete definition of keywords like sexually transgressive behavior, social norms and 'normal' behavior, because this can vary from person to person. Where the law provides some guidance here and there, a large grey area remains. The perception



of these keywords differs from person to person and is influenced by, for example, context, bias and previous experiences (Fischer & Sprado, 2017). Making them an important element of the interview.

## Informed Consent

With the sensitivity of the topic, clear communication and agreement on both the process and use of the data was of big importance. Therefore, an informed consent form was created and signed by all participants. Participants were not obligated to answer and could stop the session at any time. Next to that multiple steps were taken to handle any privacy related risks to ensure full anonymity. The informed consent template can be found in appendix D.

## Interview session

The duration of the interviews was about 1,5 to 2,5 hours per participant/session. At the start of the session I went through the informed consent again to make sure the participant understood the purpose of the research and their rights. After this the template was explained and the interview was started as an open conversation. The length of the session created enough space to go in-depth and relieve the pressure of time.

## Pilot session

To test the interview set up a pilot interview was done. The participant for this session also fits the requirements for the interview, making this a full test session. During this session the template and set up was tested. Overall, this was a very positive and productive session, already providing a lot of interesting insights on the topic but also on the interview set up. Main insights from this session were:

- Making the template visually clearer. Show the relationship between the elements and how the interaction can be done.
- Add extra words to the word cards: responsibility, alcohol use, groups.
- Make the template bigger to create more workspace to draw and write on.
- To make the interview in-dept more time is needed. Take about 2,5 hours per interview to create an open conversation where there is enough room to dive deep into the information at hand and to not feel rushed.
- Language might not be the key topic, there are a lot of things that have not yet come up in the first phase. This is a good thing, keep this open look into the topic.
- Interesting topics that came up were alcohol use, gossiping, lack of conversation and agreements, positive effects of membership, stereotypes, perception of the key words, responsibility.

Overall, the pilot showed that the set-up is effective in creating an open conversation. To make me curious about the participants experience and let the participant take the lead while still having a little bit of structure by using the template as a guide.

## 3.2 Desired Outcome

During the interviews the personal experiences, beliefs and thoughts were at the center of the conversation. Making the participants as individuals a key contributor to the research aside from their association. This is also how the outcomes will be used in the project, as individual experiences from students within a student association, unrelated from the structure and culture they are in. This way the information that is extracted from the interviews is easier to project over the full context of student associations. Hopefully providing an outcome that will be helpful to student associations regardless of their unique cultural elements.

## 3.3 HREC application

The application with the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) provided a key learning during the process. As this was an important step to take, because of the sensitivity of the topic in this project. The application checklist pointed out different risks that needed to be mitigated, something that was new. But it helped with the creation of a safe environment and the open conversation that was aimed for in this project.

Another point that was raised around asking the participants about their experience and topics on social safety and sexual transgressive behavior was that it could also provide me with the participants experiences that could put me in a position where I need to report the described situation. During the application, this also raised the question if this topic, due to the sensitivity and possible implications, was fit for a master's thesis. But I think that exactly that is the key to why this is such an important project. Because yes, it is a very sensitive topic, but if we keep looking away because it is too sensitive, it will be almost impossible to create a solution for the problem that we cannot define.

## 3.4 Limitations of the method and assumptions made

### Previous knowledge

Within this process a lot of assumptions have been made based on previous knowledge and research. This resulted into the scope of the research being the influence of social norms and language on the perception of social safety within student associations in Delft. The focus of the interview set up was already narrowed down, but the decision was made to set up the interview with a broader perspective, looking at the full picture of behavior and perception within the association and the individual. Therefore, the template also has other elements that are connected to the topic. The aim of this decision was to create the opportunity to grasp the full context of the problem while also limiting the complexity.

### Broad set up limiting the depth of insights

This set up created maybe too much room, making the insights and conversations to broad and top level. In future projects this dilemma should be considered before starting the interviews. Because there are two sides to this coin where there the focus could be on more complete and diverse data that overarches the topic, or the focus is on a smaller amount of rich data that gives a more in depth look into a smaller part of the topic.

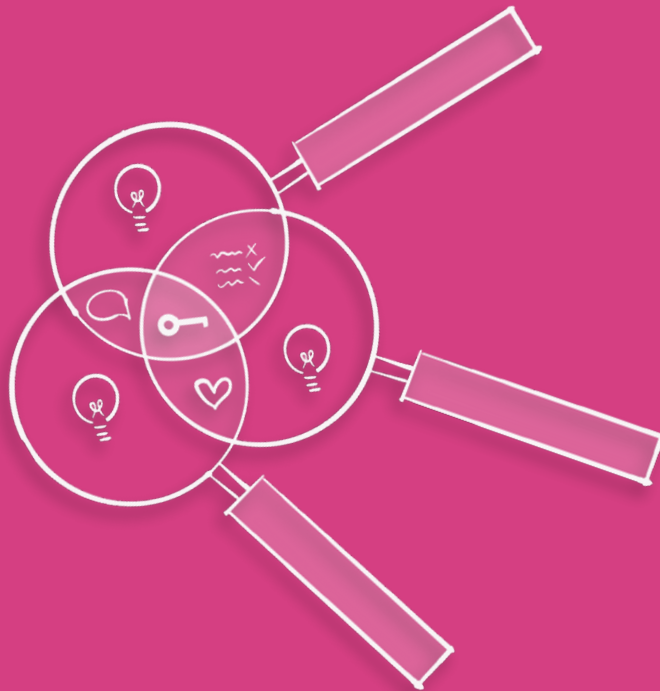
### Effects of or for participating associations

Limitations of this research could be that participants feel they cannot share their true feelings, experiences or thoughts because it might have a negative effect on them or the association.

Another limitation is that in this research the focus is on 2 different student associations with each their own culture. In this research the experiences shared by the participants are spread out on the full scale of 'Dutch student associations. As I assume the experiences shared will be scalable to other associations in the Netherlands. This research has not the depth to draw conclusions applicable for all associations because there will be big differences that have not been considered.

# Phase 4

## Looking for design opportunities



This chapter outlines the analysis of contributing factors and elements to social safety, focusing on language and social norms. Through thematic definitions, analysis, and discussion of the insights, the chapter identifies barriers and enablers to a socially safe environment. Concluding the research with five different design opportunities. Finally this chapter looks at the gap within existing initiatives through a small case study.

## 4.1 Method for analysis

### Goal of analysis

The purpose of the research was to gain a better understanding of the role the key themes 'language' and 'social norms' play within student associations in Delft. Therefore, the interviews were analyzed according to and by using these themes. The transcripts were coded according to the themes and the broader context of social safety. After clustering the codes were organized to answer the research questions that were drawn up and described in chapter 3.1. In this process, the focus was on looking for interesting and relevant examples, similarities between the different perceptions, patterns and ideas. This was done for both themes from where the insights from the analysis were discussed to create a deeper understanding of the meaning and value.

### Explore barriers and enablers

The purpose of this analysis method was to take the results into a discussion to look for key barriers and enablers from there and turn the discussion into design opportunities. To create more depth to the top-level insights they were discussed using relevant literature. During the interviews participants were also asked to reflect on and define certain key themes through the use of word cards. These definitions were also included in the analysis because they shape the basis of perception and thus influence how the other themes are expressed.

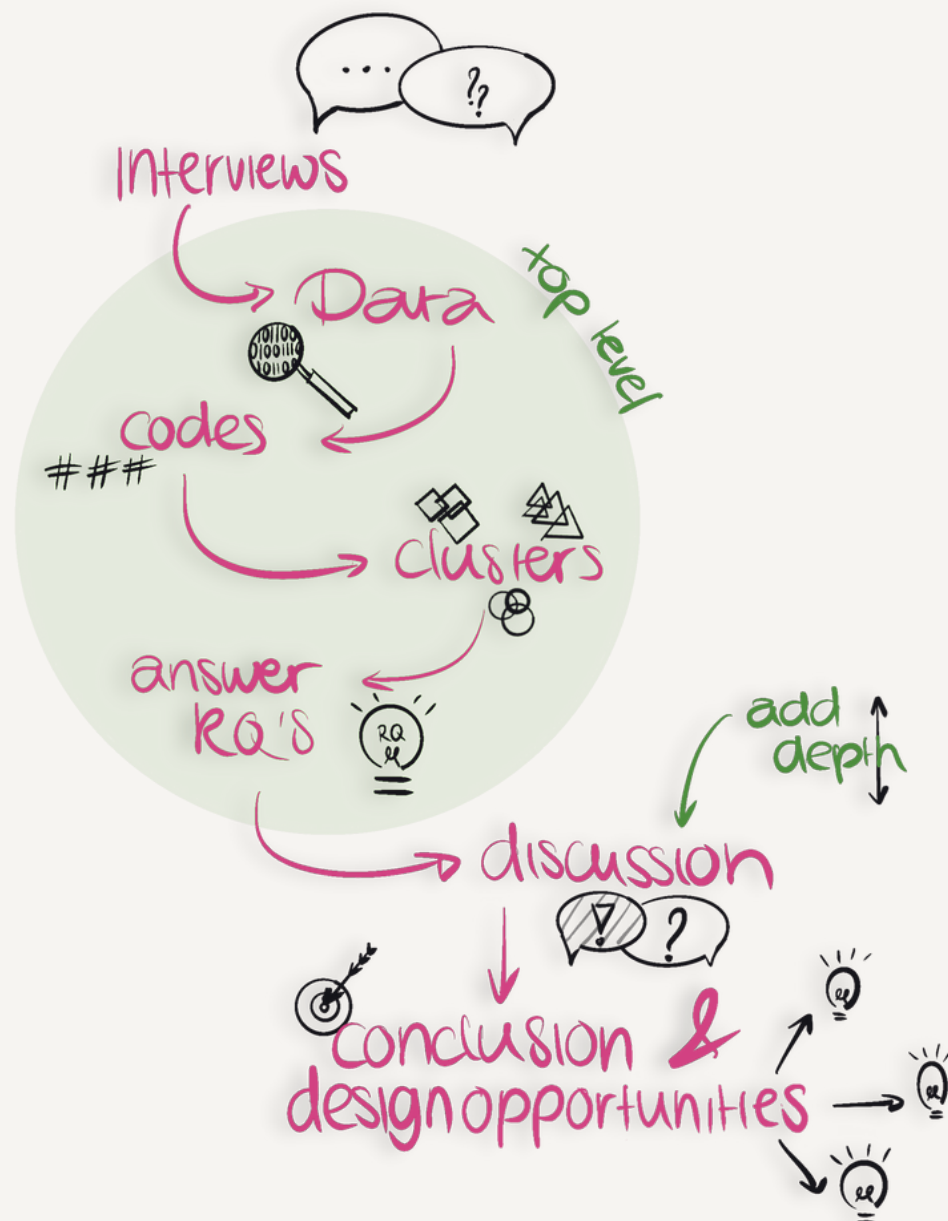


Figure 10: Visualization of the translation process, from data to insights and opportunities.

## 4.2 Proces of translating data into useful insights

### Process of interpreting and translating data into insights

Since the interviews created a large amount of complex data the analysis was done in multiple phases. This process of analyzing started by separately coding each transcript using colors/themes. The codes from each transcript were transfered into an excel sheet, and then placed onto a Miro board for further analysis (MIRO | The Innovation Workspace, n.d.)

Those separate codes where then analyzed and clustered, according to the key theme's, creating an organized overview of themes and elements that came up in each transcript.

After this the next phase of clustering started with combining all codes an clusters together and deepening the definition of each element and theme given to the clusters. To further define connections and clusters from there, these clusters were then divided to answer the research questions and discussed to create an understanding of the insights.

This discussion started with writing and interpreting the codes, clusters and themes for each research question. Using existing literature the insights were further explored, defined and interpreted. Creating more valuable and useful insights.

### Definition and interpretation of the key theme's

The themes used to analyze were, social safety, social norms, language use. To create more structure and foundation for the analysis the key themes were defined before the analysis was done. These definitions and interpretations can be found in chapter 4.3. The full analysis was done top level because of time limitations. There might have been more complex and deeper insights if conditions like association, gender, position or role within the association would be considered in the analysis. The method used in this project ensures that the results provide sufficient basis for drafting the design opportunities and take further steps in the project.

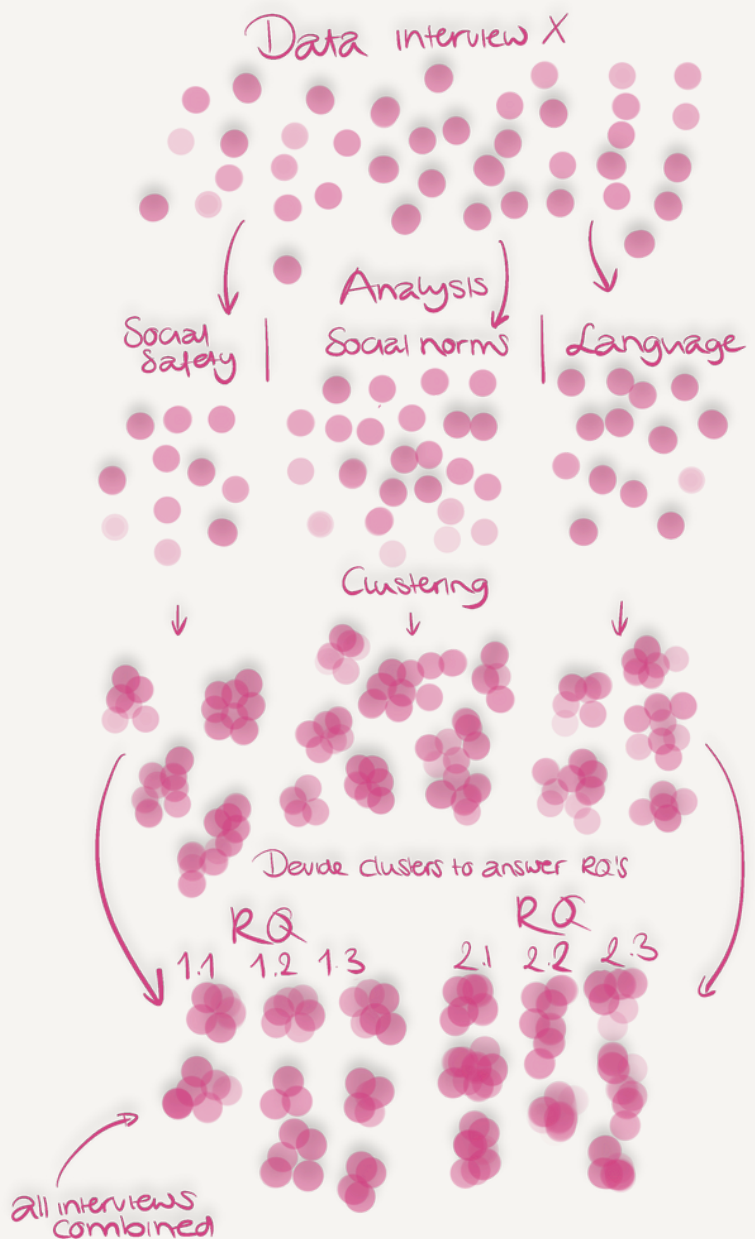


Figure 11: Visualization of the clustering proces for every individual transcript.

## 4.3 Definition of themes used in analysis

To make sure that all interviews are analyzed on the same basis the following definitions were drawn up. They were used to evaluate the data and look for relevant perceptions, quotes, examples and ideas.

### Social Norms

Social norms are influences from the social environment that guide people's behavior. They are often mutual agreements that indicate what is desirable and undesirable behavior. This study therefore looked at different forms of social norms, such as unwritten rules, traditions, norms and values, and 'normal' or normalized behavior.

The concept of social norms appeared in various forms in the study. It is often intertwined with the norms and values of the association, the basic assumptions of the participants or the communication from the association. Personal beliefs also play a role in participants' responses. The difference between social norms and values is that values are often the thoughts, motives and ideas that are held within the group or culture. In contrast, norms are the concrete guidelines for action and how an individual should behave (Lechner et al., 2021).

Social norms are an extension of mainstream norms. The difference is that these norms are in force within a particular group, whereas norms may also include rules set by law or other structures (UNICEF, 2021). Both involve agreements that are associated with a value that has been previously identified as important.

This project also looks at the norm, something that is common or considered normal. This can be filled in from a variety of perspectives, but in the analysis, it is linked to the social norms that emerge in the context of student culture. Participants were asked to describe what they considered to be 'normal' behavior and to consider where these beliefs and perceptions come from. Another part of the analysis includes how these norms are communicated, how they are maintained and what is involved in this process of cultivation.

### Social Safety

During the analysis, social safety is a central theme in which the connection between the key themes, language and social norms, can be found. But most of all, to see what the participants understand by social safety, what the requirements for it are, how it is currently experienced, and what has led to this perception.

In the study, social safety was seen as the extent to which people feel free and protected so that they can be themselves and express themselves (CAOP, 2025). To provide a clear definition for this, the definition of social safety as described by TU Delft in the 'Plan for Change' was used (Plan For Change Sociale Veiligheid, 2024). This definition states that social safety means respect, equality, open dialogue and protection from undesirable behavior, regardless of an individual's background or position. This definition is used in this project because it should be the one that all Delft students can relate to, as most students are affiliated with this educational institution and are therefore also part of this, intended socially safe, environment.

### Language

The topic of language was used in the analysis according to David Crystal's definition. He gives the following definition of language in his Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language: "The systematic and conventional use of sounds, signs, or written symbols for communication and self-expression in a society. Crystal (2010). This involved looking at how language occurs within associations, and in what ways it is part of the behavior within and culture of associations. But also, what different forms of language, what unique features emerge and what participants understand by language.

Chapter 2.3 looked at the importance of language and the literature available on it. With this knowledge, the analysis also focused at whether there were examples of language affecting social safety. And explored those examples in relation to creating a socially safe environment. Including both positive and negative impacting examples.

## 4.4 Discussion of the insights

This project examined the influence of social norms and language use on social safety within student associations in Delft. The study focuses on the following six research questions within these two themes. To answer the questions that were defined (chapter 3.1), in-depth interviews were conducted with 8 students, 6 of whom ultimately participated. These students are all members of a student association in Delft. The students who were interviewed are members of one of the two different student associations that participated in the research, also differences in gender, length of membership and role within the association were considered to get as complete a picture as possible. The template (Appendix C) was used during the interviews.

Below you find the discussion of the relevant insights, examples, perceptions, ideas and conflicts that shape the answer to the research questions. The information given below is part of the overall set of insights. There is not enough time in this study to go into all the elements. Thus, examples, themes or other forms that emerged in the research will undoubtedly not be reflected in the discussion that follows.

### Language

What language is specific to student associations?

#### Code language and songs

Within this theme, language use specific to student associations was explored first. This shows that language is used as a means of connection. This is done within associations through their own association language, which often consists of unique words, expressions and abbreviations that contribute to the identity of the association. These abbreviations often serve as a kind of code language. Examples are 'SG'tje', 'DiBo' or 'Soos'.

Songs are also an important part of the associations' culture. There is a particular focus on songs at specific times within various rituals that are part of the culture. For example, during the initiation period/'kennismakingstijd' (KMT) and hazing activities of the subcultures, but also as rituals within subcultures during dinner. Although participants describe this as a tradition that

creates group spirit, it also emerges that the songs often contain language that does not really fit in with the norms and values of the association. For example, several groups sing songs that use denigrating language about women (and other minority groups), or in which swear words play a central role. So we can see a kind of conflict of association, but also the use of songs to validate and normalize sexist expressions.

#### Symbolic language

It also appears that symbolism in language is used strategically to encourage desired behavior. This is done by using symbolism in language to encourage positive behavior by directing and using peer pressure in a positive way. Examples given are 'for \*association\*' and by \*association\*' or 'heart for \*association\*'. Where these phrases are used in group contexts by telling other students to help with something because they should show their 'heart for the \*association\*'. Participants mentioned that these statements are often easily repeated and ensure that students motivate each other to do their bit. The Rutgers campaign is another good example of this phenomenon. In it, the phrase "Are you okay?"/ "Ben je oke?" is used as a low-threshold way of checking whether a situation is okay (Ben je oke?, 2024). In practice, however, this phrase is often used in other ways and also it raises awareness of the issue of social safety by lowering the bar to start the conversation. This symbolic way of using language within the association seems to work well in other areas.

What aspects of language are threatening to social safety?

#### Gossip culture

Looking at social safety within student associations, we also see that there are elements within language use that have a negative impact on the perceived sense of safety. Feddes (2018) describes that gossiping is often seen as damaging and destructive and is therefore perceived as undesirable by people. The gossip culture, which is very prevalent in student associations, is seen by participants as the norm, but also as a source of mistrust. Participants say that it is part of the deal and that, as a result, there is nothing that can be done about it by the association.

## 4.4 Discussion of the interview results

It is often unclear to participants what the effects of this gossip culture are, but they seem to be there. For example, there is a kind of fear of reporting situations of misconduct but also discussing situations with friends or a confidant person/*vertrouwenscontactpersoon* (VCP) seem to be something an individual needs to think about more carefully. This feeling is fuelled by the fact that everyone in the association knows everyone else, so stories often circulate very quickly. The feeling of talking about each other, rather than talking to and with each other, is therefore something that participants see as problematic. For this to change, there needs to be a basis of mutual trust, openness and transparency.

### Unwanted jokes, comments and objectification

Various forms of denigrating and sexist comments and jokes are part of the association culture. Examples include terms used to indicate hierarchy such as '*kutsjaars*', '*barn*', '*knurfde*', as well as words used to objectify women as a kind of 'trophy'.

'If someone is a 'slut/*slet*' or a 'sissy/*mietje*', you don't have to treat them with as much respect' (Van Huis, 2024). Harsh language and negative language about women are more often mentioned by participants, this is also evident in Van Huis' (2024) study. These forms of language use are recognized by participants as damaging to social safety and equality within the association, but the excuses that justify the behavior often come right after this conclusion. Thus, these forms of language use are often downplayed and normalized because 'it is part of it/*het hoort er bij*' and because it is actually 'not meant that way/*niet zo bedoeld*'.

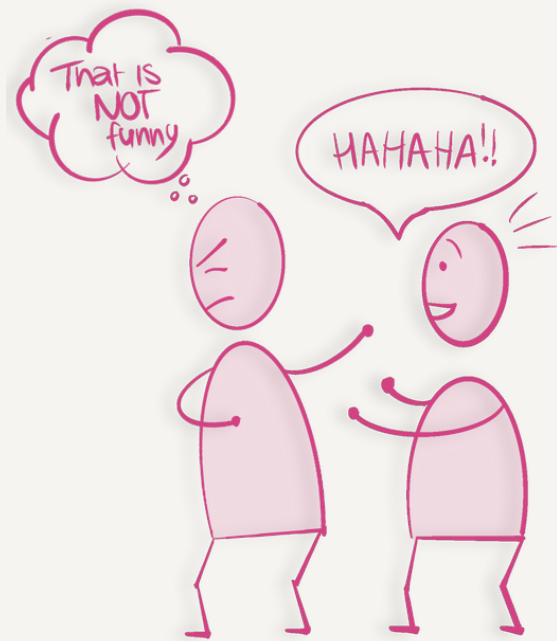
In contrast, the research by Thomae & Viki (2013) shows that individuals who encounter, or are part of, denigrating and sexist humor and comments have a higher risk of committing sexually transgressive behavior. This risk is also highlighted by the report published by Act4Respect (2025). The ignorance but also the avoidance of responsibility to confront each other about these forms of microaggressions thus becomes a crucial component in creating a socially safe environment.

### Recognizing and acting are not the same

This example also clearly shows that there is often a conflict between what we know and recognize as good behavior, and how we then deal with that. Because although it is recognized that this form of language and behavior is harmful and does not fit within the association, it still remains part of the culture by downplaying or ignoring it. In doing so, we should perhaps also ask why people within this culture do not speak out against behavior that is recognized as undesirable? Especially when it is recognized as such.

### Context-dependent language

While these behaviors often occur within specific subcultures, often male groups, the reality remains that these comments and forms of language also affect situations outside of that context (Act4Respect, 2025). Where behavior that is normalized and acceptable in one context is not acceptable in another. A phenomenon described as 'code switching', meaning that there is a change or difference in the way people speak depending on the context (Van Huis, 2024). A fueling ground for situations of transgressive behavior shows the report by Act4Respect (2025). Also, because forms of harsh and undesirable language are seen as normal and even functional within certain groups, the threshold for initiating change is even higher. In addition, the board that oversees the association's norms and values often has little or no influence on the behavior and attitudes that are considered normal within subcultures. This further influences and complicates regulation, enforcement and change.



## Room for interpretation

Language clearly has a negative impact on the perception of social safety. Tone, choice of words and context play a crucial role. This is also because language is a means of communication that is always open to interpretation. The intention of one person can always be interpreted differently by another. This is particularly risky in the context of student associations, where humor and alcohol are part of the context. Misinterpretation of language can affect situations where consent, body language or listening to other people's wishes and needs are crucial.

## Need for awareness

Although there are concrete examples of how language can have a negative impact on feelings of social safety, it remains a complex issue. This is because language is a means of communicating with each other, which leaves a lot of room for miscommunication. Language is something that is shaped by upbringing, environment and personal beliefs. This, combined with the complexity of social safety, will always create grey areas. However, this study shows various examples of harmful language being used within associations. It highlights that there is room for improvement. As language is something that will always be part of culture, it is good to be aware of its negative effects.

The conflicts highlighted in this part are the need for change, but the lack of resources and influence to do anything about it. The fact that everyone knows the different forms of unsafe language is true, but they are accepted as part of the culture anyway. Language is and will always be part of culture, but certain elements don't fit in and need improvement and awareness.

What aspects of language contribute positively to social safety?

## Trust, transparency and attention

When looking at aspects of language use that have a positive effect on social safety within the association, a number of conditions immediately come to mind. These conditions are important for language use to be experienced as a positive influence on the sense of safety. Trust, transparency and structural attention are

conditions that are mentioned and therefore influence how language use is experienced in the context of social safety.

Having open conversations with others is seen as crucial to creating and maintaining social safety within the association. These open conversations often take place within a close knit group, where people know and trust each other, often a subculture. Elements that contribute to social safety are mutual trust, structural attention and space for open and in-depth conversations. These open conversations show that it is okay to discuss and talk about (difficult) topics with each other, and to really check-in with each other to see how things are going. The trust that exists within the group is used in a positive way to exercise a type of social control. This is something that participants experience as positive, because it means that there is always someone to talk to.

## Differences between groups

However, there seem to be many differences between the groups, both in terms of gender and how often the groups see each other. For example, women's groups or mixed groups often place more emphasis on creating and having these open conversations. Men's groups, on the other hand, are often still bound by the stereotype of 'masculinity', which means that the language is direct and there is little room for emotion or deep conversations.

The examples that emerge from the study, such as initiatives for personal round tables, weekly email updates and fixed discussion times within the groups, show that the students are aware of the importance of creating space for these conversations on a structural basis to stay in touch with each other. It is interesting to note that the association does not play a role in this; initiatives taken within the groups are passed on between the members themselves. There is also no focus on this form of group formation during the initiation period (KMT). This is certainly an area for improvement, as it increases the differences within the association and depends on the intrinsic motivation of individual students within a group.

## Protection mechanism

Another example of language being used positively to ensure social safety is its use as a

## 4.4 Discussion of the interview results

protective mechanism. Examples in the study show that in different social circles, often among female students, there is a kind of code language or symbolic communication. These subtle signals and warnings are directed at other female students to 'protect' them from inappropriate situations. For example, if someone has had a bad experience with a male member of the association, other female members are informed. But even during club activities, women use code language to check whether someone really wants to be in that situation. Although it should not be necessary, this is a wonderful example of social control among members, where language is used as a cover and a means of communication.

### **Open and transparent communication is key**

Finally, transparency emerges as a key condition in the study. This refers to transparency in communication about policies, protocols and sanctions. Open and transparent communication can increase the sense of fair treatment and control. When members become part of the process by being informed about it in a transparent way, it increases the feeling that incidents and reports are taken seriously. Transparency can also be used to strengthen social control within the association. Communicating what happens in cases of undesirable behavior, for example by publicly announcing suspensions and other sanctions, will make members aware of the social norms and policies and regulations in place in the association. Members' curiosity about what is happening in the association, which also feeds the gossip culture, will ensure that the conversation about desirable and undesirable behavior is started. This allows you to use the negative aspects of incidents in a positive way to raise awareness.

### **Language as a tool for feedback and reflection**

The final, but perhaps most important aspect to emerge from the study is the culture of accountability/[aanspreekcultuur](#). Members are encouraged to talk to each other about incidents of (undesirable) behavior, which ultimately leads to greater social control and a direct feedback loop in maintaining social norms. Both the close links between students within the subcultures and

the strong social control within the association are distinctive features. The importance of talking to each other is also seen as crucial to creating a socially safe environment. This makes it almost inconceivable that this is not already the norm for all students within the associations.

But where 'talking to each other' still ranks below 'talking about each other', it remains very difficult to encourage this positive aspect. This is partly due to the widespread feeling that if you talk about or name undesirable behavior, you become part of the situation or 'the problem' (Ipsos I&O, 2024). In practice, this often leads to people swallowing things and keeping them to themselves or justifying them because 'it wasn't meant that way'. But it is this direct feedback that can have a huge impact, as people are often unaware of the damage they are causing through ignorance, misunderstanding or other reasons.

In addition to the direct feedback and conversation that would start if addressing each other's behavior became the norm, there are other elements that could benefit from this. For example, it is mentioned that talking to each other is seen as essential for enforcing and maintaining social norms. There is a preference for a personal but friendly conversation, as this would influence the effectiveness of the sanction. This is because something said to you by a close friend often has more impact than something said by someone you do not know very well.

### **Language is more than just a means of communication**

In general, language is used as a means of communication to transfer thoughts and beliefs from one person to another. Language is therefore essential for communicating, respecting and enforcing social norms within the association. By clearly communicating agreements and expectations, you reduce the room for interpretation.

Finally, language also appears to be a powerful tool for raising awareness of social safety. Workshops, trainings, games and campaigns use language to transfer knowledge, start conversations and encourage behavior change. This makes language not only a means of communication but also a means of intervention.

## Social Norms

What social norms exist within the association? Which ones are explicit and which ones are implicit?

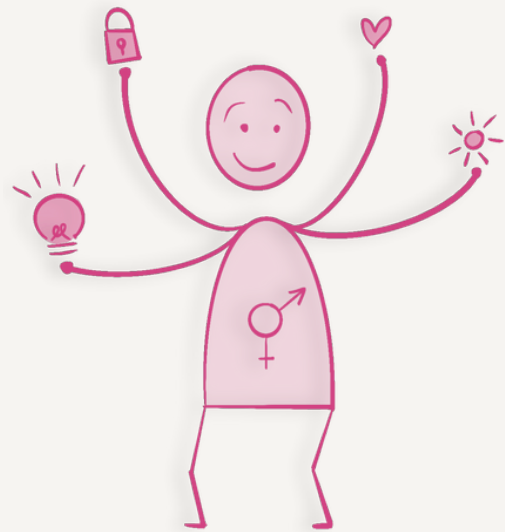
### Lack of definition

When asked what social norms exist within the association, in almost all cases there was no concrete answer. If examples were given, these were norms that remained superficial and left much room for interpretation. Examples such as 'you treat each other normally/*je gaat normaal met elkaar om*' or 'everyone should be able to be themselves/*iedereen moet zichzelf kunnen zijn*' show that there is a lack of definition and that norms are seen as abstract statements rather than concrete rules of behavior.

Both explicit and implicit norms were examined. These appeared between the lines in the study; participants were often unaware of these norms but mentioned them in specific examples and contexts. This shows that many norms and forms of desired behavior are unclear or undefined and are only known by a small part of the association. This creates grey areas and room for personal interpretation. Participants also mention that this space leads to double standards and that people are less likely to challenge each other because there are no agreements to fall back on.

### Explicit and implicit norms

Explicit norms are often associated with official rules and sanctions. These may be set out in policy documents or in the rules and regulations (statuten en reglementen) of the association. Examples include 'No alcohol for minors/*Geen alcohol voor minderjarigen*', 'No drug use/*geen drugsgebruik*', 'Violations will be punished with a fine or suspension/*bij overtreding wordt er gesanctioneerd met een boete of schorsing*'. Implicit norms are woven into the culture of the association, such as drinking alcohol, hazing and unwritten rules. Participants also gave examples such as 'No phones or photos during drinks/*Geen telefoons of foto's tijdens de borrel*', 'You are quiet when you go outside/*Je bent stil als je naar buiten loopt*' and 'You always listen to the board/*Je luistert altijd naar het bestuur*'.



### Influence of gender

An interesting point that emerges from the perception and awareness of social norms within the association is the influence of gender on these norms. While certain behaviors are more quickly normalized or not even perceived as unsafe in male groups, women are generally more aware of the social norms. This is reflected in examples where women often take it upon themselves to correct the behavior of others.

The difference between men and women is visible in all themes that emerge from the study. Different effects and causes are identified. For example, women often have a greater need for structural openness, they are naturally more open and more directly involved in the topic. Of course, it could be argued that this is because women are often more likely to be disadvantaged and experience the negative effects when it comes to social safety. This only highlights the importance of involving male students.

The behavior in passing the responsibility that we see, which stems from a sense that individual men cannot identify with the image of the perpetrator, ensures that responsibility is disproportionately shared among all who are part of the larger issue. The sentiment that 'I am not the problem, so I don't have to be part of the solution' should no longer be acceptable when it comes to social safety. This unequal distribution of responsibility for addressing behavior and being part of positive change is seen as a problem by participants. This is also something that is widely recognized in society: 84% of the Dutch population believe that everyone in society has a responsibility or role to play in tackling (sexual) transgressive behavior (Ipsos I&O, 2024).

## 4.4 Discussion of the interview results

### What is 'normal' behavior?

When we talk about norms, social norms, we are looking at desired behavior. But the question of what we would describe as 'normal' behavior is also very interesting. In everyday life, what is normal for one person may not be normal for another. This has to do with things like upbringing, experiences and personal beliefs. The study also looked at what the participants considered to be 'normal' behavior. This proved to be a difficult task, as the question mainly stimulated reflection. Ultimately, it became clear that this definition of normal and desirable behavior differed from group to group. In practice, this often leads to uncertainty and inconsistency within the association when it comes to expectations and enforcement.

There are countless examples of behavior that is normalized, meaning that behavior that would be completely unacceptable in another context is considered 'normal' in the context in which it occurs. Examples include binge drinking, derogatory language, gossip and hazing rituals. Although the participants themselves often recognize that the behavior is unacceptable, it is often swept under the carpet on the grounds of 'tradition', 'it is part of the culture' or 'it has always been done that way/het is altijd zo geweest (AZG)'. And although traditions are also framed as binding and preserving history, this creates a paradox in which traditions and practices both bind and protect and legitimize and mask harmful and undesirable behavior.

### Balance between definition and open interpretation

There are various causes and consequences of the absence of concrete, clearly defined social norms within the association. The absence of an ongoing dialogue about what we do and do not consider to be unacceptable behavior certainly does not contribute to social security. And although there is often a basis for such rules, a one-time introduction to them is not enough. It leaves a lot of room for personal interpretation, leading to inconsistent and unclear behavior. It could also be argued that it is far too complex to create clearly defined social norms, as this would mean that there would always be exceptions to the rules due to the need for human measure and different personal boundaries. But with the results

of this study there is a negative effect of the current lack of definition, so balance and caution should be part of the creation process.

In what ways are these norms maintained, cultivated?

### Initiation period as starting point

Social norms are maintained in associations in various ways, and their effectiveness is by no means always guaranteed. In fact, if we look at the learning process that students go through, we can see that there are different moments that influence the development of the individual and their environment. The first moment, in this learning process, for every student is the initiation period (KMT), during which potential members are completely reset and prepared for life within their chosen student association in a short period of time. This initial introduction often includes a lot of information about the association, its history and what it means to be a 'real' student.

It is also the time when the norms and values of the association are introduced, and the different forms of desired behavior are taught. Associations organize various activities during this period to pass on all this knowledge, such as workshops, get-to-know sessions and group-building activities. Although all participants describe this period as intense but extremely informative, it also appears that the knowledge provided during this period does not always stick. This is confirmed by research conducted by Van Huis (2024), which shows that after the KMT, there is often less attention paid to the issue of sexually transgressive behavior and social safety. Reducing the impact of the initiatives and activities that are organized during this period. Students therefore recognize the importance and power of repetition, although it can sometimes become too much, leading them to feel 'fed up' (Van Huis, 2024).

### Power of repetition

There is consequently a great need for repetition and structured discussion of topics such as social safety, sex, and mental well-being. Again, however, social norms do not appear to be part of the knowledge acquired after the KMT. Participants suggest that a structural approach would help to create more consistency and awareness of what is and is not acceptable within

(and outside) the association. The KMT alone is therefore not effective. There are initiatives such as bar staff workshops or well-being weeks that address such topics, but these initiatives are often one-time events and are not a structural part of the culture, which means that they lose their impact because they do not reach everyone. In addition, the annual turnover of board members can mean that issues are not put back on the agenda as other priorities emerge. Continuity is therefore a key word in implementing cultural change over the long term.

### **Diversity of members**

In addition, the diversity of members' background and upbringing also plays a major role in the shaping and maintenance of social norms. This is because upbringing, environment and different generations all have their own influence on the perception of social norms. As a result, behaviors such as 'respect for others/*respect voor anderen*', 'avoidance of physical contact/*het vermeiden van fysiek contact*' and 'social interaction/*sociale omgang*' are often taken for granted and not further defined. This often leads to a situation where social norms are seen as implicit rules. And the combination of all these elements leaves too much room for personal interpretation, which does not necessarily correspond to the expectations of others. This makes it unnecessarily complex to assume that members will behave in accordance with the standards and expectations set within the association and beyond.

### **Grey areas and inconsistent enforcement**

This grey area also makes it difficult to determine what exactly is considered desirable behavior and what is not. This can lead to conflicts or uncomfortable and undesirable situations. It also makes the enforcement of social norms more complex. The lack of explicit rules and effective enforcement mechanisms results in sanctions and social control being applied inconsistently and depending on personal beliefs. Although there are various examples and forms of enforcement mechanisms within student associations to enforce social norms, including social control, formal sanctions through a sanctions policy and a reporting structure, these often prove less effective due to the lack of a clear, concrete and transparent framework.

For example, it is not always clear to members what sanctions (if any) exist or how they are applied, leading to uncertainty and inconsistency in enforcement. Where a clear line is drawn within associations is in the case of serious transgressive behavior: behavior such as sexual transgression is not tolerated and can lead to suspension or exclusion. And although participants are aware of this, it is often unclear how the process works and on what basis a sanction would be imposed.

### **Complexity of social safety reports**

Dealing with social safety incidents is highly contextual. Tailored solutions are often needed because of the complexity of the situation and the different factors involved. This can lead to inconsistencies in policy regulation. Expectations are not clear from the start and members are unfamiliar with the process, reporting structures and sanctioning policies. Another influencing factor is an individual's position within the association. The board is often aware of all the processes, but this is not always the case for other members. It is also assumed that if the information is available somewhere (online or on a notice board) then the members are aware of it. So if something happens, 'you could have known'.

Participants repeatedly indicate that certain behaviors within the association, although perhaps not entirely socially acceptable, are 'just part of the culture/*horen gewoon bij de cultuur*'. This shows that there is room within the association, often within subcultures, to tolerate and normalize transgressive behavior. Behavior such as making sexually suggestive comments, publicly watching and displaying pornography, or objectifying (female) members is often approved of by members by comparing it to situations in other contexts, such as changing rooms or student houses.

### **Despite recognition, no one intervenes**

There are several examples of participants recognizing that certain behavior is not acceptable, indicating this themselves, but accepting it anyway. This is often because they do not know why they should do anything about it, they expect their intervention to have no effect, or because others do not share the same opinion. Another possible reason, also revealed by the

## 4.4 Discussion of the interview results

Ipsos I&O study (2024), is that two out of three bystanders do not intervene in transgressive situations, for example because they are unsure about the correct interpretation of the situation and the context, or because they doubt whether the victim wants help and what effect their intervention might have on him or her. It is therefore important to discuss this with others and think about what possible strategies would work for them as an active bystander.

### **Social control is a crucial enforcement mechanism.**

On the other hand, it is argued that there is already a strong structure of social control within the clubs, with members often holding each other accountable for their behavior. This is essential for maintaining a socially safe environment, especially in settings where large numbers of people from different backgrounds come together and alcohol is an important part of the culture. However, due to a lack of clarity about social norms and the acceptance and normalization of 'boundary-pushing' and transgressive behavior, this form of collective norm enforcement is not always seen as effective.

What is the role of subcultures on social norms?

### **Positive and negative role**

Contrary to expectations, subcultures within associations appeared to play an important role, both in a positive and negative sense. For example due to the lack of concrete social norms within the associations, it can be argued that most of the social norms that emerged in the study did not originate at the association level, but rather within subcultures such as (year)clubs/*jaarclubs*, '*Disputen*', '*Verticalen*', or student houses. This can be explained by the fact that the group of individuals who are part of the subculture is a lot smaller and creates a closer, more open environment in which people talk to each other about their desires, needs and behaviors. Addressing behavior, discussing issues and making space and time for open and in-depth conversations also seems to be more prominent, as well as more effective, in these subcultures. The foundation of trust, mutual understanding and connectedness has a positive impact on the sense

of social safety within these groups. Participants consider space and time for open and honest conversation as essential.

### **Higher levels of social control**

In these smaller, close and intimate groups, there is more social control: members feel more comfortable talking to each other and social norms are often more clearly defined and maintained. It could therefore be argued that this mechanism can be 'leveraged'. Examples of possible uses include creating and exercising social control and acting as a sounding board for the social norms that apply within the association. Something that is discussed in Van Huis's research (2024) is that this intimate and close form of social control can also make it difficult to report incidents. Because everyone knows each other well, students prefer to keep situations of unwanted behavior to themselves. It is therefore important to have a good reporting structure alongside these subcultures to minimize this risk and its effects.

### **Blurring of what is perceived as 'normal'**

These subcultures can also encourage and contribute to the blurring of norms or socially unsafe situations, if there is no room for open discussion or disagreement. If individuals within a particular group are not given the space to discuss with each other what is and what is not considered as desirable behavior, this will eventually lead to unconscious boundary violations. This is also highlighted in the NRC article on the students of the Utrecht Student Corps (USC) (Rengers et al., 2025). Setting one's own 'normal' or exercise of peer pressure are also negative effects that a subculture can have on the creation of a socially safe environment. It is therefore important that the association pays sufficient attention to this and provides sufficient guidance to these students. Research by Foubert et al. (2019) also shows that these subcultures often have their own norms and values that influence behavior. In this case, exposure to role model behavior, personal or group expectations and (toxic)masculinity can influence the normalization and justification of sexually transgressive behavior.

## Using hierarchy and traditions as a cover

The hierarchy within the group is another factor that can influence the enforcement of norms within these subcultures. This is because it often influences the extent to which problems and other topics can be discussed, corrected and normalized. Traditions that have always been upheld by older members are maintained, which can lead to boundary-pushing behavior.

The article by Rengers et al (2025) provides a number of examples of such behavior. Serious transgressive behavior occurs behind the closed doors of association owned student houses, but also within the group of 'Bademeisters', where older members hold or take 'power' and exert pressure on younger members because 'they too have had to endure it' (Rengers et al., 2025). Participants in the study also mention that elements of hazing rituals would be unacceptable to the outside world but are not being controlled by the board of the association.

## The pressure to belong and fit in

Another contributing factor here is the desire to be accepted into the subculture. In practice, this leads to boundary-pushing behavior, particularly in relation to sex, alcohol, drugs and accomplishment. Curiosity is often fueled by observing the behavior of other members or by what is considered 'normal' behavior by others.

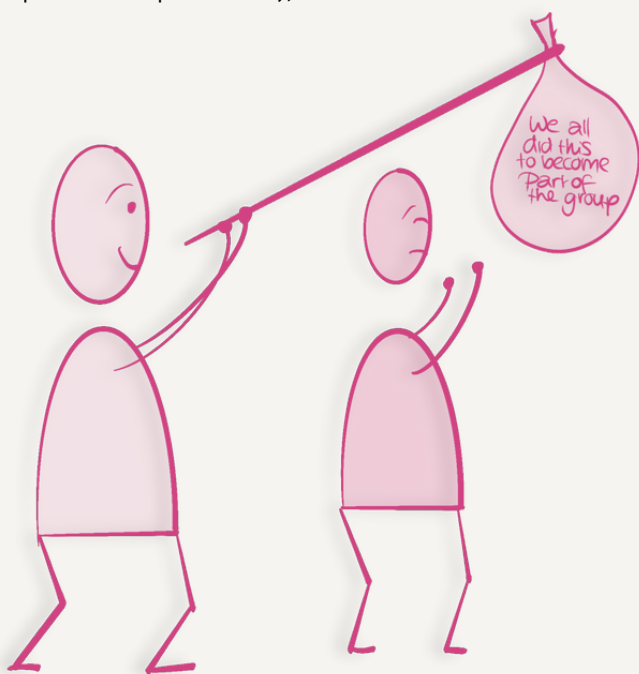
The pressure that this creates is partly social, imposed by the group or environment (peer pressure/expectations), but it is also often felt and

fuelled internally by the individual. In hazing, students are not explicitly asked to do anything, but they tend to do more than they want to by pushing their own boundaries. It could be argued that this is part of stepping out of one's comfort zone, but in the case of these vulnerable individuals, who may not be able to think about what they want instead of what they need to do to become part of the association, it creates a thin line that should be avoided at all times. The stereotype of students drinking beer or having sex also seems to create more pressure for individuals. All participants gave examples of this type of boundary-pushing behavior where the individual only realized afterwards that they had done something they did not want to do. The subculture plays a dual role here, as open and honest discussion can help reduce this pressure and the risk of unwanted behavior. But being transparent with each other about more risky situations can also reduce peer pressure for individuals.

## Group dynamics and diversity

In addition to the influence of hierarchy and the desire to belong, the composition of the group also affects how social safety and norm reinforcement are experienced within the group. Diversity in gender, age and background are factors that play a role in this. Age has an influence within the hierarchy, with older members often claiming more rights and power than younger members because they have yet to earn it. The background of each individual member plays a role in the composition and dynamics of the group. However, what emerges very clearly from the research is the influence of gender on the sense of social security within the group. Specifically, it affects the effectiveness and extent of social control, attention to the topic and the ability to discuss it.

For example, women are more likely to take the lead in correcting unwanted behavior within the group, while men tend to normalize such behavior. Experiences in mixed groups show that the mix of perspectives and beliefs creates even greater social control, using the best of both sexes to positively enforce social safety. For example, women take responsibility for explaining to men where the boundaries are, and men know how to use their directness to avoid dancing around things and say things directly to someone's face.



## 4.4 Discussion of the interview results

### **Make use of the existing mechanisms**

Both the positive and negative aspects that happen within the subcultures are interesting. Within the associations, there are several structures in which the subcultures play a role, but little use is made of them. Initiatives and practices used within the subcultures come from these groups themselves or are picked up from others. So, there is room within the association to learn from each other in this way, which seems quite logical, but this is not the case for each of the groups. This means that there is room for a more widespread approach, so that success does not depend on individuals within the group or on the chance of picking up an idea. But using this mechanism, it should be accessible to everyone.

### **Social safety**

Both themes, language and social norms, reveal different aspects that influence social safety within the association. The study therefore explored the broader concept of social safety, how it is experienced by the participants and which factors play a role in this. This led to a number of findings that are important to consider and interpret in the context of the various elements mentioned above.

### **The perception of social safety within the association**

The association is generally seen as a socially safe place by the participants, but there is a disclaimer, that is interpreted in different ways. This is because although there is a growing awareness and focus on social safety, there are still many incidents and examples both inside and outside the association. While participants see the effects and improvements and feel positive, they also recognize that there is still a long way to go.

### **Second home**

In many cases, the association is seen as a "second home" by its members. The sense of connection and trust, openness and safety allow members to be themselves and develop into the best version of themselves. There is a consensus that the association is also a place where mistakes can be made, but that there must also be room to correct each other.

### **Bad apples**

Several participants mentioned that in all types of associations there are members who misbehave, the so-called 'bad apples/rotte appels' which makes it feel impossible to create a completely socially safe association and prevent all forms of undesirable behavior. This shows above all that awareness is important at all levels of the association. And that even if individuals feel very safe, there will always be room for undesirable situations.

### **The anchor of social safety**

Social control is seen by participants as an anchor of safety. As already mentioned, the social control is often very strong within the student associations, especially within subcultures. The conditions for this are a culture of openness that needs to be woven into the various forms of interaction, but also clearly defined social norms so that there are no misinterpretations and conflicts in the perception of what is and is not desirable behavior.

The downplaying and normalizing of an environment in which sexist and derogatory comments are seen as 'normal' or are not corrected is seen as a breeding ground for serious sexual misconduct (Van Huis, 2024). This suggests that it is important to focus on creating strong and effective social control, and to ensure that factors such as clearly defined social norms are carefully implemented. Strong social control can then be used positively throughout the association and contribute to a socially safe environment, even outside the doors of the association.

### **It's a lack of knowledge, not bad intentions**

Socially unsafe behavior within the association often appears to result from a lack of understanding or awareness, rather than bad intentions. Several examples of inappropriate behavior within the association are given. Interesting elements that play a role in creating undesirable situations that emerge in these examples are the role of alcohol, power structures and hierarchy, and a lack of openness and awareness.



## The relation between social safety and alcohol culture

The influence of alcohol on social safety is big. The alcohol culture is deeply rooted in student culture and is often cited as one of the most normalized things in the association. In many cases, it also contributes to blurring boundaries and creating unsafe situations. And although the association is a place where mistakes can be made, alcohol consumption often means that these mistakes can have long-term negative consequences for all parties involved.

## Who takes the responsibility

Responsibility is also a key word in creating a socially safe environment. Although participants believe that this responsibility lies with everyone who is part of this environment, in practice it is not always taken seriously, which is also highlighted in the Ipsos I&O research (2024). Often, there is a specific group of members, such as the board, evening supervisors or female members, who take responsibility for maintaining a safe environment.

A common argument for this is that individuals do not see themselves as part of the problem and therefore do not need to be part of the solution. This form of passing the responsibility often stems from disinterest, ignorance, and differences in interpretation. An example of this is that men often do not see themselves as perpetrators, which is also evident in Sunny Bergman's (2025)

documentary 'Blue balls and other rape myths / **Blauwe ballen en andere verkrachtingsmythes**'. In this documentary, crossing boundaries, even in the smallest way, is seen as something that 'I would never do'.

## Shared responsibility

Social safety is a shared responsibility. The board members of student associations often take on a great deal of responsibility for creating a socially safe environment. In practice, however, this often does not lead to major changes because the daily tasks of a student board are more extensive, which means that this issue is often not at the top of the list of priorities. The lack of a structured approach means that progress made one year is often lost the following year.

## The need for structure and continuity

Cultural and behavioral change in the area of social safety is a slow and gradual process. It is therefore emphasized that one board year is not enough to break patterns, raise awareness and put the needed internal structures in place. This further emphasizes the need for a structured and continuous approach, for example through a long-term policy and assigning the responsibility for this issue to another designated group that has the continuity needed (for example former members).

Protecting and embedding progress is the implementation of a structure, such as an advisory board or well-being committee, which can ensure continuity, stability and policy succession. Rather than quick and short-term interventions, there is often a greater need for a long-term policy in which everyone contributes to the collective development of a safer culture. It is clear that sustained efforts pay off: participants report an increase in inclusion and acceptance within the association, for example through greater visibility of LGBTI+ members.

## Existing reporting structures and enforcement mechanisms

The structures that associations currently have in place often focus on reporting incidents and imposing sanctions, also known as reporting structures and enforcement mechanisms. There are various reporting structures that do not

## 4.4 Discussion of the interview results

always work well in practice. Examples include confidential counsellors, anonymized written reporting options, the board or independent committees to deal with reports. In practice, these do not always work well because of a lack of transparency and unclear policies, leading to inconsistencies in how reports are handled. The culture of gossip and lack of clarity about protocols and codes of conduct also play a role in the loss of confidence that members will be taken seriously after making a report, making victims less likely to speak out or seek help. For example, although there is often a lot of information available, it seems to be accessible only to a select group of members, often members within the association's close circle (students with a distant function). This leads to an unfair distribution of opportunities and possibilities, and ultimately to a reduced sense of social safety.

### **The importance of a social network as safety net**

Finally, the association is described by the participants as a social network that is essential in a student's life. This social network, which is built up within and in some cases outside the association, is the crucial social security net that an individual needs to develop into the best version of oneself. It is therefore very important that this environment is perceived as safe so that there is room for this development to take place. It is found that within associations there is always room to make mistakes and learn from them, if this remains within the limits that have been set.

### **Transition from kid to student and adult**

It also highlights that all students who join an association are educated from adolescents to true students, and finally to adults who are ready for the next phase of their lives. The initiation period (KMT) is the first step in this education journey, laying the foundation for the adventure that will follow. We can therefore conclude that the association and the structures within it play a major role in shaping and guiding all these unique individuals. This is a great responsibility, but one that we are not always aware of.

### **First steps have been taken**

Although the results of this study mainly reveal a handful of elements that paint a predominantly negative picture, this is not always the case in reality. In recent years, the topic has gained momentum within the student community, and many associations are aware of their responsibilities when it comes to creating a socially safe environment. These positive sentiments are also frequently expressed in the interviews and show that the various initiatives, often set up by students themselves, are already demonstrating positive effects. However, this project specifically looked at ways in which the existing structures could be improved by looking at the barriers and enablers of creating a social safe environment. This revealed conflicts, conditions and other examples that affect the sense of social safety within student associations.

## 4.5 Conclusion and recommendations

This study shows that language use and social norms play a significant role in how students perceive social safety within their associations. Language acts as a bonding factor but also appears to be a powerful tool that normalizes social exclusion, sexism, and inappropriate behavior. Similarly, social norms are often implicit and context-dependent, which leaves room for interpretation and unequal treatment. Valuable initiatives and forms of social control emerge within subcultures but are often confined to small groups and lack structural anchoring within the whole association.

### Tension between knowing what is right and acting on it

There is a clear tension between awareness and action: many students recognize and acknowledge undesirable situations, yet they seem to lack the tools, determination and support to intervene and initiate change. Responsibility also seems to be unevenly distributed, with female members more often taking on the role of ‘guardians’ of social safety. At the same time, more and more students are showing intrinsic motivation and commitment, inspiring hope for change from within.

### Where can design play a role?

The findings show the need for interventions that reinforce existing mechanisms, define social norms, and critically examine language use. Existing structures should be leveraged because they already have power that can be used for positive change. Design can support or emphasize the following elements:

- Supporting social control, for example by developing tools that encourage open dialogue and a culture of accountability.

- Making language use and other undesirable behavior point of conversation, through playful or symbolic forms of language that stimulate awareness and reflection.
- Leveraging the power of subcultures, by identifying initiatives that work, highlighting them and making them more widely available within the association.
- Continuity and anchoring, by developing formats that are transferable and not dependent on individual motivation or specific efforts during a board year.

In addition, it is important to look for opportunities to align the design with elements that already exist within the association. Introducing and implementing something new will be an additional barrier that can hinder progress. And if we look back at the original goal of this project it aimed to get a better understanding of the complexity that social safety brings.

### Lack of a solid basis to build on

Looking at the students who are responsible for creating and sustaining the socially safe environment, we see that they often also get lost in complexity and don’t understand what it entails, what is involved and what factors are there that they could pay more attention to in creating a socially safe environment. Where this project aims to empower students to create a socially safe environment within their student culture, this empowerment should be in understanding. Because the research shows that there is acknowledgement for unwanted behavior, there is motivation to improve and create awareness but there is no understanding of the basis on which a socially safe environment can flourish.

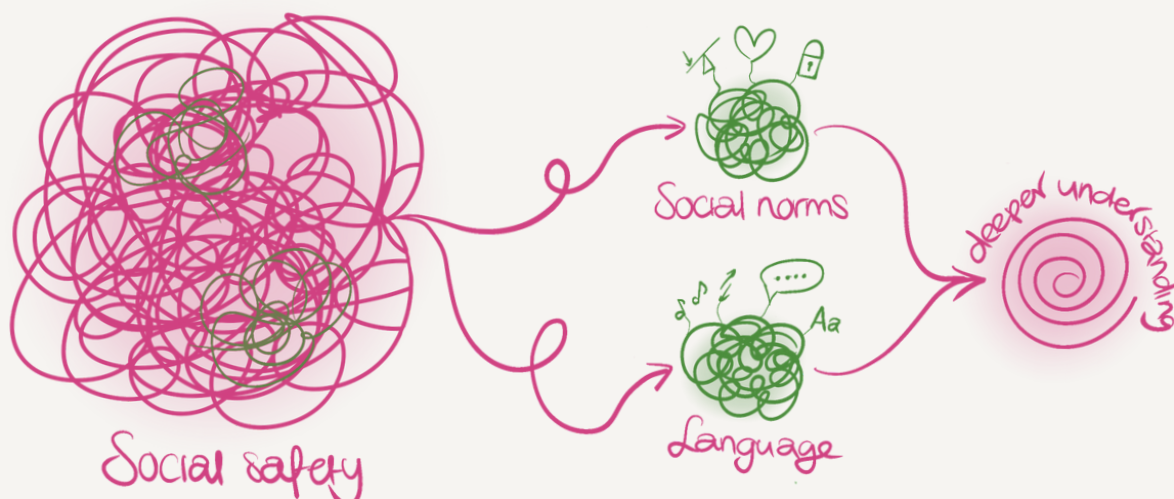


Figure 12: Navigating through the the complexity of social safety

## 4.6 Limitations of the method

For this study there are some limitations that could have impacted the outcome of the research. Those limitations are explained below.

- **Selective information**

within student associations, not all information reaches all members equally. This uneven distribution may have influenced how participants perceived or interpreted certain themes during the interviews.

- **Restrained due to social pressure**

Participants might have held back during the interviews out of concern for how their answers could affect their position within their association. As a result, some stories or critical insights might have remained unsaid.

- **Relevant insights left unexplored**

Certain themes and examples that emerged during the research could not be further investigated or included due to time and scope constraints. During the analysis information showed up lacking at times.

- **Broad setup, limited depth**

The interview design was intentionally broad in its approach to language and social norms, to allow space for any influencing element to be discussed. However, this breadth sometimes came at the cost of depth and nuance within each theme. A more focused approach might have allowed for greater depth and sharper insights.

- **Exclusion of digital elements**

The impact of online interactions and social media on social safety was not included in the scope of this study, even though these may play an increasingly important role.

- **Small sample size**

In total, six students participated in in-depth interviews. A larger group would have provided more diverse perspectives, but was not feasible within the boundaries of this project.

- **Limited diversity**

The research includes students from only two different associations. Although the data was generalized across the project, including a broader range of associations could have led to a more diverse, inclusive and layered outcome.

- **Influence of position within association**

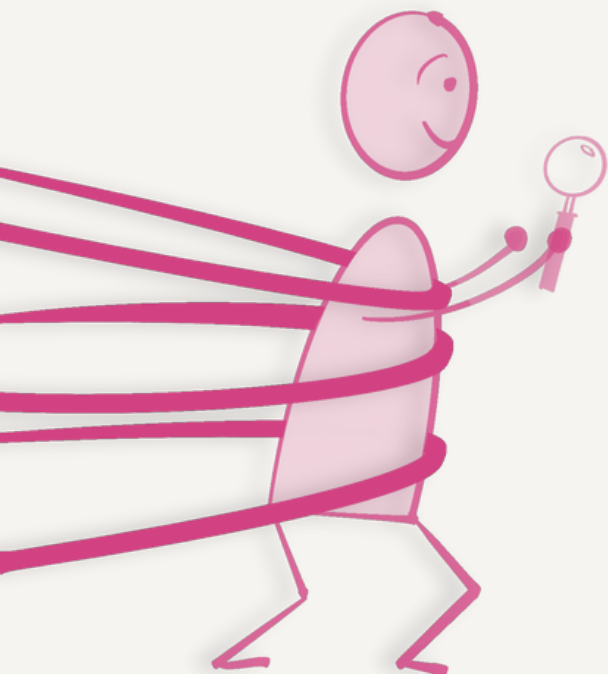
Participants' roles within their associations, such as board positions or committee members, may have shaped their perspectives, but this was not explicitly accounted for in the research design. It provided a more diverse view in the results, but the influence of the role on the experiences and perceptions were not considered in this project.

- **No use of sensitizing or follow-up**

This study didn't include sensitizing materials or follow-up interviews. In hindsight, these methods could have helped participants articulate their experiences more easily, especially since many found it difficult to give concrete examples or formulate clear answers during the interviews.

- **Inclusivity of the research**

The project focuses solely on male and female perspectives, like most of the existing literature does. The results are not directly linked to any type of relationship individuals might have, making them more inclusive. However, this approach may still limit the project's diversity and inclusivity outcomes. This is because there are more gender identifications, and situations are not always inherent to a type of gender or relationship.



## 4.7 Design opportunities

In the define phase, the insights from the research phase were analyzed and synthesized to find an inspirational and meaningful opportunities to be addressed in this project. Based on this defined opportunity, a design brief was formulated, including a problem statement, design statement, guiding principles, and envisioned benefits to aim for

Five potential design opportunities have been identified based on the results. Although there are other possibilities for using the findings to explore potential solutions, it was decided within the scope of this project to explore these five design opportunities further. The five design opportunities are briefly explained below.

### Design opportunities

#### Make positive use of internal subcultures

Subcultures (sub-groups within associations) are an opportunity to act because they are closely connected groups that often cultivate their own social norms. The study identified several examples of the positive impact these groups have on the perception of social safety. These include upholding mutual social norms, having open conversations and holding each other accountable for undesirable behavior. Although there are often significant differences in the effectiveness of different groups within associations, elements of this structure could be used to promote positive behavior change.

#### Reduce the downplaying of harmful and negative language use.

##### 'From downplaying to awareness'

Although many situations and examples of undesirable behavior are recognized, there is also a culture of approval. Things are often simply accepted as part of the norm, and statements such as 'he didn't mean it' or 'it's always been like this' ensure that behavior such as inappropriate behavior, sexism or derogatory language still have a place within the association. Downplaying this behavior only serves to hinder cultural change. It is therefore important to look further into the underlying causes by asking questions such as: 'What does it mean?', 'Why do we actually do that?', 'How do we do that?' 'And how can we change that?'

#### Focus on continuity and structure for existing positive interventions.

The study clearly shows a need for continuity and structure. Various interventions are already being implemented within the associations, which often have positive effects, but because they are not followed up or are not structurally included on the agenda, the results achieved are not pursued further. The importance of a structured discussion about desirable and undesirable behavior, social norms and other related themes also plays a role here, for example in raising awareness.

In addition, cultural change is a long-term process, something that cannot be changed in a year, which means that a long-term policy is crucial to ensure that this change is not only initiated but also further guided until the desired result is achieved.

#### Create space for new symbolic language

There are various examples of symbolic language use within associations. These include the 'are you okay/ben je oke?' campaign, 'for the members, by the members/voor de leden, door de leden' or 'heart for the association/hart voor de vereniging', in which these symbolic forms of language use encourage positive behavior. Due to the diverse applications and possibilities that this form of language use offers, there could also be opportunities to apply it more broadly within the context of social safety as intended in this project.

#### Define social norms

Although this may be stating the obvious, having concrete and clearly defined social norms is the basis for a socially safe environment. The need is great, as is the current lack of clarity. Something is needed to reduce the grey area, provide more clarity and leave less room for personal interpretation. Ultimately, this will clarify what is meant by 'normal' behavior. Social norms such as 'just behave normally/je gewoon normaal gedragen' will then clearly show everyone what is expected of them. This takes into account the fact that an association is made up of a diverse group of individuals who all have different backgrounds, upbringings, ages and personal beliefs.

## 4.8 Defining the gap in existing initiatives

After concluding the interviews a small case study was done to take a closer look at what is already out there, what design does for the areas defined in the conclusion and where a possible gap is that this project could focus on.

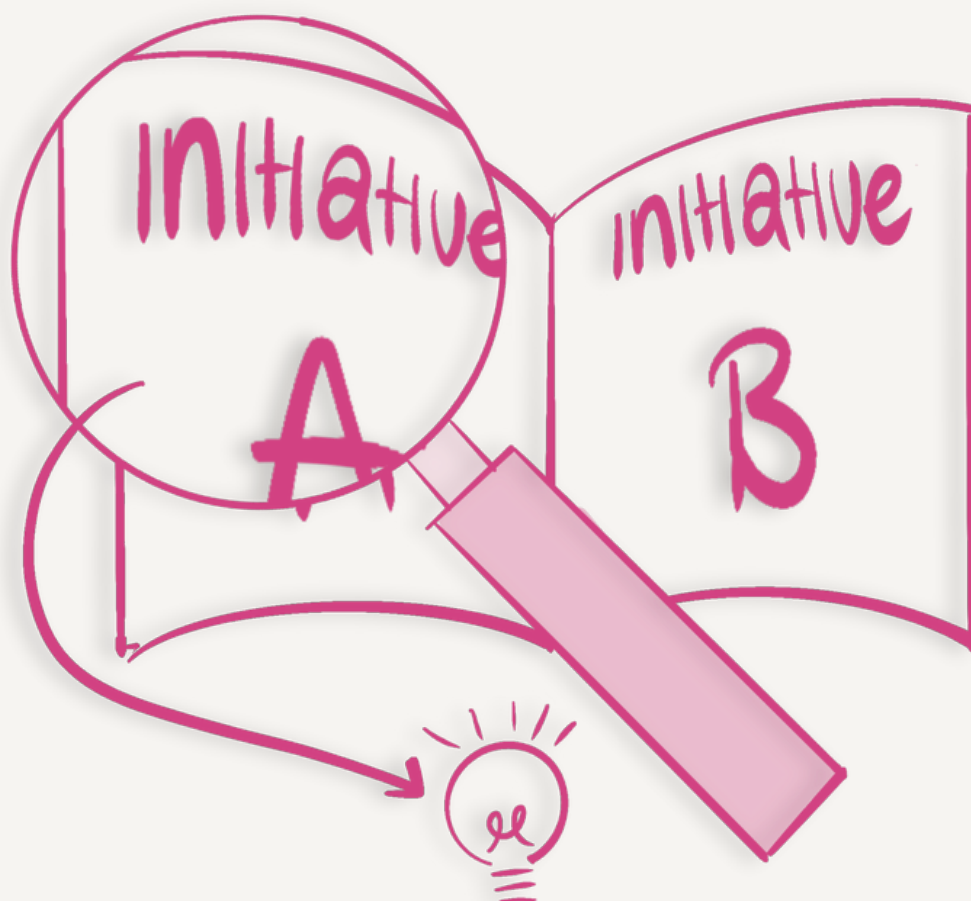
### Existing initiatives

When we look at what interventions already exist within the design opportunities, there does not appear to be very much. Various expertise organizations and centers offer workshops to raise awareness, as well as special programs for associations to write policies and codes of conduct. An example of this are the workshops created and offered by GELIJKSPEL. The 'Ben je oké? (Are you okay?)' campaign created by Rutgers is another intervention that stands out as an example within the design opportunities (Ben je oké?, 2024). And as mentioned before in 2023 the

national studentpact was created and launched to support student associations in creating policy for sexual transgressive behavior (Mariëtte Hamer et al., 2023). Other examples include picture cards, card games, conversation cards and other tools for initiating dialogue.

### Case study

To get a better understanding of the initiatives and tools that already exist, two of them were further analyzed to find out what they are, how they are created, what the advantages and limitations are. GELIJKSPEL and the studentpact are both initiatives that focus specifically on the context of student associations and were therefore chosen for further analysis. With those insights the position of this project can be further developed.



# GELIJKSPEL

GELIJKSPEL is a Dutch organization, founded by three students, that is committed to creating a socially and sexually safe environment within student culture. It offers workshops and support for students, student organizations and educational institutions. Encouraging open discussions about sex, consent and social safety are key priorities.

GELIJKSPEL offers **three different services**. First, they offer **workshops for students** that address topics such as setting boundaries, talking about positive sexuality and the role of bystanders. These are interactive sessions in which participants discuss the case studies presented. GELIJKSPEL also offers **workshops specifically aimed at students in leadership roles**, such as committees or boards. These workshops focus on recognizing inappropriate behavior and ways to intervene. Both workshops can be requested by student organizations and educational institutions and are tailored to the target group in consultation with the client.

Finally, GELIJKSPEL offers a **program of meetings with student boards during which a policy is developed**. Using a step-by-step plan developed by GELIJKSPEL, boards are guided in developing a policy on social and sexual safety. In this program, associations engage in dialogue with other associations and are guided by former board members or other students to share knowledge and experience.

If we look at how these three elements influence the approach to social safety within student associations, there are two separate initiatives. The workshops focus on raising awareness and providing tools in an interactive way. This is extremely important and because the format can be adapted to the target group, it can really serve as a conversation starter. However, these workshops must be requested by the association and only reach a small number of students. It is also a one-off initiative, whereas the research emphasizes the importance of repetition and continuity. The initiative alone is therefore not a means of bringing about long-term cultural change.

Figure 13: Students participating in a workshop given by GELIJKSPEL



The policy development programs, on the other hand, provide sufficient support and guidance for associations to develop a constructive, long-term approach. And although the content is not publicly available, the aspects of structural support, the drafting of a comprehensive policy document, cooperation with other associations and intensive guidance offer the prospect of effective results. On the other hand, these processes are only available to a small group of specific associations. This hinders the accessibility and the low threshold for creating a policy. This means that there is a very large group of student organizations in the Netherlands that do not have access to this knowledge and information or the possibility of support.

In conclusion, GELIJKSPEL's **positive approach** is certainly effective. The initiatives are **closely aligned with the target group** and ensure a transfer of knowledge that is relevant to the context. What is lacking is the accessibility and continuity of the approach. This is something that could be addressed in this project



Figure 14: The GAMEPLAN for boards to support them in the process of developing policy

## 4.8 Defining the gap in existing initiatives



The studentpact is a **national initiative** that encourages student organizations, educational institutions (secondary education, higher education and university education) and municipalities to work together to tackle sexually transgressive behavior and sexual violence in student culture (Mariëtte Hamer et al., 2023). The pact was developed on behalf of the Government Commissioner for Sexual Transgressive Behavior and Sexual Violence, Mariëtte Hamer, and in collaboration with various students and student organizations.

The pact is a **document that organizations can 'sign'**. By signing, the organization promises to actively implement the action points outlined in the document. These **action points contribute to creating a socially and sexually safe environment for students**. The document also contains various suggestions and tools to implement these action points in an accessible way. Educational institutions and communities are also encouraged to work with students.

The action plan in the studentpact is divided into five themes (figure 15): awareness, behavior, reporting and complaints, measures and support.

Each of these themes is covered in detail in the pact, with specific action points that can be taken by the various target groups. The pact is also full of examples, tips and expert organizations that can help readers work through the document.

When we look at the effectiveness of the studentpact, we see that few student organizations use it or even know about it. The document contains a huge amount of text and is something that the association itself would have to delve into. In practice, this makes it inaccessible, despite its important content. The document is not easy to read, which makes the threshold for getting through it and getting to the heart of the matter too high.

In conclusion, the studentpact **contains a lot of valuable information**. It also **provides examples, possible connections and encourages collaboration**. These are elements that can certainly provide support, but without concrete steps or an understanding of the underlying factors and the need, they are not effective. The Student Pact provides a starting point for developing an approach or policy, but the large amount of text and unclear structure means that a lot is being asked of administrators.

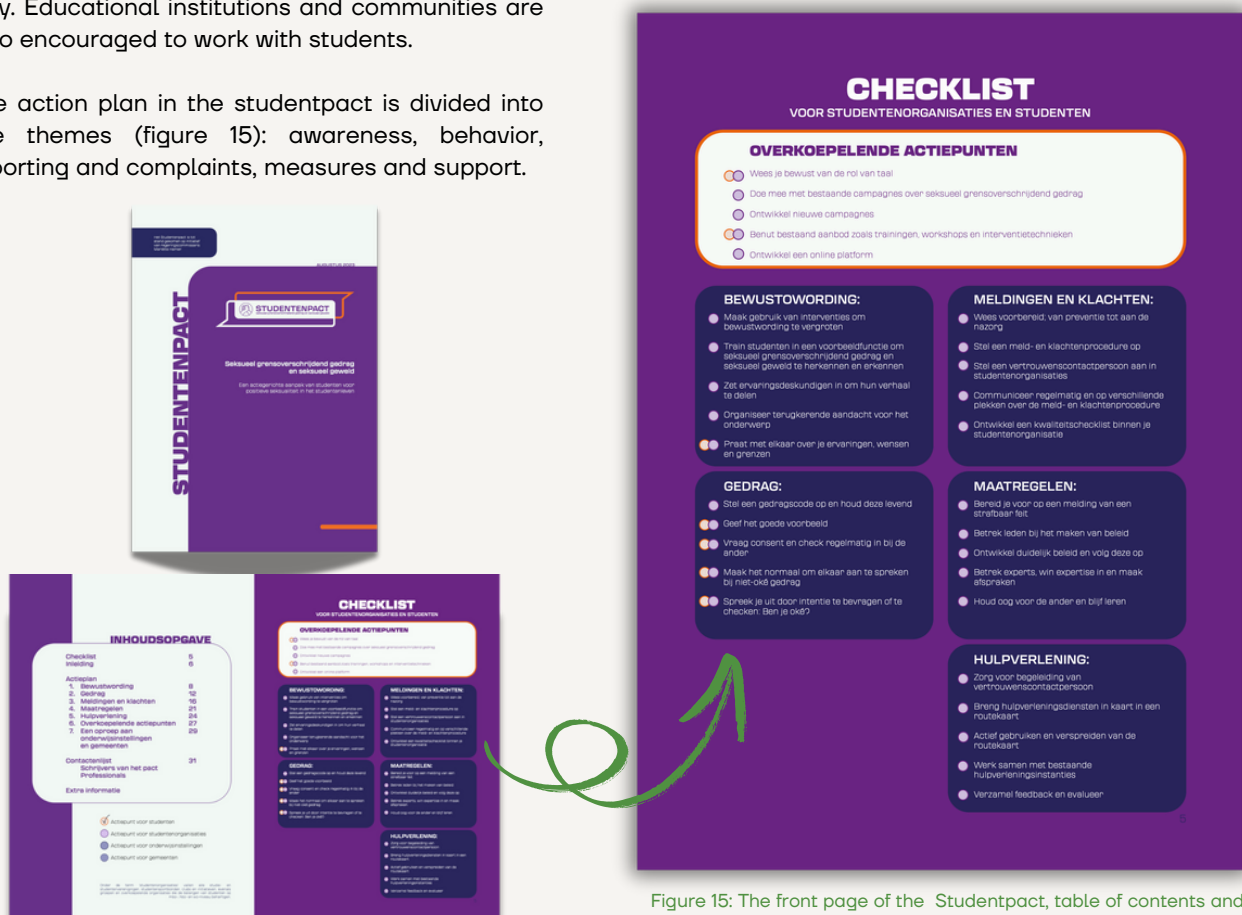


Figure 15: The front page of the Studentpact, table of contents and the checklist for student organisations and students

# Where is the gap?

## Student driven

Both projects were created for and by students, which only emphasizes the importance of the students themselves taking the lead in tackling this issue. This can also be reinforced using design in this project. In addition, both initiatives focus on the transfer and facilitation of knowledge and experience. However, in a long-term approach, understanding the core is crucial to build a solid foundation.

## Accessibility

Furthermore, both initiatives are not accessible to all associations or students. This is due to their form, but also to their availability or the initiative required from the association itself. This accessibility is therefore a focus of this project, because although the motivation is often there, if the threshold to start or continue is too high, progress will not be inevitable.

Accessibility also emerges as an important element. Although the Student Pact is accessible to everyone, many students are still unaware of it and find it difficult to apply in practice. The workshops and program offered by GELIJKSPEL are often accessible to a specific group of students and organizations, but as these components always have to be supervised by GELIJKSPEL staff, this also limits accessibility. This leaves room for a solution that can be used independently and easily in practice.

Both initiatives have demonstrated the desire and ability to have a **positive impact** on the approach to creating a socially safe environment. However, there are certainly areas where this project could contribute.

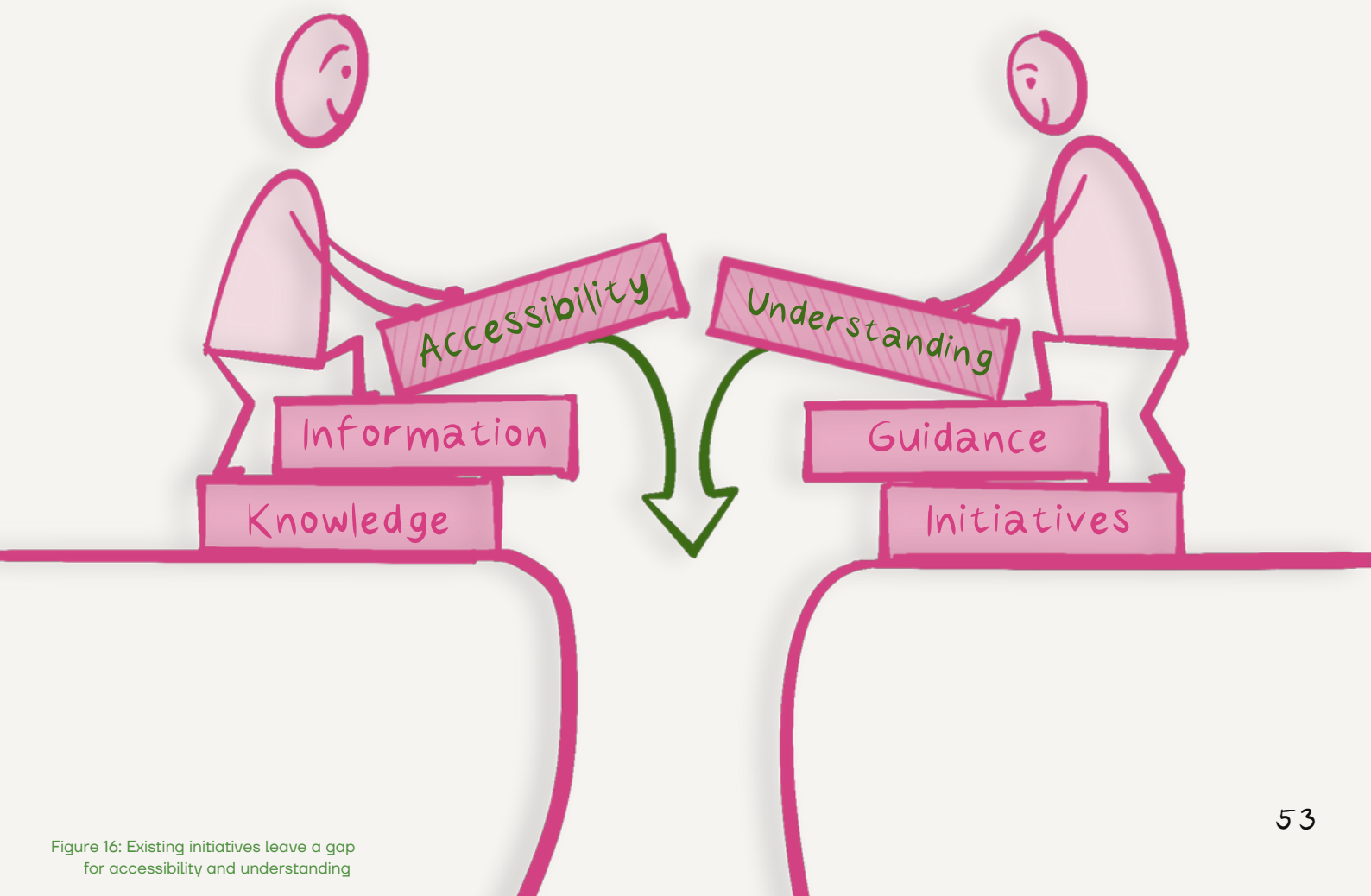
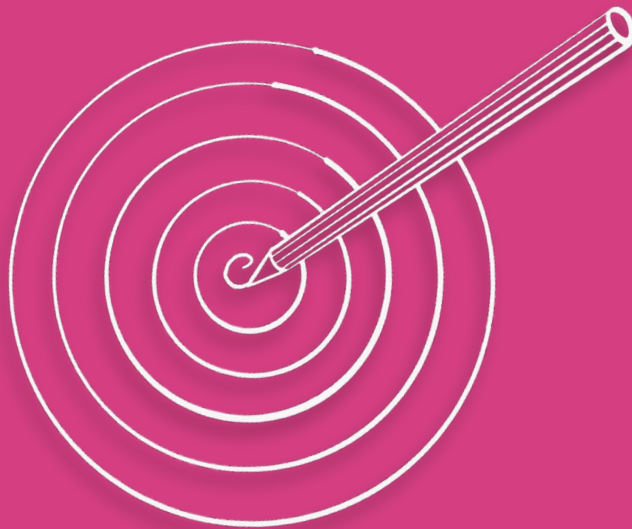


Figure 16: Existing initiatives leave a gap for accessibility and understanding

# Phase 5

## Redefine the focus and design goal



This chapter outlines the project's new focus. Taking the insights from previous chapters into account, it explains the redefined design goal, the intended effect of the design, and the guidelines for evaluating concepts.

## 5.1 Focus of the project

### From complexity to understanding

Throughout the course of this project, it became clear that the complexity of the issue that the research aimed to clarify also made it difficult to design a concrete 'solution'. For this reason, a different form of design result was chosen for this project, one that is in line with the needs that have emerged from the project. As the complexity that has already influenced the process in this project will also have an impact on how the associations approach and tackle the issue, it was decided to use the findings to provide understanding and tools that the students can use themselves.

The focus is therefore on understanding the issue and all the factors involved. The result must also provide easy access to the content and be accessible in terms of use and application. By presenting the insights gained in this project in a visual way and by providing a tool that supports students in the process of assessing which factors need attention and setting priorities, we aim to achieve this.

### Lack of a solid foundation to build on

The main reason for this decision is that experiences and examples from the research have shown that a great deal of attention is already

being paid to this issue and initiatives are being taken, but there is often a lack of a solid foundation on which to build further. In practice, this leads to a loss of progress, which is something we need to overcome. The result should ensure that the issue of social safety and the role of social norms and language use are easy to understand. It is crucial to know which factors play a positive or negative role in social safety within the association, before any steps are taken.

### Redefining the focus of the design

The final design will therefore focus on three elements: a visualization of the content of this project, a tool that students can use to apply this knowledge themselves, and a form of external motivation and incentive to highlight the importance of the approach.

The design goal was therefore formulated as follows: "The end result will facilitate the development of an approach to foster social safety within student associations. It will enable boards, and other students, to deal with the theme themselves by providing agency to create a long-term plan for at least a year. This will be achieved through the use of a visual communication tool and an implementation and reflection tool to

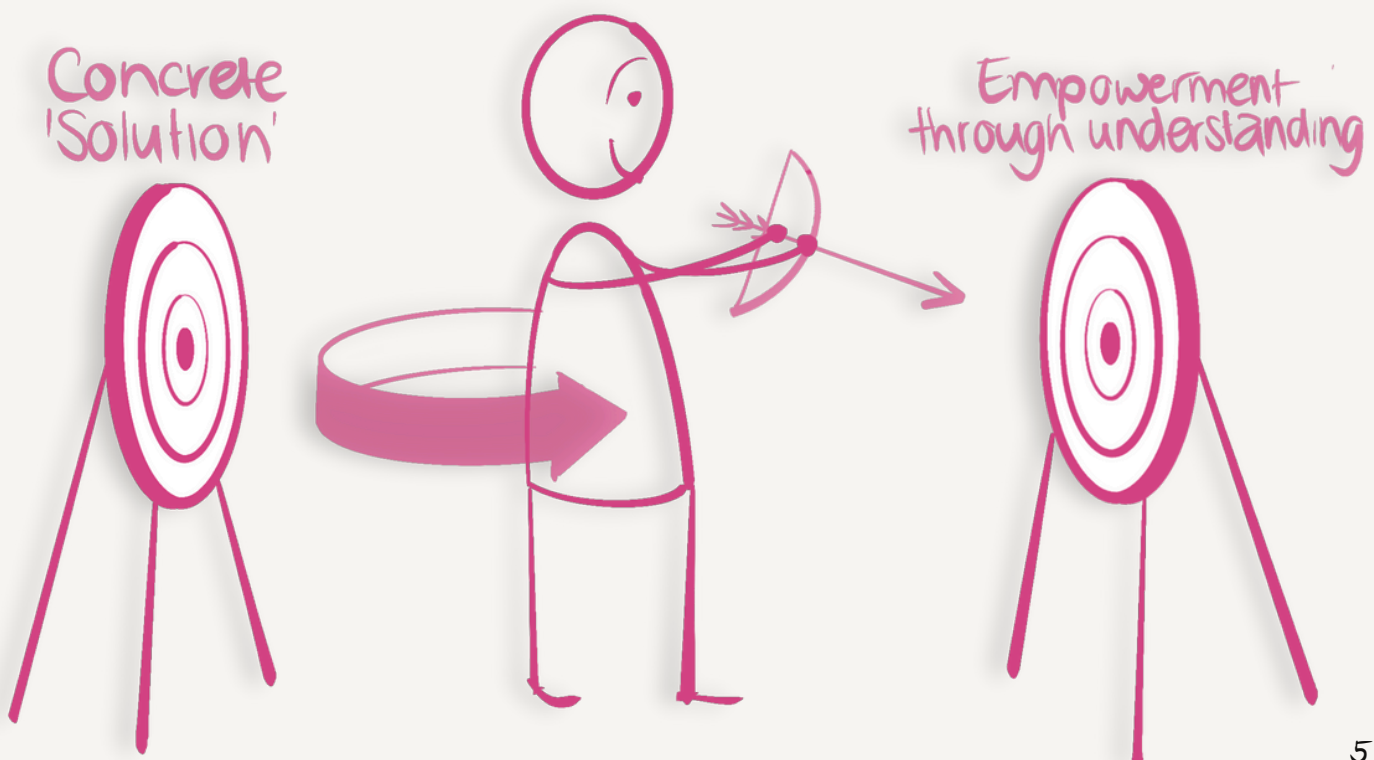


Figure 17: Redefined focus and goal of the project, shifting away from any concrete and ready-to-use 'solution'.

## 5.2 What should the design do?

The final design should encourage students to take the initiative and inspire them to contribute to a socially safe environment within the association. The design should raise awareness of this shared responsibility and empower those who take the lead to feel a sense of ownership and motivate others. At the same time, the design should establish a sense of structure and continuity to create a strong foundation for lasting change. This change should be visible in small, meaningful ways, such as new activities, a calendar of events, a code of conduct, and a dedicated team working on the issue.

The visual communication element should spark conversation and create awareness of what influences social safety within the association. The implementation and reflection tool should guide students through creating a long-term action plan. This tool should focus on the factors, elements, and conditions that play a role in creating a socially safe environment. The tool should empower associations to work autonomously on the topic. Resulting in a multifaceted and personalized approach that creates change from within the association.

Ultimately, the aimed effect of the design is to inspire students to take the initiative and guide them through the process of creating lasting cultural change, thereby transforming the association into a socially safe environment for all students.

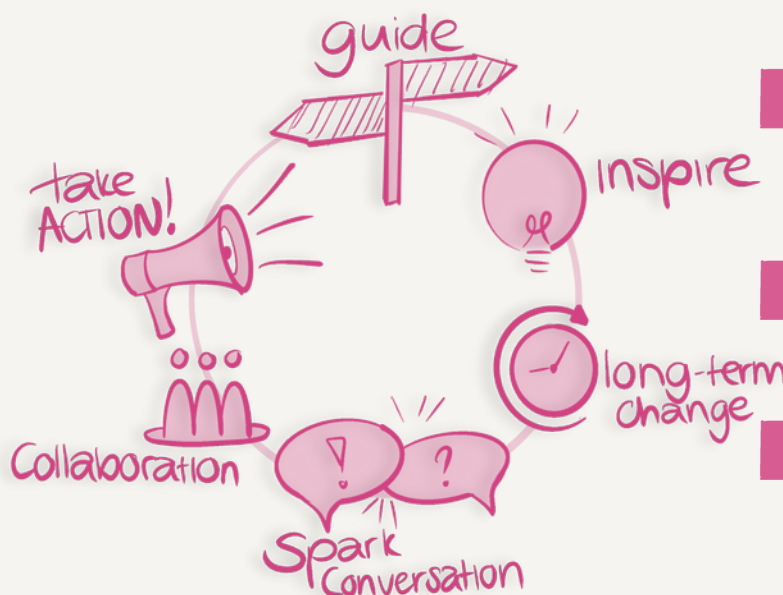


Figure 18: Aimed effects of the design and concept

## 5.3 Guidelines for concept evaluation

Based on this design goal and aimed effects of the design, a number of requirements have been drawn up to help achieve the goal. These are formulated as guidelines that can be used to evaluate the final concept:

- 1 The design must help the board, or other students within the association, to **understand the aspects** that influence social safety.
- 2 The design must support students in **assessing which aspects play a role** within the association.
- 3 The design must support students in **setting priorities within the approach** that is drawn up to create the needed foundation to long term change
- 4 The design must **encourage the creation of an approach** that can be used within the association as a long-term plan, laying the necessary foundations for a socially safe environment.
- 5 The design must **stimulate and inspire people to engage with the theme** and start acting. Role models, examples or other forms of support can be used for this purpose.
- 6 The design must **encourage cooperation and co-creation within the association**. All levels of the association must be involved in creating an approach and all perspectives must be considered.
- 7 The design must **create a sense of ownership** by making it accessible and easy to understand for everyone.
- 8 The design must consist of at least a **visual representation of the insights** and a tool with which **an action plan can be drawn up independently**.

# Phase 6

## Concept exploration and creation



In this chapter discusses the process of concept creation. Highlighting the steps that were taken to create the final design and how this will create value to the target group. Both the development of the visualisation of the insights and the tool for implementation and reflection are discussed and the criteria used in this process.

# 6.1 Empowerment through understanding and reflection

Throughout the research and design process, it became more and more clear that social safety in student associations is an extremely complex and multifaceted issue. Contexts are different for each association, interventions are highly situation-specific, and underlying factors, such as group dynamics, yearly board changes, culture and hierarchy, are deeply rooted and interconnected.

## Exploring design opportunities

Through various design methods such as brainstorming, cubing and formulating "how-to" questions, I explored five the five defined design opportunities. However, it soon became clear that there was no solid basis upon which such a solution could be effectively built. Instead of working directly towards a concrete intervention, I began to focus on mapping and understanding the underlying factors that influence behavior.

The research showed that the biggest obstacle is often not a lack of motivation or initiatives, but a lack of understanding of how behavior is created and influenced within associations. Many boards do not really know where to start, what their role is, or how to achieve cultural change effectively and sustainably.

## Shifting focus to create a valuable design

The value of this project is therefore not in providing a ready-to-use intervention, but in providing a deeper understanding of the problem itself. This is also reflected in the revised design goal: instead of designing a ready-to-use intervention, this project focuses on empowerment through understanding and reflecting. The insights should be presented in a visual and accessible way, so that they can be used as conversation starters or reflection tools within associations. This way, the project helps and supports students and boards to understand their own position and recognize their responsibilities. Providing students with a clear overview of the many factors and elements that influence social safety.

Next to this, possible forms of implementation were explored, such as a workbook, a workshop or a toolkit, which build on the visual basis. These resources are intended to help open the conversation and encourage sustainable change from within. By empowering and guiding the students to create a personalized plan of action, taking small steps towards cultural change from within.

## Shape of the design

After this conclusion was drawn, the process continued to find the best solution for both parts by using the guidelines and design methods to generate ideas.

**1.Visualization:** infographic, discussion board (Praatplaat), interactive visual, visual report

**2.Independent implementation tool:** workbook, workshop, toolkit, co-creation session



Figure 19: Process of exploring design opportunities

## 6.2 Visualization of the insights

### Designing the 'praatplaat'

Rather than designing a ready-to-use intervention or solution, this project focused on a visual representation of research insights in the form of a discussion board (praatplaat). This choice stems from the central aim of the project: to increase understanding of the complexity of social safety within student associations. By presenting the variety of underlying factors and elements in a visual and accessible way, it is possible to make the conversation about social safety more open and concrete for all students.

The visualization focuses on communicating the different factors and elements that influence social safety, with the aim of highlighting the core themes from the research and providing insight into the conditions for creating a socially safe environment. After looking at the discussion board, students should not only have a better understanding of the topic but also be encouraged to discuss it with each other. The discussion board thus serves as a conversation starter and contributes to awareness, reflection and possible follow-up actions within the association.

### Target group

The target group for this intervention consists of students who are members of a student association, including board members, members with a specific role and other active or involved members. The discussion board has been designed with this diverse group in mind: the information is visually clear, accessible and aimed at recognition and activation.

### What insights need to be visualized?

The contents of the visualization is based on the insights from the research and focuses on the following core themes:

- Conditions for a socially safe environment
- Social norms and what role they (can) have within associations
- Language use and its influence on behavior, boundaries and normalization
- Subcultures within associations and the differences between them
- Responsibility and ownership, both individual and collective
- Social control and a culture of accountability (aanspreekcultuur)
- Structure and continuity, particularly regarding annual board changes and the need for ongoing awareness.

A discussion board (praatplaat) was deliberately chosen as the communication tool: a 'praatplaat' is a visual tool that conveys a complex story in a clear and structured manner. According to De Betekenaar (2023), a discussion board is intended to communicate a message clearly and supportively, which is closely aligned with the aim of this design.

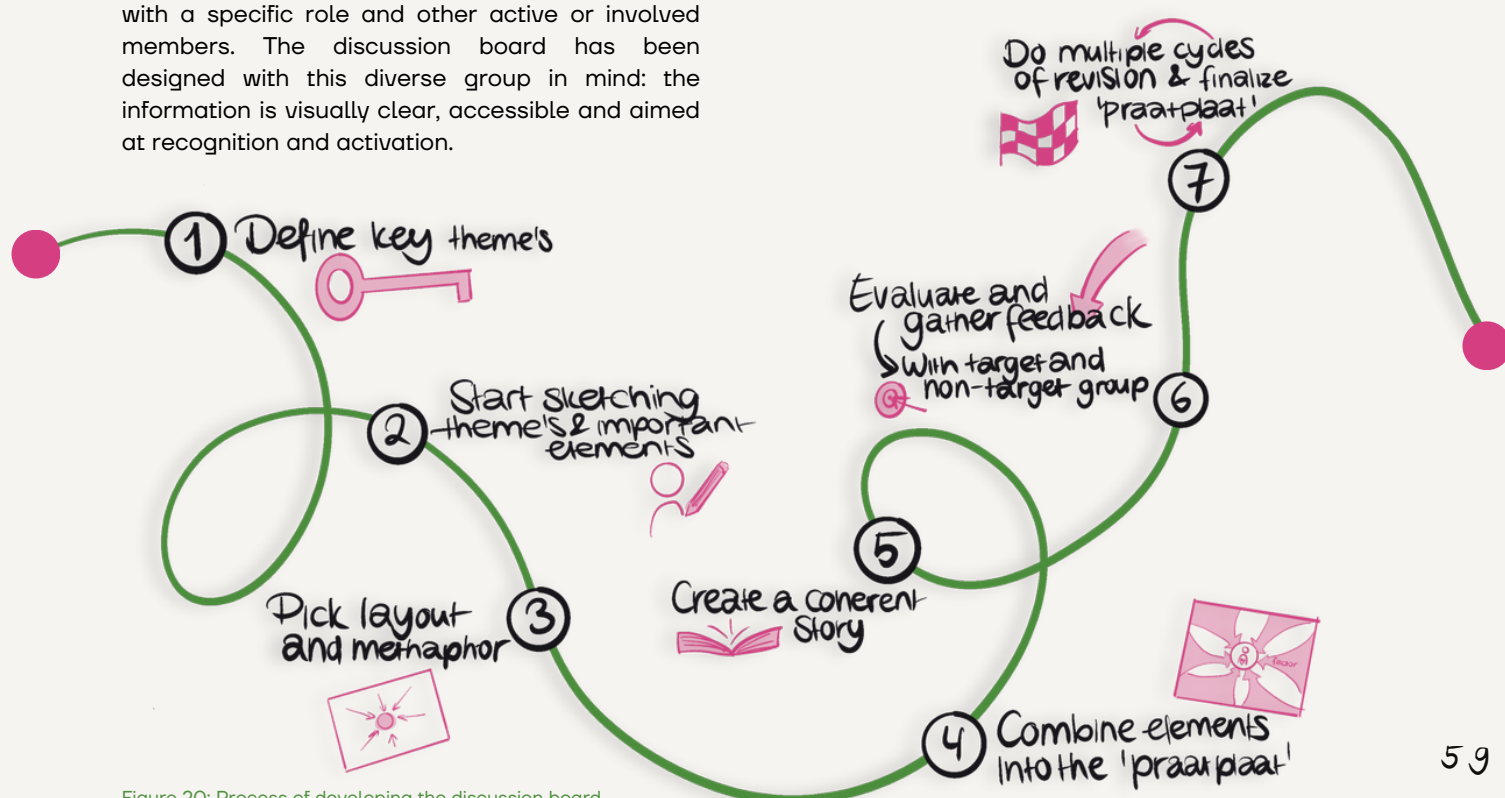


Figure 20: Process of developing the discussion board

## 6.3 Implementation and reflection tool

### Designing the workbook

In addition to the visual discussion board, an implementation and reflection tool was also developed for this project. While the discussion board focuses on increasing understanding and initiating conversation, this second intervention provides students with concrete tools to get started with the topic of social safety within their association. The focus is on reflecting on the information shared, the current situation regarding the issue, collaboration, open discussion and formulating possible next steps. This builds a bridge between awareness, through understanding, and actual action.

The aim of this tool is to support students and board members in developing an approach to social safety on their own. It focuses on stimulating collaboration and joint discussion of issues identified as essential during the research. The content is clearly written and illustrated with examples, so that the issues and underlying factors can be discussed in an accessible way.

### Target group

The tool is designed to be easily accessible in a variety of student association contexts, regardless of hierarchical positions or specific experience with the topic. It is therefore aimed at all students who want to actively work on social safety within the association: from board members and committees to involved members.

### Design process

The design process involved the HOW-TOS method and the SCAMPER method (Van Boeijen et al., 2014). SCAMPER is a creative technique for rethinking existing ideas and approaching them from new perspectives. Both methods helped to critically examine the objectives of the approach and how they could be achieved. For example, how reflection and collaboration could be facilitated and how the implementation tool could encourage students to take initiative and ownership. By using these methods, a variety of ideas and possibilities were explored and used as inspiration for the final concept, a flexible and easy to use workbook.

The development of this tool focussed ensuring clarity, accessibility, usability and engagement of the target group. The result is a reflection tool that guides students in understanding the theme, analyzing their own context and formulating targeted steps for a more socially safe association culture.

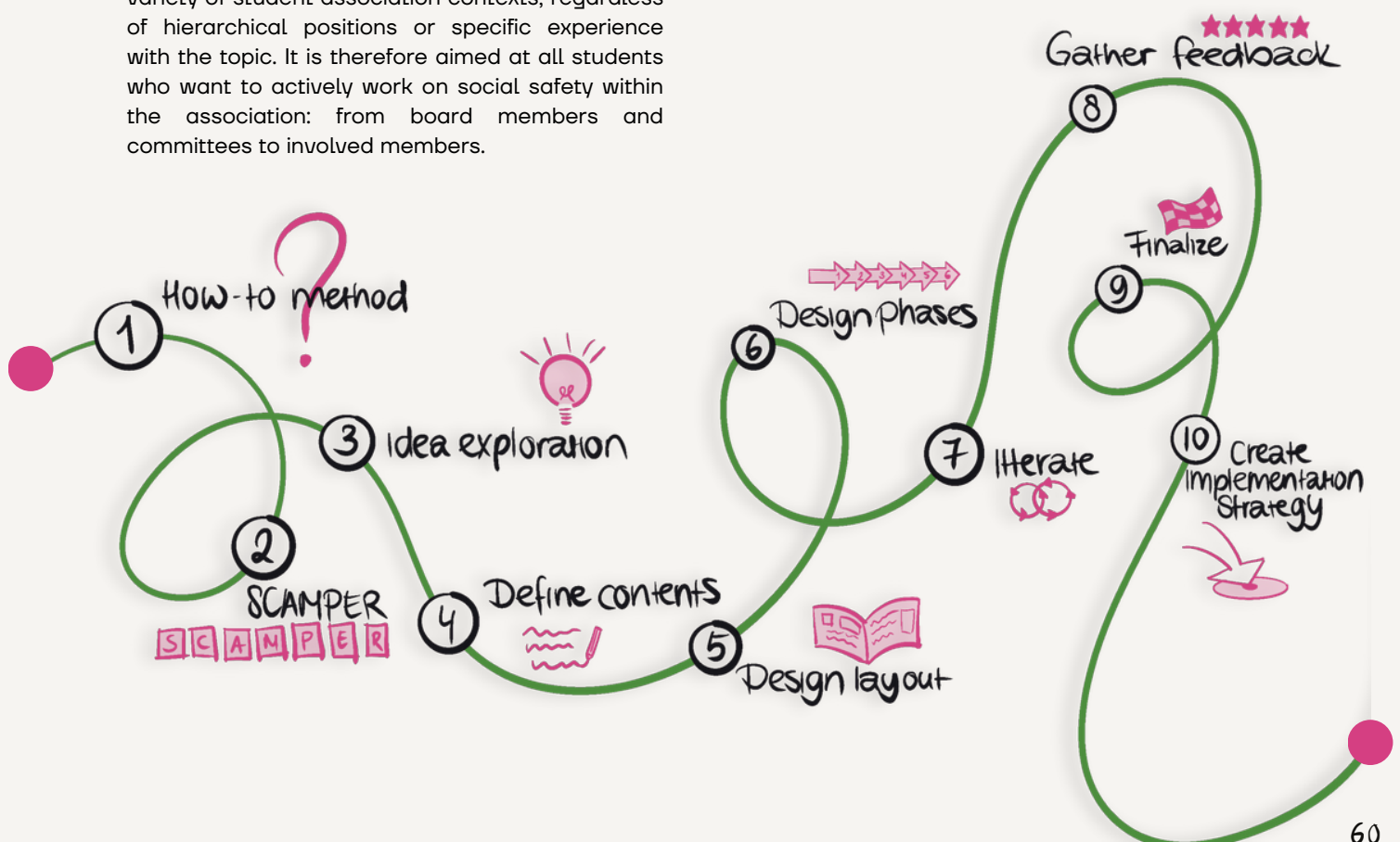


Figure 21: Process of developing the workbook

## 6.4 Criteria for concept creation

To make the concept's content and design easy to understand and set a framework for this project, a number of choices have been made and formulated into criteria that the concept must follow. These criteria allow for the concept to be further developed, but it was not feasible to work out all the details in full within the scope of this project. The criteria have been drawn up for the discussion board, the contents of the workbook and the design of the workbook.

### Discussion Board

- The discussion board provides a clear, visual overview of the factors influencing social safety within student associations.
- The use of images and clear structure makes the information accessible and easy to understand, enabling students to gain insight into the subject.
- The discussion board is designed to stimulate conversation: it encourages reflection and recognition and inspires students to consider their own experiences and perspectives.
- The aim is for the discussion board to inform, inspire and motivate students to take further steps.
- The visual style and content are consistent with the workbook to create a coherent whole.

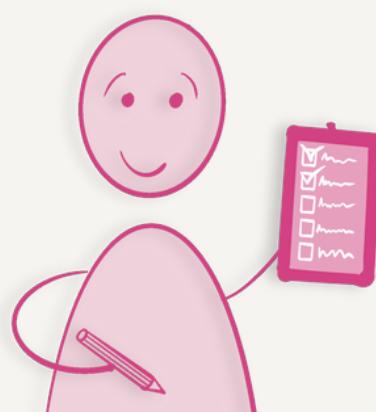
### Workbook - design

- The layout follows a clear hierarchy and story, with sufficient white space, a clear overview and not too much information per page.
- The workbook must be user-friendly and inviting. A simple, calm design ensures it does not feel overwhelming.
- There is sufficient space for personal notes and reflection through features such as blank sections, fill-in exercises and spaces for post it notes.
- An abstract visual style has been chosen with simple illustrations to increase recognizability while avoiding stereotypes. This makes the workbook more adaptable beyond the target group.
- The visual style of the workbook matches that of the discussion board so that the two are experienced as a single, consistent concept.
- Various fill-in sheets and formats encourage active participation and make progress visible.

- An added QR code provides access to a digital slideshow, enabling the content to be easily shared and discussed within a group.
- The workbook is designed in an A4 landscape format and bound with a ring binder for practicality and ease of use.

### Workbook - contents

- The workbook provides sufficient explanation and context to enable understanding of the theme of social safety, including related themes and influencing factors.
- The steps are clearly defined, providing direction for the process without being overly descriptive.
- Specific cases or examples have not been used deliberately, as situations may vary significantly between associations. Instead, students are encouraged to use their own experiences to discuss and reflect.
- By not including standardized templates and examples, the workbook remains applicable to a wide range of associations. At the same time, it encourages an active attitude and personal ownership.
- The content is designed to encourage teamwork and the gathering of different perspectives.
- All necessary information is contained within the booklet itself to keep the threshold for use as low as possible. No direct reference is made to external sources. However, these sources are mentioned as an option for further exploration.
- Accessible language has been chosen. Important concepts are clearly explained and contextualized.
- The content is intended to stimulate discussion and encourage reflection, building on users' own motivation and experience.
- The content also includes recommendations for possible activities or partner organizations to be included in the process.



# Phase 7

## Final concept

***‘The recipe to a socially safe association’***



In this phase the final concept will be explained. The story behind the concept, the aimed effect and two components that shape the concept are explained. This phase also contains the creation of an implementation strategy to shape possible future steps to bring the final concept to the aimed target group and reach the envisioned effects.

## 7.2 Creating the final concept

## 7.3 Discussion board on social safety within student culture

To create the 'praatplaat' the insights from the research were visualized as a part of the concept to empower through understanding. The 'praatplaat' visualizes all 6 factors: language use, social norms, subcultures, responsibility & ownership, social control & approach culture, structure & continuity. In the center of the 'praatplaat' are the conditions that 'protect' the social safe environment. Showing all factors and elements that play a role in creating a socially safe student association. The praatplaat visuals are used in the workbook to connect the information in a structure. (Appendix E)

### How could the the discussion board be used?

There are multiple ways to use the discussion board. First, the core team can use the discussion board to start a conversation. A second option is to hang a large version of the discussion board somewhere in the association to spark conversation among members. Members can then discuss what it is, what it means, and how they perceive it. The discussion board could also be used during an activity, for example during the initiation period, to facilitate an open conversation about factors that influence perceptions of social safety. The board could provide the discussion board to subgroups as a tool to motivate them to discuss the theme. Finally, the discussion board can be used individually to gain a deeper understanding of the factors and elements involved. However, it will be more effective if used with multiple students, ideally from diverse backgrounds, to facilitate a conversation with different perspectives and experiences.

### What are limitations and tension that might arise with the use of the discussion board?

Through a thought experiment the discussion board was evaluated to find any natural limitations and tensions that might arise during the use. Possible limitations are:

- Students leave out things they know have an influence.
- Students stop trusting their own feeling of what is right or wrong. Making the outcomes less effective and relatable. This also might effect the motivation to carry out the action plan once it is done.
- The discussion board does not provide all context; it would therefore be possible for students to misinterpret the information. What could lead to both positive and negative outcomes
- The discussion board does not spark the conversation; students look at it and go on with what they were doing. What would negatively impact the effectivity of the discussion board.
- The colors and visualization of the discussion board does not resonate with some of the target group. Making the information less accessible and relatable.
- The discussion board inspires students to start talking about the elements that resonate with them to other students. This leads to discussions and big differences in opinion and maybe even conflict.



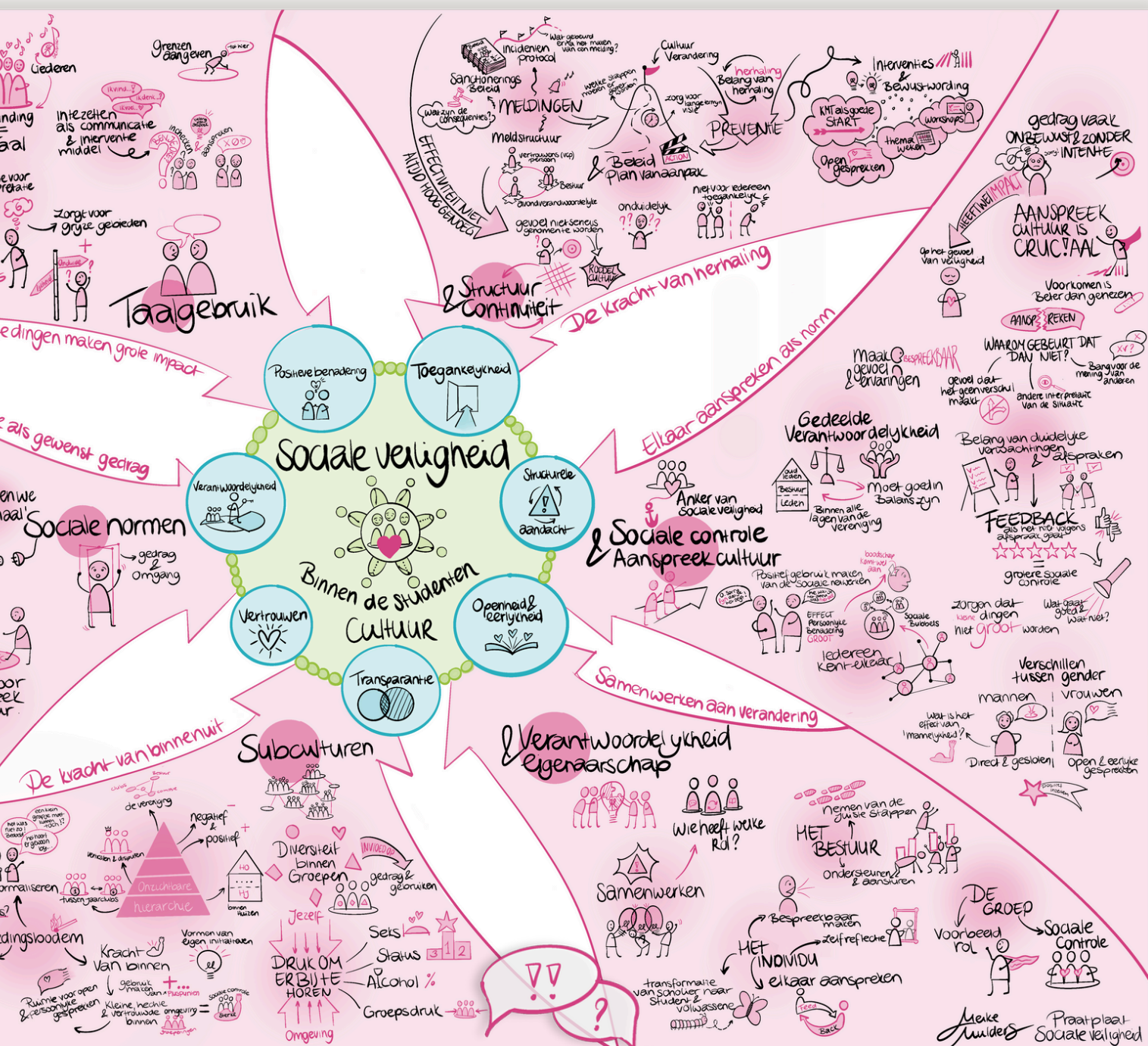


Figure 23: The discussion board: 'Social safety within the context of student culture'

## 7.4 Workbook on social safety within the student culture

“The recipe for social safety within the association”  
– *Look for the right ingredients and steps to a social safe association*

There are six different phases that students can work through themselves. These phases focus on the various steps needed to implement long-term cultural change to create a socially safe environment.

The book outlines **a process carried out over several months** by the 'core team'. This team of students takes the lead in creating a socially safe environment within the association.

The workbook **recommends composing a team** of at least four students from various sections of the association. This 'core team' then works through the workbook together and is encouraged to continue the conversation outside the group by talking to others, organizing discussion evenings, and coming up with other ideas to gather input and perspectives.

The workbook is designed to **facilitate reflection and discussion**. While basic information is provided to help students understand the theme and its context, it is the students themselves who must contribute their own experiences, examples and discussions. Provocative questions, dilemmas and fill-in tools stimulate curiosity and reflection, enabling students to develop a long-term action plan.

The workbook is divided into six different phases that guide the team through the process with different types of tips, exercises and information. These six phases are something that students can **work through themselves**, without help from any external factors. The phases focus on the various steps needed to implement long-term cultural change and create a socially safe environment.

The result of the workbook is a plan of action that consists of the core subjects the team identified important in creating a socially safe environment. Through multiple reflection assignments **three goals will be defined and translated into a timeline** on which the team can plan the steps they need to take. Fase 2 till 5 are there to guide the team in the conversation and reflection process. Motivating them to be creative and implement their own ideas and **create their own personalized path to a socially safe association**. The phases will be explained more in depth on page 68.

This chapter will further explain the contents of the workbook, which can be found in Appendix F.



Figure 24: Visualisation of the 'core team' working on the workbook together.

## Sociale veiligheid

Sociale veiligheid is het gevoel van jezelf kunnen zijn en jezelf kunnen ontwikkelen, iets wat enorm belangrijk is binnen een studentenvereniging. Het thema wordt binnen de context van studentenverenigingen vaak geassocieerd met (seksueel) grensoverschrijdend gedrag, en hoewel dat een belangrijk en relevant onderwerp is, kijkt dit werkboek verder dan dat. Sociale veiligheid gaat over veel meer dan alleen seksueel grensoverschrijdend gedrag; het omvat ook thema's zoals discriminatie, uitsluiting, machtsmisbruik, groepsdruk, roddelcultuur, onveilig taalgebruik en de ruimte om jezelf uit te spreken.

Daarom richt dit werkboek zich op de bredere sociale dynamiek binnen verenigingen die samen de sociale veiligheid beïnvloeden. Om de veiligheid binnen verenigingen echt te vergroten, is cultuurverandering noodzakelijk. Een belangrijk thema om samen, binnen de vereniging, mee aan de slag te gaan. Maar wat betekent sociale veiligheid eigenlijk? En welke rol kun jij daarin spelen?

## Wat is sociale veiligheid Het begrip uitgelegd



Sociale veiligheid is een enorm complex thema dat vaak door iedereen anders wordt geïnterpreteerd. Maar ondanks dat door verschillen in kunnen zitten, is het belangrijk om hier verder in te duiken en op zoek te gaan naar welke factoren er meespelen binnen jouw vereniging. Een voorbeelddefinitie van sociale veiligheid is hieronder beschreven; deze definitie wordt binnen de TU Delft gehanteerd.

Voor ons betekent sociale veiligheid dat we als medewerkers en studenten respectvol met elkaar omgaan. Dat we elkaar gelijkwaardig behandelen en dat we elkaars grenzen respecteren. Dat we elkaar niet discrimineren op basis van leeftijd, seksuele oriëntatie, etniciteit of andere kenmerken. Sociale veiligheid betekent ook dat we elkaar durven aan te spreken en dat we onbeveiligd kunnen zeggen wat we vinden. Ook als we een afwijkende mening hebben. Dit geldt tevens voor mensen in een afhankelijke positie. Sociale veiligheid betekent tot slot dat we ons beschermd weten tegen ongewenst gedrag.

Binnen de vereniging kan sociale veiligheid zich uiten in bijvoorbeeld: seksueel grensoverschrijdend gedrag, pesten, discriminatie, inclusiviteit, fysiek en verbaal geweld, online grensoverschrijdend gedrag, seksisme en nog veel meer.

Om een sociaal veilige omgeving te kunnen creëren en waarborgen is het cruciaal om een goede basis te hebben. Binnen de vereniging zit deze basis vaak in de cultuur; het is daarom belangrijk om elementen binnen deze cultuur te analyseren en waar nodig te veranderen. Deze cultuurverandering is niet iets wat in een paar weken of maanden gebeurt, maar is een proces van de lange termijn. Daarom is het extra goed dat je met behulp van dit werkboek, samen met andere studenten binnen de vereniging, aan de slag gaat om door de eerste stappen in te zetten.

De verschillende factoren en elementen die in dit boek behandeld worden zijn gekoppeld aan de studentencultuur. Dit werkboek omvat zeker niet alles wat er speelt binnen de vereniging, maar de uitkomsten die uit dit boek komen zullen een basis vormen van waaruit verder uitgebouwd kan worden naar grotere thema's. Gebruik de informatie, voorbeelden, tips en acties vooral om met elkaar te reflecteren en tot concrete stappen te komen. Het gesprek is daarin de sleutel tot vooruitgang en misschien wel verandering.



The first part of the workbook provides an introduction to social safety. Explaining what the topic means, what concepts people might relate to the topic and how it relates to student culture.

## Format

Welke onderdelen zijn er en hoe kun je die gebruiken?

De 6 verschillende factoren, die invloed hebben op de sociale veiligheid, bevatten allemaal elementen die een rol kunnen spelen. Deze elementen zijn ook afgebeeld in de PraatPlaat (pagina 20). In het werkboek zal voor elk van deze factoren & elementen uitgelegd worden wat er mee bedoeld wordt en wat de mogelijke (positieve & negatieve) effecten zijn. Ook zullen er tips zijn die gebruikt kunnen worden in de aanpak, of als inspiratie dienen. Na elke factor of element zal er ruimte zijn voor reflectie, schrijf daar bevindingen op, ideeën of actiepunten. Aan het einde van het werkboek zullen al deze reflecties gebruikt worden als input voor het plan van aanpak.

### [Factor of element]



Korte beschrijving van [factor of element] met voorbeelden, definitie of dilemma.



Wat zijn de mogelijke effecten (positief & negatief)?



Tips om over na te denken, over in gesprek te gaan of mee te nemen in je plan van aanpak.



Wat neem je mee, wat zijn aandachtspunten, ideeën of actiepunten?

Ruimte om opmerkingen in te schrijven zodat belangrijke inzichten, ervaringen en perspectieven later terug gezocht kunnen worden.

Het werkboek dient als documentatie van het proces dat jullie gaan doorlopen. Omdat het werkboek gebruikt wordt door een 'kernteam' van ten minste 4 studenten is er een online versie van de informatie beschikbaar (QR-code vind je onderaan deze pagina). Deze kan bijvoorbeeld op een scherm of met een beamer geprojecteerd worden zodat iedereen toegang heeft tot de informatie en de opdrachten. De reflecties, bevindingen, actiepunten, perspectieven en andere belangrijke informatie kan in het werkboek genoteerd worden. Dit kan direct in het werkboek of door post-its erbij te plakken.

Gebruik tijdens het behandelen van de thema's ook post-its om dingen op te schrijven. Zo kun je in het gesprek alle belangrijke elementen noteren en bewaren, hoe handig!

QR code naar de digitale versie van het werkboek



## Opzet werkboek

Doel & doelgroep



Het doel van dit werkboek is om de complexiteit van het thema sociale veiligheid op een duidelijke manier aan te bieden. Waarbij dit werkboek een ondersteuning is om door te informatie, factoren en stappen heen te lopen en aan te moedigen tot het opstellen van een concreet plan van aanpak. Door de verschillende factoren uit te leggen met voorbeelden en tips kan met eigen kracht en motivatie gewerkt worden aan langdurige cultuurverandering voor een sociaal veilige vereniging.



De doelgroep bestaat uit studenten die lid zijn bij een studentenvereniging. De informatie in het werkboek is toegespitst op studenten gezelligheidsverenigingen, maar het kan zeker ook ingezet worden voor andere type studenten organisaties (studie-, sport of cultuur verenigingen).



Het werkboek is bedoeld om door te nemen met een groep studenten binnen de vereniging die aan de slag gaan met het opstellen van een plan van aanpak om de sociale veiligheid op de vereniging te vergroten. Het is belangrijk dat de diversiteit binnen deze groep zo groot mogelijk is, dat betekend verschillende genders, jaarlopen, posities & rollen binnen de vereniging en groeperingen. Zo zorg je er voor dat zoveel mogelijk perspectieven meegenomen worden in het doorlopen van het werkboek, en heb je ook op meerdere vlakken een ingang om het plan uiteindelijk te toetsen.

The format of the workbook is thoroughly explained to the students. This way they know where to look for specific information. A QR code is added to the workbook to provide the students with a digital version of the workbook they can display during co-creation sessions.

Next to this the goal and target group are briefly explained and the students are motivated to work together with a diverse group of members to ensure an effective plan of action.

## Het Proces

Welke stappen gaan we zetten?



Het doorwerken van het boek is een proces dat niet in 1 dag of week gebeurt. Het is cruciaal om de tijd te nemen om met elkaar in gesprek te gaan en tot de kern te komen. Ook is het belangrijk om de rest van de vereniging te betrekken door clubgenoten, jaargenoten of andere leden om input te vragen of misschien zelfs een discussieavond te organiseren.

Besprek goed met elkaar welke thema's prioriteit hebben en belangrijk zijn binnen jouw vereniging. Bijvoorbeeld door te kijken naar thema's die vanuit de reflectieopdracht bij de PraatPlaat naar voren zijn gekomen. Op pagina 12 en 13 vind je de 6 verschillende fases van dit proces.

### Tools

Wat heb je nodig?

- Het werkboek
- Een team van ten minste 4 studenten
- Pennen, stiften, papier & post-its
- Een afgesloten ruimte waar je rustig met elkaar in gesprek kunt gaan
- Optioneel: scherm/beamer
- Motivatie & tijd

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## Goed om in gedachte te houden

1. Neem voldoende tijd, maak een planning waarin je beschrijft welke thema's je wanneer gaat bespreken.
2. Niet alle thema's zullen relevant zijn voor jouw vereniging, prioriteer de thema's die interesse wekken omdat ze voor komen of omdat je er nog niet zoveel over weet.
3. Zorg dat de gesprekken verder rijken dan alleen het kernteam dat bezig is met het werkboek. Dit kan door met andere leden in gesprek te gaan (tijdens het eten, op de borrel of tijdens een koffietje). Ook zou de informatie verwerkt kunnen worden in een discussie avond of kan er input verzameld worden via een enquête.
4. Het doorwerken van dit werkboek houdt in dat er een basis gelegd wordt. Het ondersteund in de stappen, maar de uitvoering en invulling moet je zelf doen.

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After the introduction, format and goal are explained the students dive into the process. There are some tips for tools they should use during the sessions, and they get some things to keep in mind during the process. The project consists of 6 different phases the students will be guided through. The phases are explained on page 68.

## Planning

Besprek met elkaar hoe veel tijd je aan elke fase wil besteden en wanneer je dat gaat doen.

Het begrijpen, reflecteren en tot een plan komen is een proces dat niet in een middag gebeurt. Om er voor te zorgen dat de benodigde stappen echt gezet gaan worden is het handig om vooraf met elkaar af te spreken hoeveel tijd je er ongeveer aan wil besteden. Zo weet je wat je van elkaar kunt verwachten en waar je naartoe werkt. Vul hieronder in wanneer je samen komt en hoeveel tijd je wil besteden.

Fase	Doel	Hoeveel uren wil je besteden in deze fase?	Datum meeting 1	Datum meeting 2	Datum meeting 3	Datum meeting 4
<b>Fase 1</b>	Ontdekken & begrijpen	Uur				
<b>Fase 2</b>	Bespreken & reflecteren	Uur				
<b>Fase 3</b>	Concluderen & prioriteren	Uur				
<b>Fase 4</b>	Concluderen & prioriteren	Uur				
<b>Fase 5</b>	Definiëren & uitwerken	Uur				
<b>Fase 6</b>	Evalueren	Uur				

15

After the process is explained the team has to set their goals, write down some agreements and create a planning. This template is in the workbook for the students to fill in their meetings. Pushing them to talk about what they assume to do during this process, how much time each student is willing to invest and how they are going to divide the time they have over the full process.



# Phases in the workbook

## Phase 1

Discover & understand

- Look at all the information, what is social safety and the factors and elements from the 'praatplaat' are explained. The effects of each of these factors and elements are explained and the reflection is initiated by providing some tips and questions to think and talk about.
- This phase focusses on grasping what social safety is, what could influence this within the association and understanding what that means for the next steps in the process.

## Phase 2

Discuss & reflect

- Discuss subjects that are identified as relevant for the association, what do they mean? What examples or action points are there? How does it influence the perception of social safety within the association.
- The team is inspired to have open conversations about the subjects from phase 1, experiences and dilemmas. They are also nudged to include a broader perspective by gathering insights from other parts of the association.

## Phase 3

Conclude & prioritize

- After discussion the main subjects for the plan of action are written down and prioritized. The team needs to think about the current situation, dream scenario and what steps need to be taken to get there.

## Phase 4

Define & develop

- The chosen subjects are further defined by filling out a format that requires to think about examples, the current situation, points of attention, target group, groups that might need extra attention, goals, steps needed to reach the goal and possible partners that need to be involved from inside and outside the association.
- Next the three main goals are developed. The action plan will focus on reaching these three goals, making it realistic and not too big. These goals will support the cultural change needed in the areas the team defined as important.

## Phase 5

Assign roles & finalize

- For each of the goals the team will define concrete steps needed to reach the goal. Creating documents, organizing activities or gathering advice and insights (there is an inspiration page to support this process). They assign responsibility to a group or person who will be responsible for carrying out the defined steps. They have to think about who will be involved in the process and how it will be evaluated.
- The next step is to create a timeline mapping out the goals, steps and activities. There is a template for three years they can fill out. Because not all goals will be achievable in one year, but also to make sure the continuity is thought about in the process.

## Phase 6

Evaluate

- The final step in the process is to agree and plan out evaluation moments. They are motivated to reflect on the process of working together on the workbook and use these evaluations to map out future steps. Also thinking about reaching new members or specific groups within the association that need some more motivation to interact in the process.

## 7.4 Workbook on social safety within the student culture

### ***How could the the discussion board be used?***

The workbook is intended to be used by a team of student members of the association. Ideally the board initiates the process and constructs a team of students that will work through the workbook and the phases in it to create a plan for action. The workbook will be used as a guide, but also as a source of information. The team makes the workbook their own and lets the activities guide them through conversations, reflections and understanding. The workbook is intended to be used over a longer period of time, approximately 3 to 6 months, depending on the motivation and availability of the team to come together and work on the topic.

Another option is the use of the workbook for individual use. Where an individual wants to gain a deeper understanding of the theme and what the possibilities are to act. The final option is for the workbook to be used within a specific subgroup, a committee or 'club' for example. Where this subgroup works through the workbook together to create a plan for action within their own culture to create a socially safe environment and look for possible points of action or initiatives that could improve their behavior.

The workbook can be used at any time in the year, it is recommended to start early on in the academic year but later is also possible as long as there is motivation and time to finish the process. This way the process is finished before the summer and only needs to be implemented after that.

### ***What are limitations and tension that might arise with the use of the discussion board?***

- Progress within the group slows down because members disagree on what should be prioritized. The discussion on important elements could lead to disagreement.
- The team stagnates on one of the phases because it is unclear about what is expected there. Which creates a barrier to continue, that could lead to loss of progress.
- The workbook's content and activities fail to resonate with students, resulting in a lack of engagement and progress.
- The level of abstraction in the workbook is too high, leaving room for interpretation and uncertainty.
- The workbook's design does not appeal to the target audience, reducing its effectiveness and usability. Students might not feel like they are the target group for the workbook.
- Some students believe that the association is already functioning well, so they see no need for further action. There is a lack of critical reflection and evaluation.
- Students may begin the process enthusiastically but often lose motivation before completing it and finishing an action plan.
- While the process may result in a concrete action plan, a lack of follow-up steps within the association often means that the proposed steps are not implemented.
- The workbook does not effectively reach the intended target group, which limits its impact. This might be because the board or other stakeholder does not feel the topic is important, but also because the implementation strategy does not reach the target group effectively.
- Financial constraints within the association can prevent the implementation of activities that require funding. Workshops, experts or other activities might need to be funded through external parties.
- When the board initiates the process and passes it on to the team, events such as summer break, board transitions, and the start of a new academic year can reduce motivation, availability, and commitment, ultimately undermining the process.
- The intended and needed reflections in the process are not executed, making the results more superficial and less conclusive and concrete. What could lead to a less usable insights for the plan of action.
- In the process it is recommended to invite all layers of the association to participate, share experiences and perspectives. If the team decides not to do this the result might be a plan of action that is not integrated into the association. Leaving out groups or individuals in the process.

## 7.5 Recommendations for future steps and implementation – for associations

In the workbook there is also a section with recommendations for the students working through the book. Those recommendations highlight important steps that should be taken and can be used as inspiration for the plan of action. Those recommendations highlight elements that could have a negative impact on the perception of social safety within the association and are therefore recommended to discuss, take into account or implement into the plan of action.



### Make sure you have an incident protocol in place.

This ensures that, in the event of serious reports, it is immediately clear what needs to be done. Who will be involved in the process, what are the conditions, what steps and consultations will take place, and who is responsible for implementation and possible sanctions? With good preparation, there is less room for error if an unexpected report is received.



### Draw up a code of conduct, and keep it alive.

Not just on paper, but as something that the entire association is committed to. Involve all parts of the association in drawing up the code of conduct. And incorporate it into, for example, the initiation period, group-building activities, awareness-raising activities, and conversations.



### Establish a clear sanctions policy.

Show what the consequences are of inappropriate behavior and communicate this openly to all members. Draw up this policy as a guideline so that there is always room for context-dependent factors to be taken into account. And remember that a sanction is not a punishment, but a measure to make the association a safe place.



### Divide the responsibility.

Social safety is everyone's responsibility. The board, the group, and the individual all have a role to play. Pay attention to this subject so that everyone knows what role they can play.



### Use what is already there.

Build on existing structures within the association. Use club formation to discuss desired behavior with each other. Offer tools that can be used within groups themselves or let chairpersons discuss with each other what they are doing about the issue to inspire others.



### Involve external experts.

Seek help from organizations that specialize in this area. Drafting policy documents such as a sanctions policy and incident protocol can be extremely difficult, so use examples and ask for advice. You can also make use of existing campaigns, workshops, or toolkits.



### Share experiences with other associations.

You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Exchange knowledge and examples. Many associations are already working on this theme, so draw inspiration from existing materials and discuss any issues you encounter with each other. Socially unsafe behavior occurs in every environment.



### Set up a clear and independent reporting structure.

Make sure everyone knows where to go, that the threshold is low, and that the structure is evaluated regularly. Also pay attention to the reliability of the reporting channels and ensure transparency about the steps taken after a report is made.



### Take a critical look at "innocent" behavior.

Think about language use or traditions. What is normal for one person may be a boundary for another. Does what you see fit within the norms and values of the association or not?



### Keep the theme in the spotlight.

During the initiation period, club meetings, house activities, or conversations with older students, make it an ongoing conversation. Structural attention raises awareness.



### Consider the role of alcohol.

Discuss how alcohol affects boundaries, behavior, and safety, and how your association deals with this.



### Are you a role model? Behave accordingly.

Talk about it with others who also have such a role, so that you are all on the same page. Within the board, committees, or as evening supervisor, discuss with each other how you should behave and when to intervene. Also take into account the influence of positions of power. This will prevent forms of biased enforcement of norms.



### Think about continuity.

Can a committee or other body take on this topic on a permanent basis, regardless of changing boards?



### Make agreements about boundaries.

The association is a place to make mistakes and learn, but clear agreements help to monitor boundaries and prevent inappropriate behavior.



### Reflect and evaluate regularly.

What is going well, what could be improved? Social safety requires constant adjustment. This applies at the association level, but also at the group and even individual level.



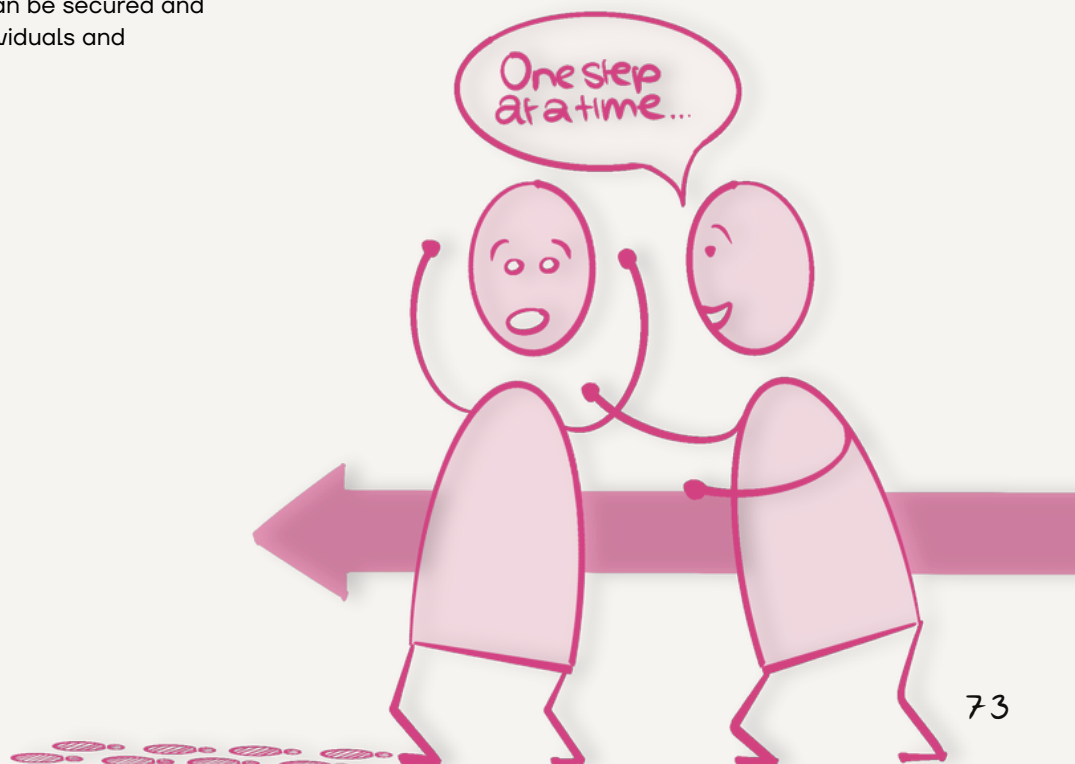
### Identify risks.

Which events, locations, customs, or traditions require extra attention? And what can you do to reduce risks? Based on experience and examples, take a critical look at risk elements that can be addressed.



### Change takes time.

Cultural change does not happen overnight, but every step counts. Ensure long-term planning and a vision from which progress can be secured and you are less dependent on individuals and motivation.



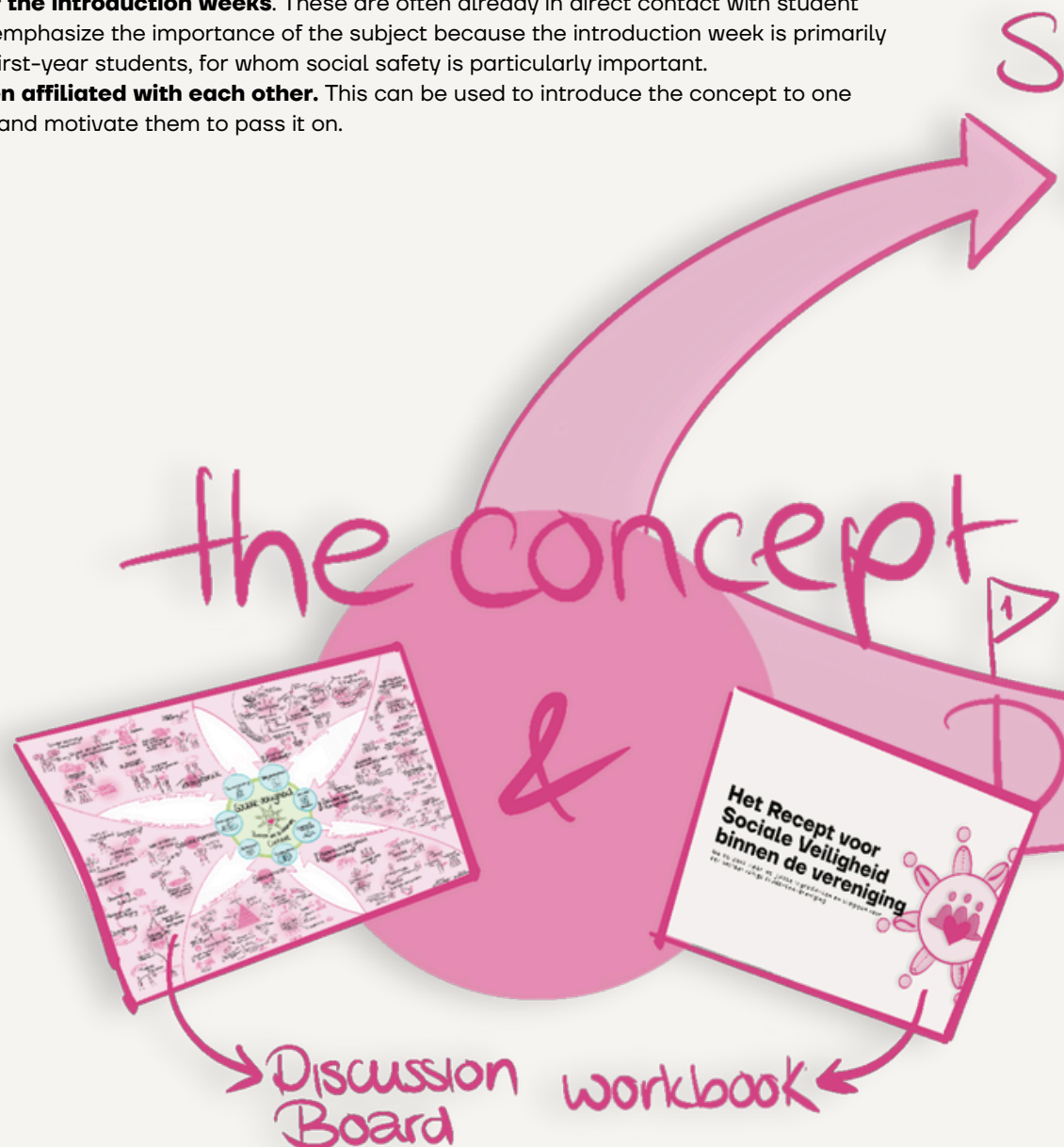
## 7.6 Implementation strategy

To ensure that this concept reaches the target group and achieves the desired effect, an implementation strategy was created. This strategy defines two approaches. The first focuses on engaging with the boards, as they are key stakeholders in the approach to social safety. They are responsible for creating a socially safe environment within the association, meaning they have the responsibility to initiate the process. Once the concept has been implemented there, it can be adopted further within the association by the board.

### *Directly towards student associations*

Implementation within student associations (via the boards) could look as follows:

1. **Distribution via educational institutions or umbrella organisations.** These bodies are often already in contact with the associations and can facilitate communication. Examples include the National Chamber of Associations (LKV) and local chambers of associations. Study associations can be approached via educational institutions. For instance, the educational institution could emphasize the importance of the theme at a central event and provide the associations with a workbook.
2. Contact the **boards of the introduction weeks.** These are often already in direct contact with student associations and can emphasize the importance of the subject because the introduction week is primarily aimed at prospective first-year students, for whom social safety is particularly important.
3. **Associations are often affiliated with each other.** This can be used to introduce the concept to one association, explain it, and motivate them to pass it on.



## Implementation through stakeholders

The second part of the strategy focuses on reaching out to stakeholders, particularly external organizations that support student associations or are experts on the theme of social safety and sexual transgressive behavior. These could be organizations such as the Sexual Violence Centre (CSG), the Municipal Health Service (GGD), municipalities and educational institutions. These stakeholders are important because they are either connected to the topic or the student associations through their expertise or existing partnerships. By implementing the concept in this way, we are hitting two birds with one stone. Firstly, these stakeholders will be informed about the factors that play a specific role in social safety within student culture. Since this is often still a context these expert organizations are not familiar with. Secondly, these stakeholders can act as a link. When a student association requests information, they can be directed to the discussion board and workbook, which they can use independently, but if needed, with direct support from the relevant stakeholder.

Other potential stakeholders have been defined in three categories:

1. **Support organizations and expert organizations** (GGD, Centrum Seksueel Geweld, Fairspace, Rutgers, etc.), so they have a better understanding of the factors and elements that play a role in student culture.
2. **Policy makers within educational institutions**, municipalities or at a national level who are responsible for student welfare, integrity or prevention policy.
3. **Umbrella organizations or national student unions** who may be able to distribute the material or use it to inspire their own initiatives.

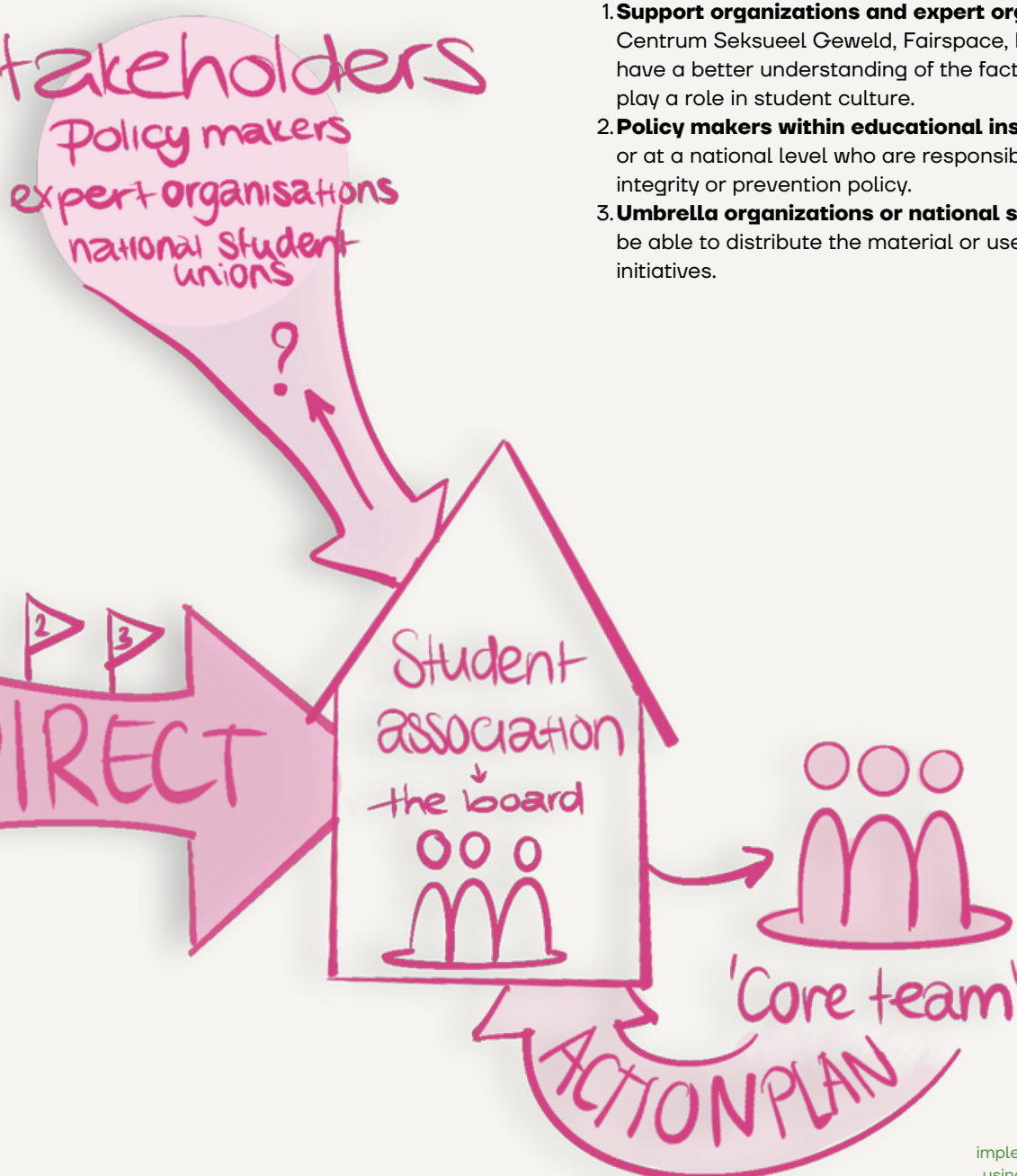


Figure 25: The concept can be implemented into student associations using two different possible strategies

## 7.5 Recommendations for implementation of the concept

This implementation strategy shows the possibilities of bringing and implementing the concept into the anticipated context of student culture. Because of the scope of this project, and due to limited time, the implementation will be part for future steps outside of this project. For those future steps there are some recommendations for both implementation and further development of the concept.

- value the concept together with the target group to finalize it and make sure the intended effects of the design are achieved.
- Look into how the concept could be adapted for different types of associations. Each might have its own needs and experiences that should be taken into account in the design.
- Start the implementation strategy within educational institutions. They often already have connections with student associations and can (and maybe should) take the lead in guiding them toward creating a socially safe environment.
- Explore other contexts where building and maintaining a socially safe environment is still a challenge and see how the concept could be adjusted to fit those situations.
- The format of the tool could have been different. In this project, a discussion board and workbook were chosen, but other formats weren't explored in depth due to time limitations. They might work better in some cases and could be worth looking into further.
- Consider whether there's a need to translate the concept so it can also be used by international student associations, keeping cultural differences in mind.



# Phase 8

## Concept evaluation



In this chapter I evaluate the concept, consisting of the discussion board and workbook, based on the criteria. The concept is also evaluated by three relevant stakeholders leaving a set of recommendations to further develop the concept.

## 8.1 Evaluation of the concept based on the guidelines

Based on this design goal and aimed effects of the design, a number of requirements have been drawn up to help achieve the goal. These are formulated as guidelines that can be used to evaluate the final concept:

1

**The design must help the board, or other students within the association, to understand the aspects that influence social safety.**

*The concept provides multiple layers of information and reflection tools to create a deep and rich understanding.*

2

**The design must support students in assessing which aspects play a role within the association.**

*The concept provides the information and guides the students through multiple reflection steps. Letting them decide what subjects are relevant for their context and what not. The students must narrow the scope back down to 3 main goals, making them prioritize themes to focus on in their plan of action.*

3

**The design must support students in setting priorities within the approach that is drawn up to create the needed foundation to long term change**

*Phases 3, 4 and 5 in the workbook support the students in analyzing, defining and prioritizing the subjects they identify as important for the social safety within their association.*

4

**The design must encourage the creation of an approach that can be used within the association as a long-term plan, laying the necessary foundations for a socially safe environment.**

*Although the design does not provide a full structure or example of an approach to a long-term action plan. The workbook has some reflection tools that provide outcomes that, when combined, can be used to create an action plan. The concept requires the students to use their own motivation and creativity to finalize and produce a concrete plan.*

5

**The design must stimulate and inspire people to engage with the theme and start acting. Role models, examples or other forms of support can be used for this purpose.**

*The praatplaat is specifically designed to inform and stimulate conversations amongst students. This is something that could be used on its own to help others engage with the theme. The workbook provides the next step, when students are inspired to start they can by working through the phases in the workbook.*

6

**The design must encourage cooperation within the association. All levels of the association must be involved in creating an approach and all perspectives must be considered.**

*The workbook nudges the board (or other students who initiate the process) to create a diverse team of students from different layers, roles and groups in the association. The workbook also encourages cooperation with other partners and stakeholders for gaining insights, perspectives or advice.*

7

**The design must create a sense of ownership by making it accessible and easy to understand for everyone.**

*Ownership is created by making the students who go through the process the 'kern team' they oversee the steps taken and take the lead in creating change from within the association. The praatplaat makes the concept of social safety accessible for all students. Showing them elements where everyone can take responsibility in creating a socially safe environment.*

8

**The design must consist of at least a visual representation of the insights and a tool with which an action plan can be drawn up independently.**

*The workbook and praatplaat combined are the tool the students can use independently from anyone else.*

Based on this evaluation the concept fits the guidelines that were set up. All guidelines are met, some better than others but overall the concept fits the design goal and the guidelines. For improvements more elements of structure, examples or concrete steps could be provided. The concept should be tested with a pilot to gather more insights on how the concept fits the target group and their needs, and if the concept is effective in supporting students in creating a plan for action.



## 8.2 Stakeholder feedback

### Feedback Student

#### Interview participant

The discussion board and workbook were reviewed with one of the students who participated in the interviews. The main points of the conversation were to ensure that the concept would be accessible and usable for a diverse group of students. Since students come from different backgrounds in terms of upbringing, education, and interests, the concept needs to rely on visual elements and clear, straightforward language. This approach helps make the information more understandable and accessible. The workbook, in particular, should offer concrete steps and clear guidance to be effective and practically usable for the intended audience.

#### Co-writer studentpact

Because the concept aims to bridge existing initiatives, feedback was also gathered from a co-writer of the Studentpact. During this session, three key areas for reflection and improvement were identified. First, the need to promote personal reflection was discussed, as it plays a crucial role in deepening understanding and engagement with the topic. Attention should be given not only to personal responsibility but also to collective accountability within associations. Second, the role of color in the design was addressed, as the choice of colors can add meaningful layers to the visual communication. This input was taken into account during development. Lastly, the issue of implementation was raised. The concept alone is not sufficient; it requires a well-thought-out implementation strategy to be truly effective. This highlights the need for careful planning to ensure the concept has real-world impact.

### Feedback Expert stakeholder

#### Centrum Seksueel Geweld

To improve the accessibility and effectiveness of the discussion board, feedback was gathered from an expert stakeholder at Centrum Seksueel Geweld. The response was highly positive, with valuable input for further refinement. The stakeholder recognized the care and attention

given to both content and design. They emphasized that the discussion board addresses important themes and highlights how social safety is a shared responsibility shaped by culture, language, norms, and behavior. Areas for improvement included enhancing clarity, readability, and recognizability. Suggestions were made to simplify the language, add practical tools, and stimulate active engagement with the theme. Although the feedback focused primarily on the discussion board, it also offered useful points for aligning the workbook more closely with it.

### Implementation of the feedback in the concept development

The feedback from stakeholders and the evaluation of the guidelines provided valuable insights for a final iteration of the concept, as well as directions for future development. These insights were used to refine both the discussion board and the workbook through multiple iterations. Ideally, user testing and involvement of the target group in the final phase would have strengthened the process, but time constraints made this unfeasible. Nevertheless, the feedback, evaluation, and thought experiments contributed to meaningful improvements and laid the groundwork for future steps.

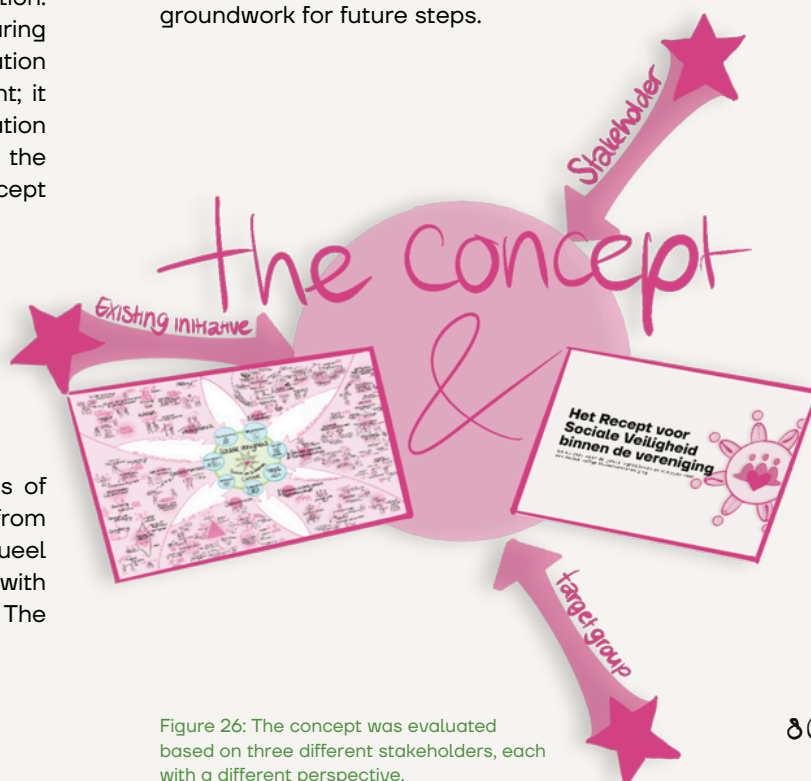
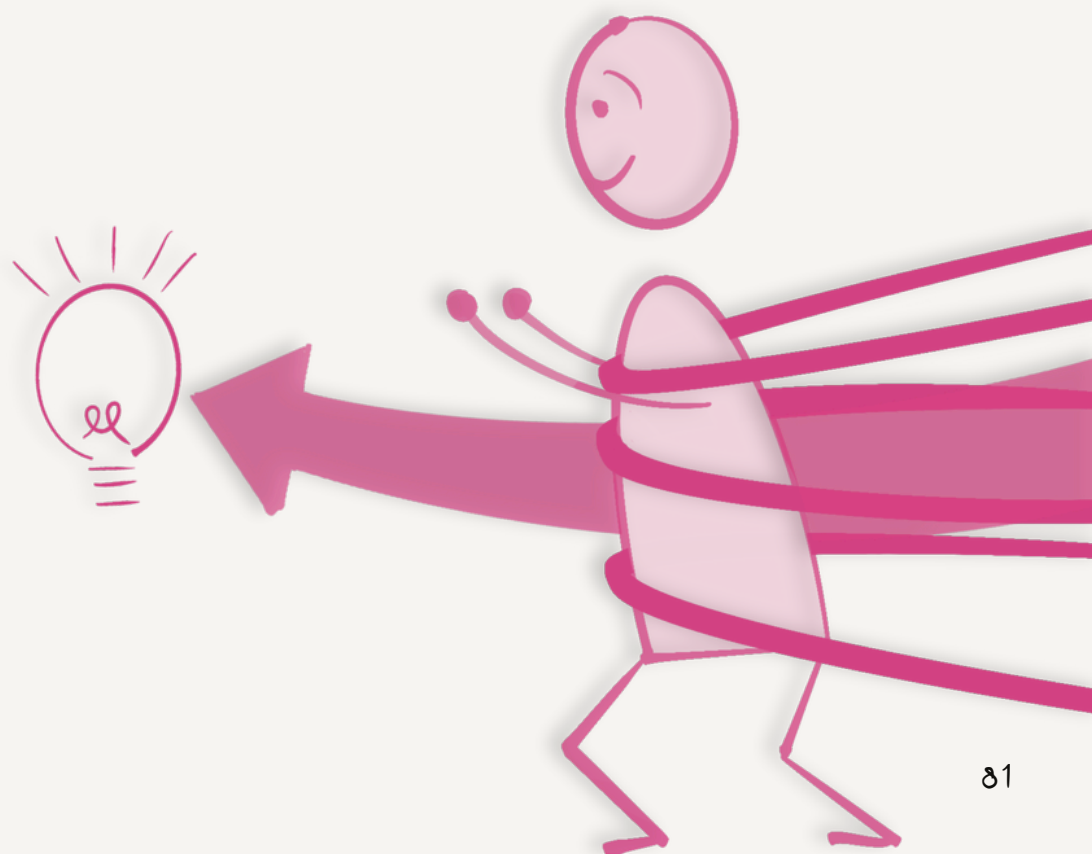


Figure 26: The concept was evaluated based on three different stakeholders, each with a different perspective.

## 8.3 Limitations of the project and recommendations for future steps

The primary focus of this project was to investigate the core problem and develop the concept, consisting of the discussion board and workbook. While the scope of this project was limited to exploration and initial development, there are several opportunities for further elaboration, refinement, and promotion beyond its conclusion. Although these steps fall outside the current project boundaries, I outline several possible follow-up actions below:

- Further development of the workbook, based on received feedback, pilot testing, user involvement, and additional research.
- Creating a communication strategy aimed at promoting and offering the concept more broadly.
- Translating the workbook into English or developing tailored materials for different contexts, such as study, sports, or cultural associations, to increase relevance and reach.
- Connecting the concept with relevant stakeholders to ensure it becomes anchored within a broader network.
- Using the outcomes and recommendations from this project as a foundation for further research into the topic, focusing on other dimensions or influencing factors to gain deeper insights.



# Phase 9

## Concluding the project



In this chapter I conclude the project by evaluating the process, provide needed acknowledgements and recommendations based on the process of this project and reflect on my personal journey.

## 9.1 Conclusion

This project explored what social safety means within the context of student culture and how students themselves can engage with this theme. Ownership and the ability to act independently were central to this approach. Over the past few years, the topic has become increasingly visible within the student culture. Research shows that sexual transgressive behavior among students occurs much more often than previously thought and its impact is often beyond what we can see or imagine. Student associations are in the optimal position to play a key role addressing the topic. They can create a safe environment where everyone knows what desired and undesired behavior is, where addressing each other is normal, and reports are taken seriously.

### Key themes

To grasp the complexity of the theme, I focused on two underlying factors in this project: social norms and use of language. These are themes that are deeply intertwined with student culture and social safety but also themes that students themselves can influence. To gain a deeper understanding of how these factors work in practice, I gathered insights into the perceptions and experiences of students within the context of social safety through in-depth interviews. I looked not only at the individual but also at how that individual relates to the association and the broader culture around it.

### Structural change

During the analysis of the interviews, it became increasingly clear to me that structural change does not begin with rules or policies, but with understanding, reflection, and ownership. Therefore, this project did not focus on 'solving' the problem by creating a ready-to-use solution, but on empowering those students who want to and actually can make a difference.

### Redefining the design goal

From the research many valuable insights emerged, which ultimately led to five concrete design opportunities. Those insights were visualized and translated into something that is accessible for the aimed target group. Since they provide a clear picture of which factors and elements enable or create a barrier to the creation of a socially safe environment, it can help them unravel the complexity of this topic on their

own. In doing so, the concept offers a tool for students to act in their own way and at their own pace.

The core of this project is therefore Empowerment through understanding and reflection: making students aware of the underlying dynamics while simultaneously providing them with the tools to respond in their own way. Reflection is not only a means towards insight, but also a tool for action, conversation and collaboration.

### Concept development

The final phase of the project revolved around translating all insights into a workable concept. In several steps, the concept 'The recipe for a socially safe student association' was developed, consisting of a discussion board ('Praatplaat') and a workbook. A concept that allows for personal interpretation but also provides direction. Where students can independently work on creating a plan for action that fits their own context and culture.

### Effectiveness depends

What this project also made highlighted is how important continuity is. Due to the annual board changes within associations, much knowledge, motivation and progress is lost. This negatively influences the steps towards structural change. Therefore, this has been included in the concept and is reflected in the collaboration and the steps that need to be taken. The effectiveness of the concept depends on many factors and has not been further tested in this project. This is certainly something that needs to be explored further in future steps, going through more iterations of concept improvement.

### Conversations are key

What I have learned most is that change begins with conversation. Not swallowing something you want to say because it is uncomfortable or because the fear of a negative reaction dominates, but engaging in a conversation with the other, even if it is tense or confrontational. During this project I experienced how tense it can be to give a voice to topics that often remain silent or misunderstood. That brings uncertainty, but also strength, a combination that pulls you out of your comfort zone and leads to even more motivation. Social safety is not just a condition, it is

## 9.1 Conclusion

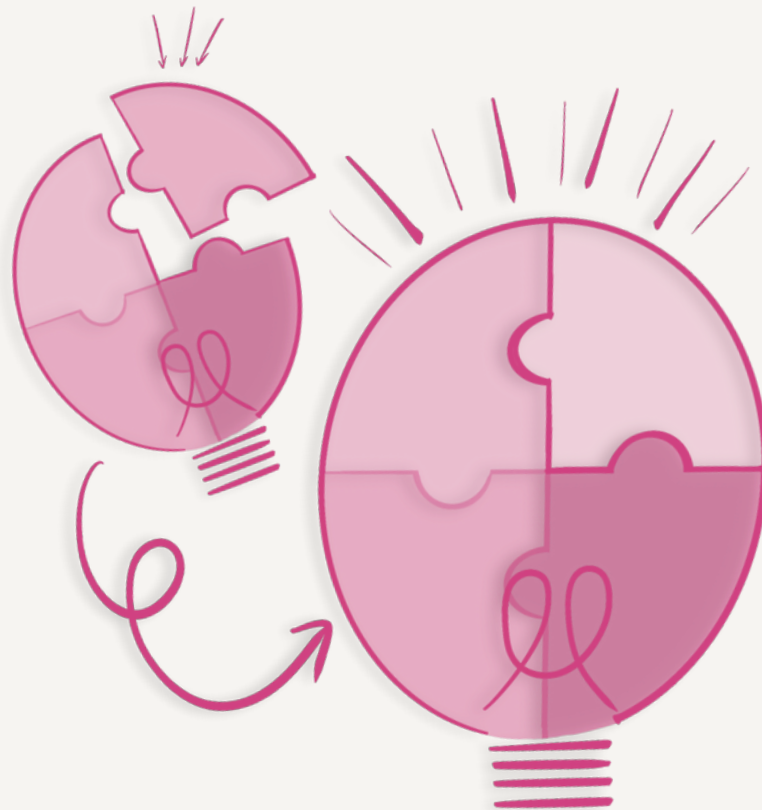
the foundation upon which trust, connection and development can grow.

### Spark change from within

I hope this project helps students, especially boards of student associations, to start conversations, take responsibility, and collaboratively build a culture in which everyone feels free and safe. Not perfect, not all at once, but step by step. Because change has no endpoint, it is a process of understanding, reflecting and continually making choices that you believe are the right ones.

The insights and results that this project has delivered, enable positive change from within. The complexity of the subject has been made accessible, allowing students to take responsibility on their own, without being directly dependent on external parties.

I look back on this project with pride and gratitude. I hope to pass on the inspiration that has driven me to others who face the same challenges. It was not always easy, and even tough from time to time, but it has proven to be of great value. And that is precisely what it is all about: giving each other the space to be yourself, to make your feelings the subject of conversation, and to reshape together what we consider normal. Because that, I think, is the true strength of cultural change.



## 9.2 Acknowledgements and recommendations for future projects

During the course of this project a lot of different limitations, recommendations and acknowledgements have surfaced. But to conclude this project, some recommendations for future research are given, accompanied by acknowledgements.

### Complexity of the subject

Due to the complexity of the subject, the path that was taken may not have been the best one. While I stand behind the result and outcome of this project, some of the elements remained on the surface of the subject and did not get to the bottom of everything. But with the complexity that is now more accessible and understandable, this project could be used as a starting point for future projects to build on and dive deeper into specific factors and elements that were identified. This deeper dive could provide more concrete and ready to use interventions, lowering the bar to act even further.

### Psychological Safety

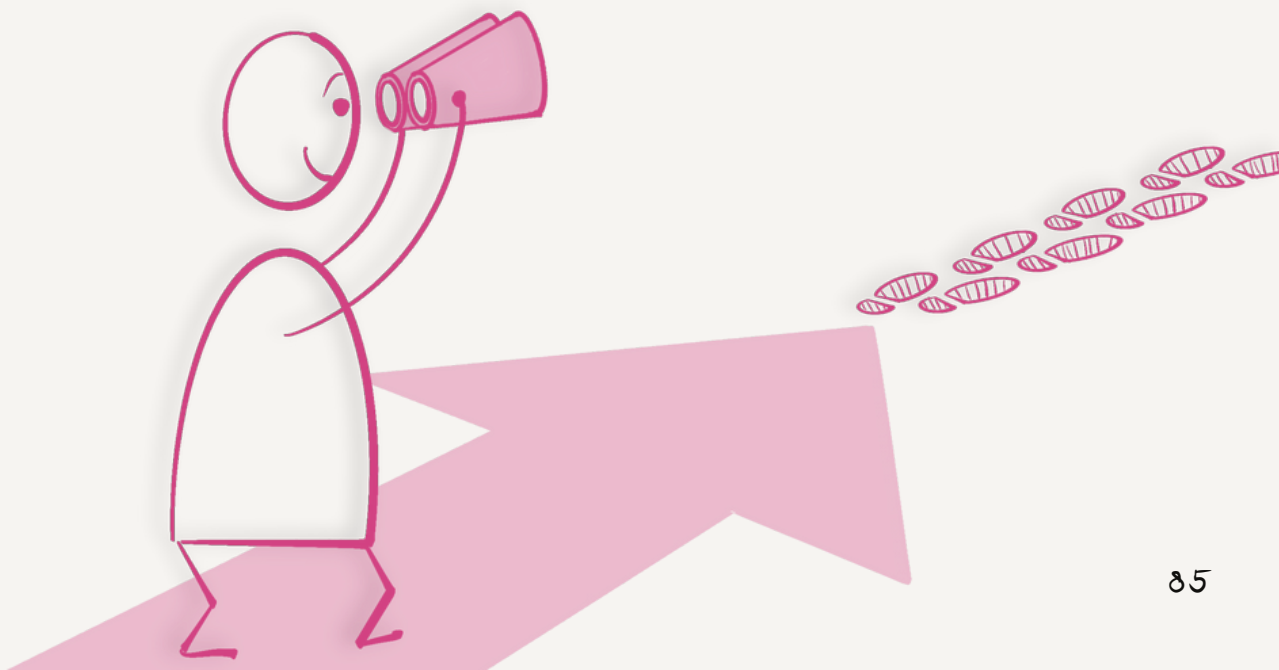
This project did only focus on the concept of social safety. Because of time constraints the concept of psychological safety was not considered. But this might be a relevant topic to involve in future project to see if there might be other perspectives and angles to creating a safe environment. Since psychological safety goes deeper into the feeling and individual has towards the environment, it might therefore be interesting to explore the interconnected elements. Where social safety looks at more at the tangible elements in the environment.

### Involve the target group

This project was based on the experiences and perspectives from participants that participated in the interview. The target group was, due to time constraints, not involved further in the process. But since this is such a sensitive and complex topic, it would be interesting to apply a more cooperative approach. Using co-creation methods could bring new, useful insights and perspectives. Making the students directly the owner of the project and results.

### Use of AI in this project

With AI becoming a bigger part of our everyday lives, it seemed important to also discuss the use of AI in this project. The topic always needs to be placed in context and needs critical thinking, because of the sensitivity and complexity, the use of AI was therefore restricted to translation and rewriting of text. Translation was done using Deepl.com and ChatGPT was used to rewrite parts of this report, gain new perspectives and summarize findings, articles and other documents. Sometimes ChatGPT was used as a sparring partner to help find new paths to take or provide feedback on ideas. ChatGPT was also used as an inspiration for tips and tools used in the workbook.



## 9.3 Personal reflection

During my studies I did a wide range of projects that equipped me with a lot of different skills. Where one project interested me more than the other it showed me what I really like to do. Besides my studies I have been active within different project regarding student culture. Since the start of my board year the topic of sexual transgressive behavior has been something important to me on a personal level. I have seen first-hand what the effects are and how we, students, struggle with handling all forms of unwanted behavior. When I started looking for a graduation project I could only think of doing something with this experience and topic that I am intrinsically motivated for. During my studies, I worked on a wide range of projects that helped me develop a diverse set of skills. Some projects sparked my interest more than others, but each one taught me something valuable and helped me discover what I truly enjoy doing.

### Topic close to my heart

During my time as a student, the topic of sexually transgressive behavior has been especially important to me on a personal level. I've witnessed firsthand the impact it can have and how difficult it is for students to navigate through all forms of unwanted behavior. So, when it was time to start thinking about my graduation project, I couldn't imagine working on anything else. This

topic, so close to my heart, felt like the right direction. Something I was intrinsically motivated to invest my time and efforts into and use design to create something valuable. Although the subject initially felt too complex to tackle, that only made it more important for me to continue.

### The challenge of existing knowledge

My existing knowledge of the topic turned out to be both a barrier and an enabler throughout the process. I had to push myself to stay curious, to move beyond what I already knew. Getting out of my comfort zone is something I admire and aim for, but often struggle with. This project challenged me in just that way. It pulled me out of familiar contexts and routines and gave me new experiences, valuable insights, and unexpected perspectives. I learned to manage my biases, step outside my personal bubble, and work through uncertainty and insecurity.

### Overcoming every challenge

The first phase of the project was especially complex. I often felt lost, unsure of the next steps or even the overall goal of what I was doing. After taking a short break for personal time, I returned with a clearer, more concrete plan. This allowed me to move forward and build towards concrete results. I regained my spark for the project, and time started to fly. Despite all obstacles, I look back on the experience with a big smile. I ended up learning more than I expected when I started.

### Personal learning goals

Halfway through, I set a number of personal learning goals to help guide my work and make sure this project contributed to my growth. (appendix G) Looking back at those goals now,

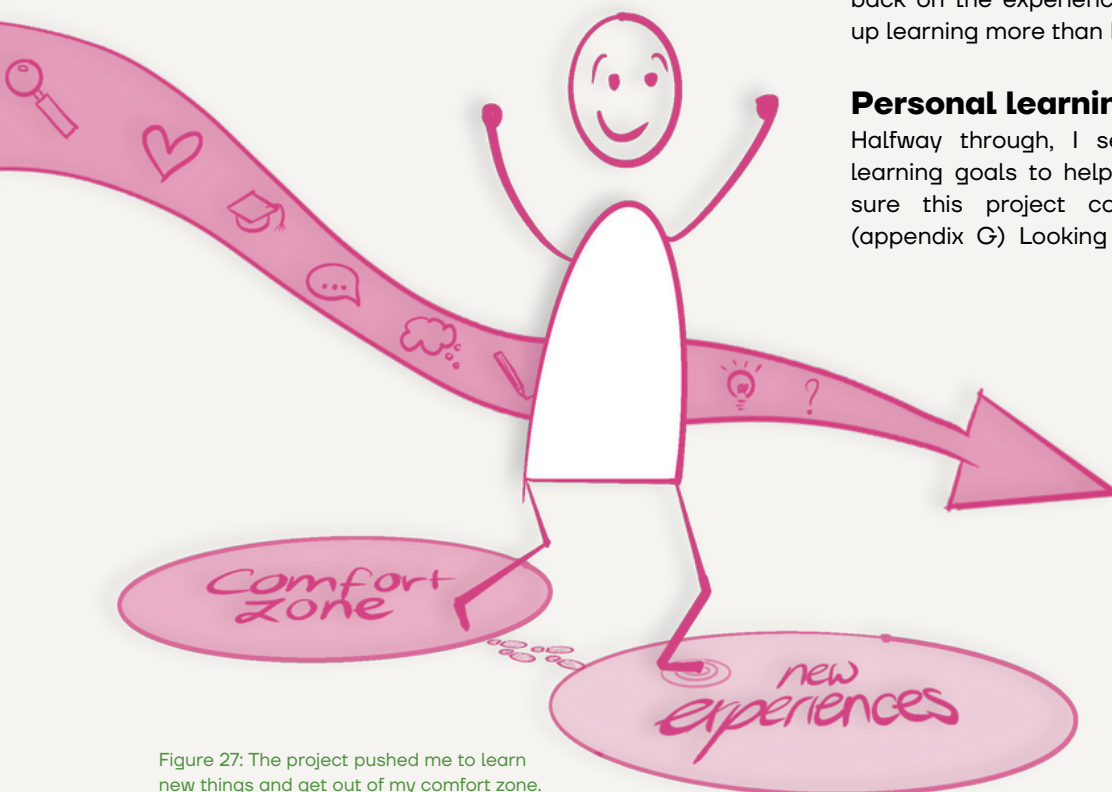


Figure 27: The project pushed me to learn new things and get out of my comfort zone.

it's clear how far I've come. I deepened my understanding of sexually transgressive behavior and its complexity within student culture. I discovered that design can be a powerful tool to create positive change, even within sensitive and difficult social issues. I stepped outside my comfort zone, something I often hope to do but rarely end up doing. That led to new insights and the development of new skills. Throughout, my goal of creating value remained central, and I truly believe the outcome reflects that intention. I connected with students and experts whose perspectives inspired me, and hopefully I inspired them in return. Most importantly, I created something I'm genuinely proud of. This journey was personal, often challenging, and incredibly inspiring. It has helped me understand more clearly who I am, what I stand for, and how I want to apply design in future projects.

### **Working with a sensitive topic**

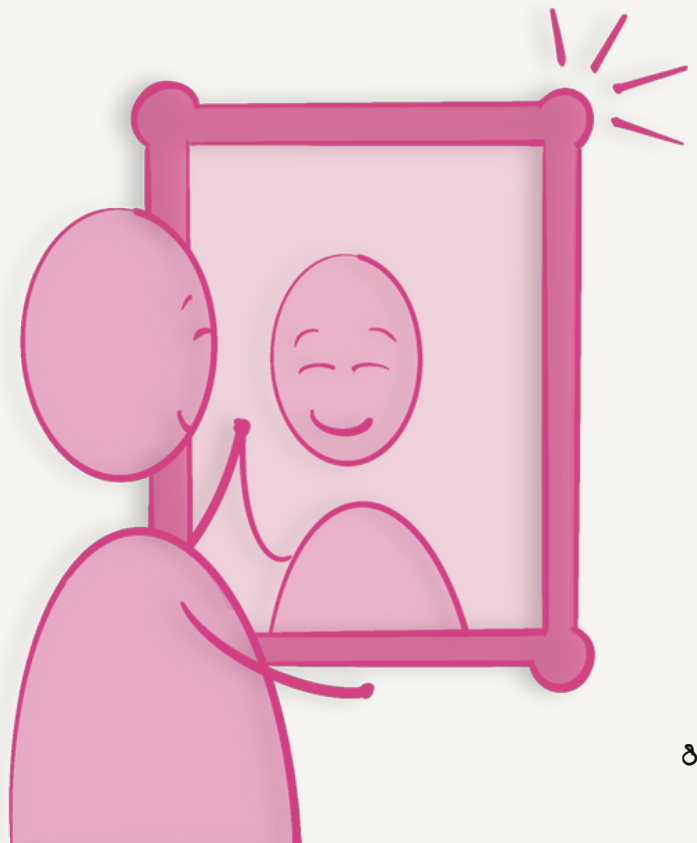
During the process, I also had to complete a human research ethics application. This taught me how important it is to take every step carefully when working with sensitive topics. There was also a moment when the question came up whether this subject was suitable for a master's thesis, since this might be too complex. That only fueled my motivation, to show the impact a student can make and prove just how important this topic is.

### **Unexpected new skill**

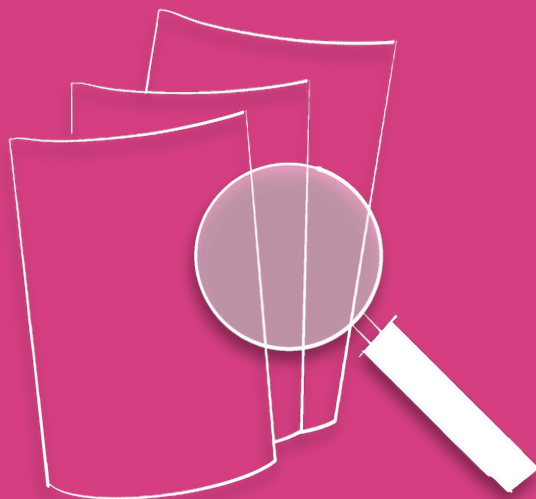
One unexpected skill I developed during the project was organizational drawing (zakelijk tekenen). When I entered the concept creation phase, I realized that a discussion board would be the best fit for my project. This meant I had to learn how to use this visual method to communicate my insights. It took time to master and I was skeptical at first. But in the end, I really enjoyed the process. Looking back at my designs, I can clearly see my learning curve and growth reflected in them.

### **Icing on the cake**

In the final phase of the project, I was given the opportunity to share my insights and perspectives during a roundtable conversation, an event attended by His Majesty the King. That experience showed me that every action, conversation and initiative is a step towards creating a more socially safe environment. It gave me even more energy, motivation and inspiration to continue this work beyond the project, applying everything I've learned along the way. Reflecting on this, I can say that this was absolutely the icing on the cake for everything I have been working on within this project.



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# Appendices

A: Project brief

B: Cultura

C: Interview materials

D: Informed consent template

E: Praatplaat

F: Workbook design

G: Personal learning goals

# **Appendix A: project brief**



# IDE Master Graduation Project

## Project team, procedural checks and Personal Project Brief

In this document the agreements made between student and supervisory team about the student's IDE Master Graduation Project are set out. This document may also include involvement of an external client, however does not cover any legal matters student and client (might) agree upon. Next to that, this document facilitates the required procedural checks:

- Student defines the team, what the student is going to do/deliver and how that will come about
- Chair of the supervisory team signs, to formally approve the project's setup / Project brief
- SSC E&SA (Shared Service Centre, Education & Student Affairs) report on the student's registration and study progress
- IDE's Board of Examiners confirms the proposed supervisory team on their eligibility, and whether the student is allowed to start the Graduation Project

### STUDENT DATA & MASTER PROGRAMME

Complete all fields and indicate which master(s) you are in

Family name	Mulders
Initials	MJM
Given name	Meike
Student number	

IDE master(s)	IPD <input type="checkbox"/>	Dfi <input type="checkbox"/>	SPD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2nd non-IDE master			
Individual programme (date of approval)			
Medisign	<input type="checkbox"/>		
HPM	<input type="checkbox"/>		

### SUPERVISORY TEAM

Fill in the required information of supervisory team members. If applicable, company mentor is added as 2nd mentor

Chair	Rebeca Price	dept./section	Design, Organisation and Strategy
mentor	Annemiek van Boeijen	dept./section	Human-Centered Design
2nd mentor			
client:			
city:		country:	
optional comments			

- ! Ensure a heterogeneous team. In case you wish to include team members from the same section, explain why.
- ! Chair should request the IDE Board of Examiners for approval when a non-IDE mentor is proposed. Include CV and motivation letter.
- ! 2nd mentor only applies when a client is involved.

**APPROVAL OF CHAIR on PROJECT PROPOSAL / PROJECT BRIEF** -> to be filled in by the Chair of the supervisory team

Sign for approval (Chair)

**APPROVED**  
**By raprice at 2:35 pm, Dec 09, 2024**

Name Dr RA Price

Date 09-12-2024

Signature

### CHECK ON STUDY PROGRESS

To be filled in by **SSC E&SA** (Shared Service Centre, Education & Student Affairs), after approval of the project brief by the chair. The study progress will be checked for a 2nd time just before the green light meeting.

Master electives no. of EC accumulated in total \_\_\_\_\_ EC

Of which, taking conditional requirements into account, can be part of the exam programme \_\_\_\_\_ EC

X	YES	all 1st year master courses passed
	NO	missing 1st year courses

Comments:

Sign for approval (SSC E&SA)

Name L.Boot Date 11-12-2024 Signature LB

### APPROVAL OF BOARD OF EXAMINERS IDE on SUPERVISORY TEAM -> to be checked and filled in by IDE's Board of Examiners

Does the composition of the Supervisory Team comply with regulations?

YES	V	Supervisory Team approved
NO		Supervisory Team not approved


Comments:

Based on study progress, students is ...

V	ALLOWED to start the graduation project
	NOT allowed to start the graduation project

Comments:

Sign for approval (BoEx)

Name Monique von Morgen Date 11/12/2024 Signature 

## Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

Name student Meike Mulders

Student number \_\_\_\_\_

### PROJECT TITLE, INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM DEFINITION and ASSIGNMENT

Complete all fields, keep information clear, specific and concise

Project title Empowering Student Associations In The Transition Towards a More Social Safe Environment

*Please state the title of your graduation project (above). Keep the title compact and simple. Do not use abbreviations. The remainder of this document allows you to define and clarify your graduation project.*

#### Introduction

*Describe the context of your project here; What is the domain in which your project takes place? Who are the main stakeholders and what interests are at stake? Describe the opportunities (and limitations) in this domain to better serve the stakeholder interests. (max 250 words)*

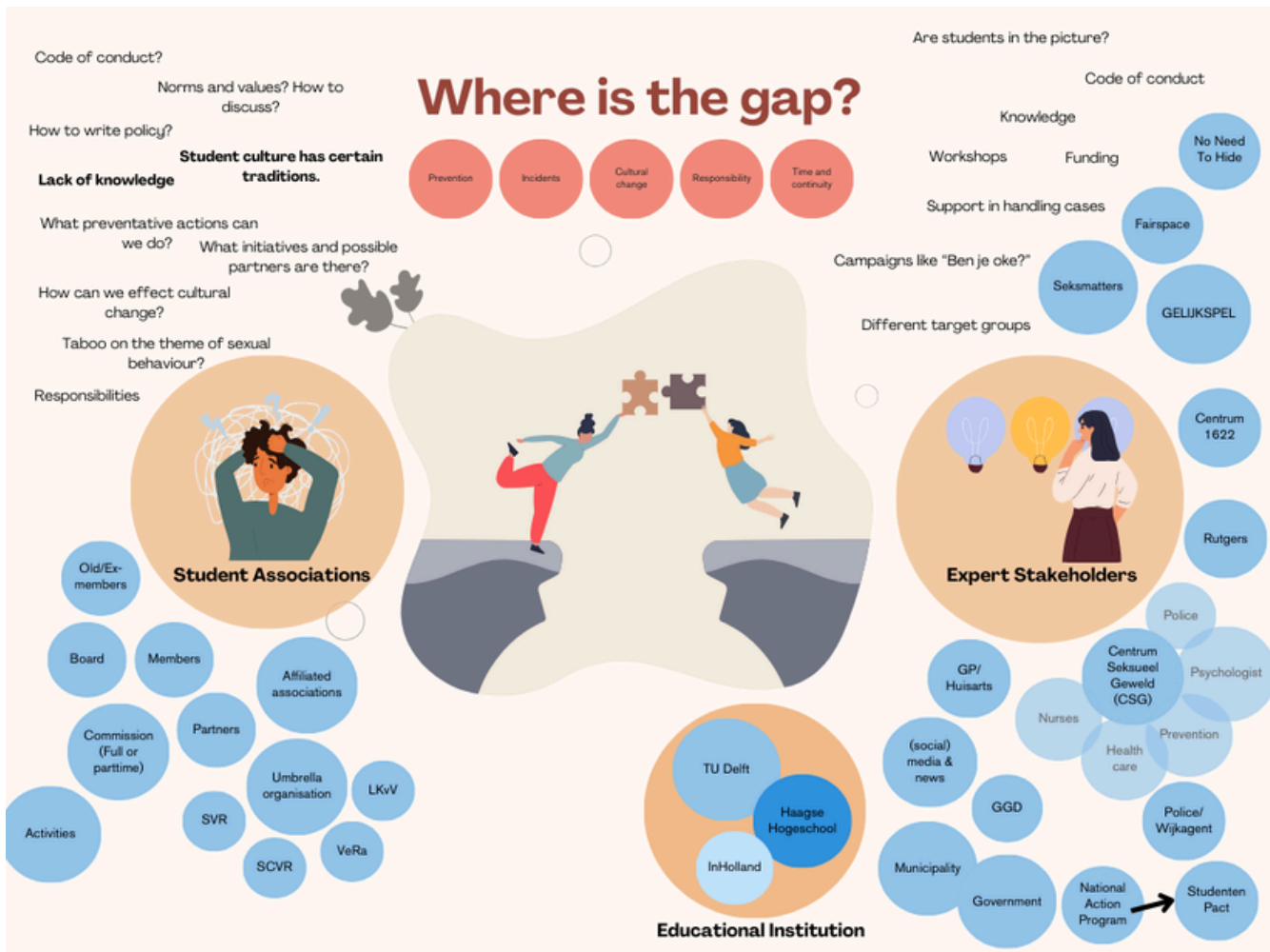
The project focuses on social safety within student culture, with an initial focus on dealing with sexually transgressive behavior. Student organizations in the Netherlands form their own cultures, each with its own traditions, norms and hierarchical structures. While issues such as wellbeing, social safety and substance (ab)use are increasingly being discussed, initiating cultural change remains a significant challenge.

Having worked with students and board members of various associations, I've seen the urgent need for change at all levels of social behavior. Despite various local and national initiatives, such as the 'ben je oke?' Campaign, many students struggle to translate awareness into action. They often lack the knowledge, tools, time or motivation to promote and create safer environments and drive the cultural change needed within their organizations.

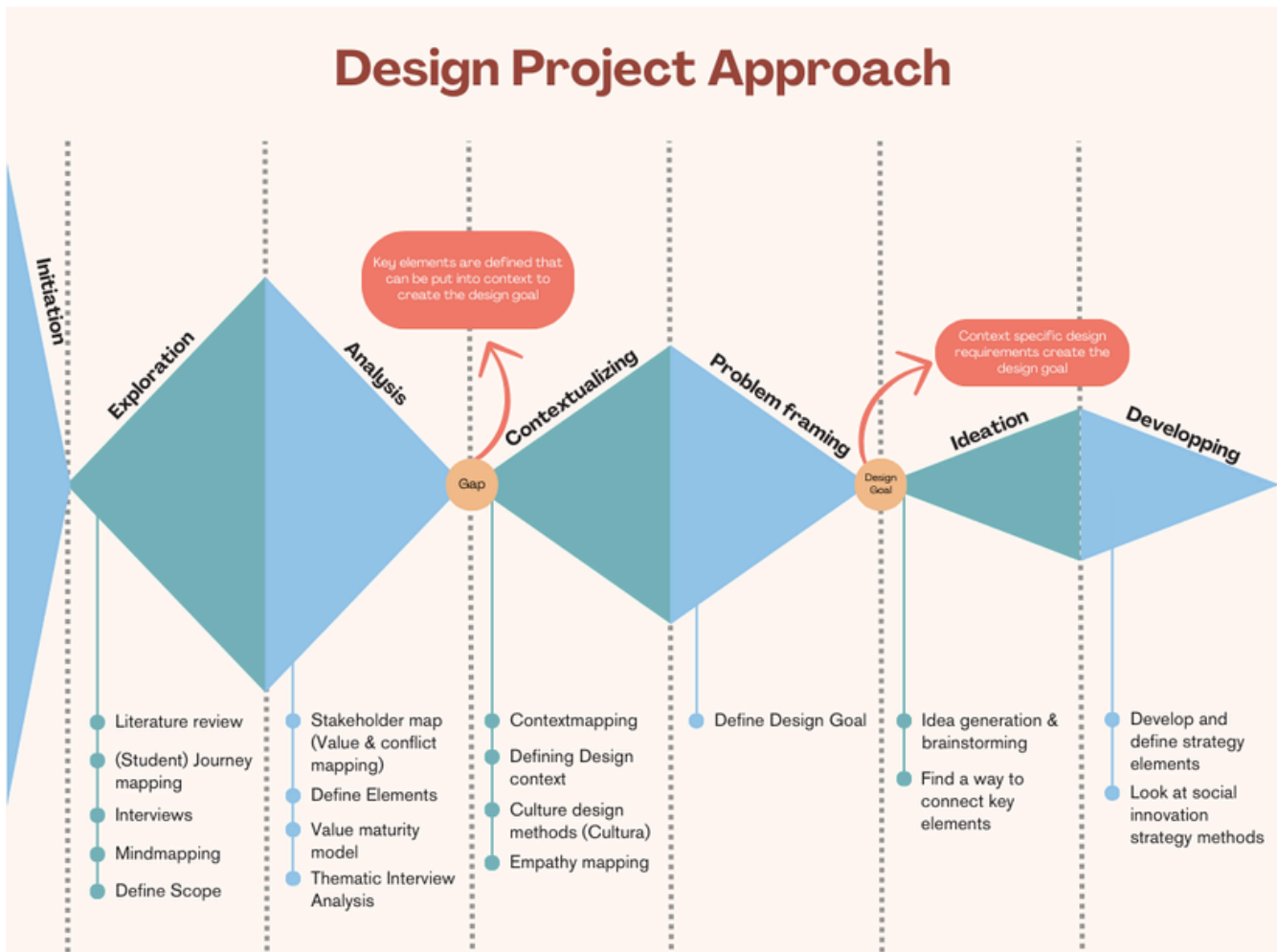
Finding the solution for the right problem is crucial in this theme. So in collaboration with key stakeholders, including national initiatives, knowledge centres and institutions such as Centrum Seksueel Geweld (CSG) but also Rutgers, GGD, Sexmatters, GELIJKSPEL, Studentenpact student associations try to take the step towards cultural and behavioral change. However, I see a gap when it comes to initiating change on the long term.

This project aims to explore and address the gaps in challenges and needs within student associations and expert organizations. By focusing on the complexities of student culture, it seeks to develop a tailored approach to support the associations in improving social safety, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all solution is not feasible.

→ space available for images / figures on next page



Where is the gap? - who were involved what are elements that could be connected.



Design Project Approach - Double Diamond showing process and methods used in the project

## Personal Project Brief – IDE Master Graduation Project

### Problem Definition

*What problem do you want to solve in the context described in the introduction, and within the available time frame of 100 working days? (= Master Graduation Project of 30 EC). What opportunities do you see to create added value for the described stakeholders? Substantiate your choice.  
(max 200 words)*

The problem in this project lies in the complexity of the topic. There are so many elements that contribute to parts of the problem that it is difficult to define a clear problem. Different facets of the problem can be considered, such as time, because all student boards change once a year, making it difficult to work on long term projects of social change. But also personal motivation and interests, awareness of the issue and its importance, responsibility, knowing what is expected and what can be expected from these boards play a role. Even more importantly, the difficulty of initiating behavioural and cultural change. Are there specific activities and traditions that play a role? How do these associations work, do they need support, are they transparent enough? There are probably more underlying interrelated elements that have an influence on why it is so difficult for student associations to work on this issue.

Looking at this, I can conclude that the problem at the time being is that I don't know what the critical elements are in this complex and multifaceted problem of long term changes in social safety within student associations. Considering that often a large group of these students are in a vulnerable position, it is even more important for these associations to know how to take their responsibility in creating a socially safe environment.

### Assignment

*This is the most important part of the project brief because it will give a clear direction of what you are heading for. Formulate an assignment to yourself regarding what you expect to deliver as result at the end of your project. (1 sentence) As you graduate as an industrial design engineer, your assignment will start with a verb (Design/Investigate/Validate/Create), and you may use the green text format:*

Design a strategy to empower and support student associations in creating a more socially safe environment. Enhancing the understanding, prevention and handling of sexually transgressive behavior, initiating long term behavioral and cultural change within student associations in the context of student culture.

*Then explain your project approach to carrying out your graduation project and what research and design methods you plan to use to generate your design solution (max 150 words)*

In the first phase of the project I will focus on exploration, identifying the full scope of the problem and all its complexity while taking the student culture as the context. I will conduct a literature review to define key concepts and terminology. For the project I will work with 5 different associations, using participatory design methods to find key elements to the problem. Parallel to this I will work with 2 main stakeholders and use interviews to find elements connected to the other side of the problem. Making sure the associations and experts tell me what the problem is during the project. Stakeholder mapping and mind mapping will further clarify existing resources and relationships within the theme.

In order to frame the problem, I will analyze the findings using tools such as value maturity model, context mapping, empathy mapping, cultura, scenarios to define the underlying constructs and elements. This structured understanding will guide ideation during the second divergence phase, exploring possible tools and/or strategies to connect and support the associations in a more meaningful way. Finally, I will converge on a tailored, practical solution that addresses the specific needs of student associations in initiating long term cultural and behavioral change ensuring continuity in the outcome.

## Project planning and key moments

To make visible how you plan to spend your time, you must make a planning for the full project. You are advised to use a Gantt chart format to show the different phases of your project, deliverables you have in mind, meetings and in-between deadlines. Keep in mind that all activities should fit within the given run time of 100 working days. Your planning should include a **kick-off meeting, mid-term evaluation meeting, green light meeting and graduation ceremony**. Please indicate periods of part-time activities and/or periods of not spending time on your graduation project, if any (for instance because of holidays or parallel course activities).

Make sure to attach the full plan to this project brief.

The four key moment dates must be filled in below

Kick off meeting 4-12-2024

Mid-term evaluation 24-2-2025

Green light meeting 22-04-2025

Graduation ceremony 20-05-2025

In exceptional cases (part of) the Graduation Project may need to be scheduled part-time. Indicate here if such applies to your project

Part of project scheduled part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>
For how many project weeks	
Number of project days per week	

Comments:

## Motivation and personal ambitions

Explain why you wish to start this project, what competencies you want to prove or develop (e.g. competencies acquired in your MSc programme, electives, extra-curricular activities or other).

Optionally, describe whether you have some personal learning ambitions which you explicitly want to address in this project, on top of the learning objectives of the Graduation Project itself. You might think of e.g. acquiring in depth knowledge on a specific subject, broadening your competencies or experimenting with a specific tool or methodology. Personal learning ambitions are limited to a maximum number of five.

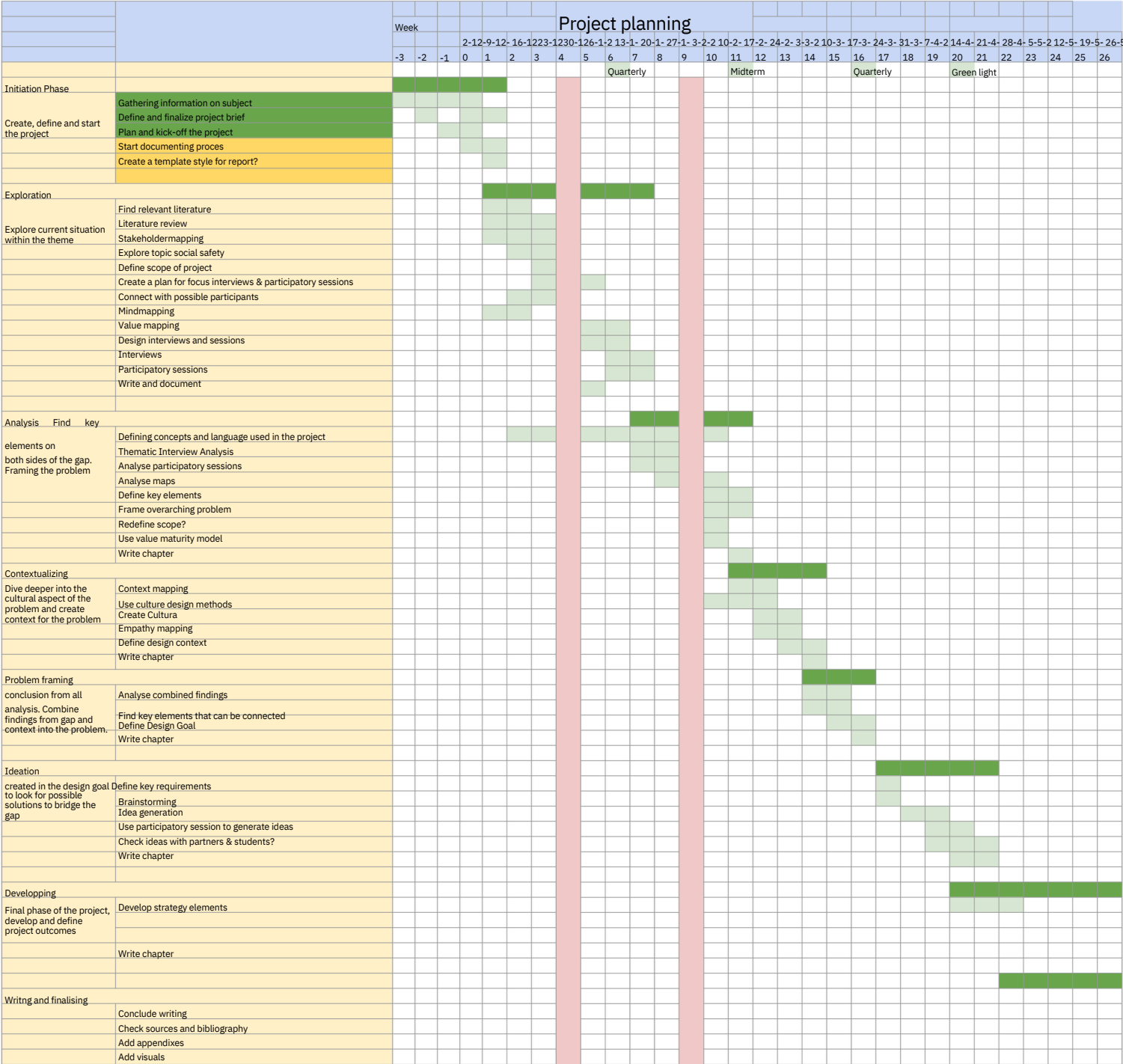
(200 words max)

Over the past few years, I've had several opportunities to make this a deeply personal and passionate project. During my year on the board of the Delftsche Studenten Bond, I addressed this issue by writing a policy. This experience showed me how complex the issue is, especially when it comes to finding the right people to support and implement solutions effectively.

Later, as a student assistant for wellbeing and behaviour at the StudentHub of TU Delft, I was involved in various projects to connect associations on topics such as social safety. One of my contributions was the overarching 'Ben je Oke?' campaign in Delft, which highlighted the challenges student associations face in addressing these issues within their organisations.

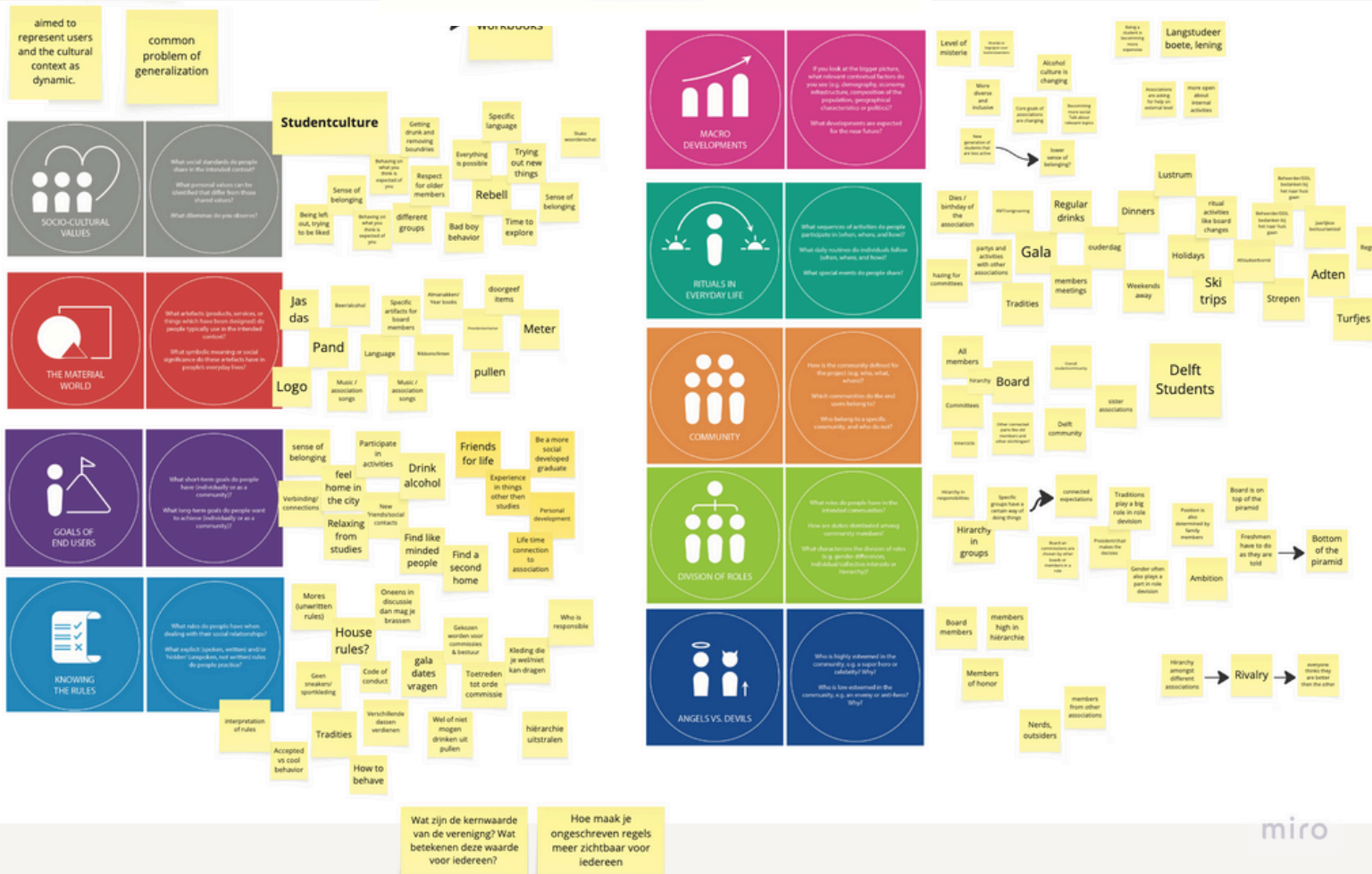
On a national level, I've worked with initiatives such as Studentenpact, GELIJKSPEL and the National Action Programme on Sexual Transgressive Behaviour and Sexual Assault. All these interactions have shown me that there is a big gap that needs to be addressed.

Beyond my professional experience, this issue is personally meaningful to me, which fuels my commitment to making a difference. I'm looking forward to further exploring this issue through my project, deepening my understanding and contributing to solutions that will help future students to create safer and more inclusive environments.



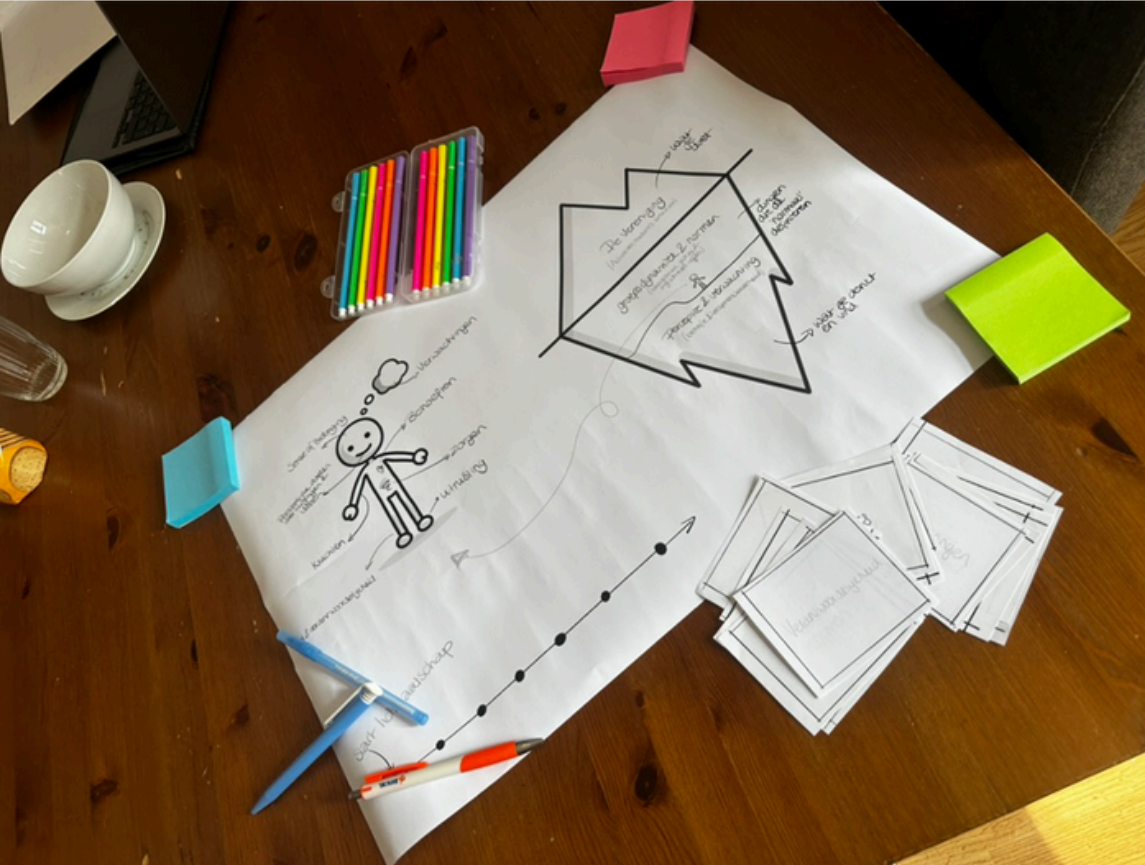
# **Appendix B:**

# **Cultura**



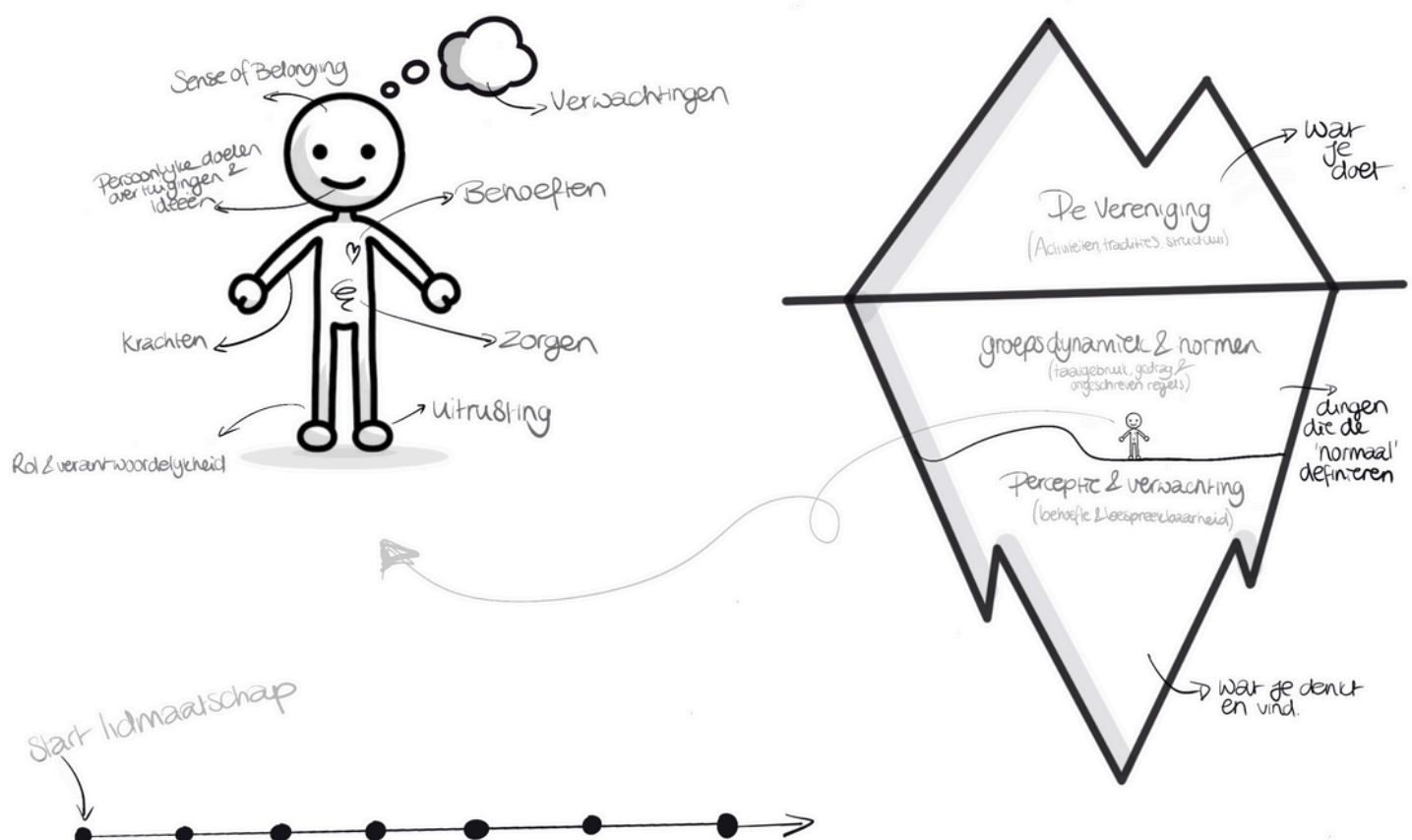
In the first phase of the project the Cultura (Hao, 2019) was used to explore the concept of student culture. Using personal experiences and previous knowledge the tool guided the process and provide useful insights into what drives student culture and what elements might be relevant for the project.

# **Appendix C: interview materials**



During the interviews the participants had access to the template, post-it's and pens. The word-cards were used as a closing activity. The image shows what the set-up looked like for each interview.

Close-up of the template used during the interviews.



# **Appendix D:**

# **Informed consent**

# **template**

## Delft University of Technology

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

U wordt uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek genaamd 'Empowering Student Associations In The Transition Towards a More Social Safe Environment'. Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door Meike Mulders van de TU Delft gedurende haar master afstudeerproject.

Het doel van dit onderzoek is om de invloed van **sociale normen en taalgebruik** op de perceptie van **seksueel grensoverschrijdend gedrag binnen de vereniging** te begrijpen. De informatie die gedurende verschillende interviews opgehaald zal worden dient om inzicht te krijgen in de huidige situatie om daarna te kijken waar de positieve en negatieve elementen zitten die invloed hebben op die perceptie. Het interview zal ongeveer een uur in beslag nemen en zal een **open en eerlijk zijn waarin persoonlijke ervaringen centraal staan**. De data die uit het interview voortkomt zal gebruikt worden voor het master afstudeerproject. Inzichten (uit de informatie) zullen vertaald worden naar mogelijkheden voor studentenverenigingen om **het gevoel van veiligheid voor individuele studenten te vergroten**. Je wordt gevraagd om persoonlijke ervaringen en/of opvattingen te delen tijdens een interactief gesprek over sociale normen, taalgebruik en gedrag.

Om je **privacy optimaal te waarborgen** en mogelijke risico's te minimaliseren zal ik de volgende maatregelen in acht nemen: 1. Persoonlijke gegevens zullen alleen voor administratieve doeleinden gebruikt worden en zullen op geen enkele manier aan de data gelinkt worden. 2. De audio opnamen en andere persoonsgegevens worden opgeslagen op de TU Delft OneDrive om datamisbruik te voorkomen. 3. De audio opnamen, die gemaakt worden tijdens het interview, zullen na afloop van het interview getranscribeerd worden en de audio opnamen zullen direct verwijderd worden. 4. In de transcripten zullen alternatieve benamingen gegeven worden aan zowel persoonlijke- als verenigingsgegevens waardoor de informatie niet te herleiden is naar jou als deelnemer en naar de vereniging. De directe informatie uit de interviews zal, buiten het supervisie team dat het project begeleidt, niet gedeeld worden met derden. In het project zal verder gebruik gemaakt worden van interpretaties van de informatie en geanonimiseerde quotes.

Uw deelname aan dit onderzoek is **volledig vrijwillig**, en **u kunt zich elk moment terugtrekken zonder reden op te geven**. U bent vrij om vragen **niet** te beantwoorden. De verzamelde gegevens zullen uiterlijk 3 maanden na het afronden van het project verwijderd worden van de harde schijf.

De resultaten van het onderzoek zullen in mijn afstudeerproject gebruikt worden om een mogelijke interventie of strategie op te ontwerpen. Dit alles zal ook geanonimiseerd meegenomen worden in mijn afstudeerrapport en daarin worden vastgelegd. Na goedkeuring van het begeleidend team zal dit rapport gedeeld worden in de TU Delft repository.

Contactgegevens van de uitvoerende onderzoeker zijn:

.....

Contactgegevens van de verantwoordelijke onderzoeker zijn:

.....

\_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE TICK THE APPROPRIATE BOXES	Yes	No
<b>A: GENERAL AGREEMENT – RESEARCH GOALS, PARTICIPANT TASKS AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION</b>		
1. Ik heb de informatie over het onderzoek gedateerd [DD/MM/YYYY] gelezen en begrepen, of deze is aan mij voorgelezen. Ik heb de mogelijkheid gehad om vragen te stellen over het onderzoek en mijn vragen zijn naar tevredenheid beantwoord.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Ik doe vrijwillig mee aan dit onderzoek, en ik begrijp dat ik kan weigeren vragen te beantwoorden en mij op elk moment kan terugtrekken uit de studie, zonder een reden op te hoeven geven.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname aan het onderzoek de volgende punten betekent: - Dat er audio opnames gemaakt worden van het interview om later te gebruiken voor het analyseren en verwerken van de informatie. - Dat deze audio opnames na het verwerken tot geschreven notities verwijderd zullen worden. - Dat de informatie die verstrekt wordt tijdens het interview geanonimiseerd en geïnterpreteerd gebruikt wordt voor het vervolg van het project. - Dat persoonlijke informatie op geen enkele manier te herleiden zal zijn aan mij als deelnemer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Ik begrijp dat de studie eindigt in mei 2025.		
<i>Please add the anticipated timing or how the date will be determined</i>		
<b>B: POTENTIAL RISKS OF PARTICIPATING (INCLUDING DATA PROTECTION)</b>		
6. Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname de volgende risico's met zich meebrengt zoals negatieve gevoelens, gevoel van onveiligheid of angst over de impact. Ik begrijp dat deze risico's worden geminimaliseerd door het creëren van een open en eerlijk gesprek en het dragen van extra zorg voor het verwerken van persoonlijke en gevoelige informatie. Daarnaast heb ik altijd de mogelijkheid om deelname te beëindigen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname betekent dat er persoonlijke identificeerbare informatie en onderzoeksdata worden verzameld, met het risico dat ik hieruit geïdentificeerd kan worden. Na afloop van het interview zal daarom persoonlijk herleidbare informatie zo snel mogelijk geanonimiseerd worden.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Ik begrijp dat de volgende stappen worden ondernomen om het risico van datamisbruik te minimaliseren, en dat mijn identiteit op de volgende manieren wordt beschermd in het geval van een databreuk; anonimiseren van naam en vereniging en het uitschrijven van audio opnames waarna de audiobestanden verwijderd zullen worden. Daarnaast zal de data opgeslagen worden op de TU Delft OneDrive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Ik begrijp dat de persoonlijke informatie die over mij verzameld wordt en mij kan identificeren, zoals naam, vereniging en studie, niet gedeeld worden buiten het studieteam.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE TICK THE APPROPRIATE BOXES	Yes	No
11. Ik begrijp dat de persoonlijke data die over mij verzameld wordt, vernietigd wordt uiterlijk 3 maanden na het afronden van dit project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>C: RESEARCH PUBLICATION, DISSEMINATION AND APPLICATION</b>		
12. Ik begrijp dat na het onderzoek de geanonimiseerde informatie gebruikt zal worden voor besluitvorming in het project en de uiteindelijke thesis.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Ik geef toestemming om mijn antwoorden, ideeën of andere bijdrages anoniem te quoten in resulterende producten.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Signatures

_____	_____	_____
Naam deelnemer	Handtekening	Datum

Ik, **de onderzoeker**, verklaar dat ik de informatie en het instemmingsformulier correct aan de potentiële deelnemer heb voorgelezen en, naar het beste van mijn vermogen, heb verzekerd dat de deelnemer begrijpt waar de deelnemer vrijwillig mee instemt.

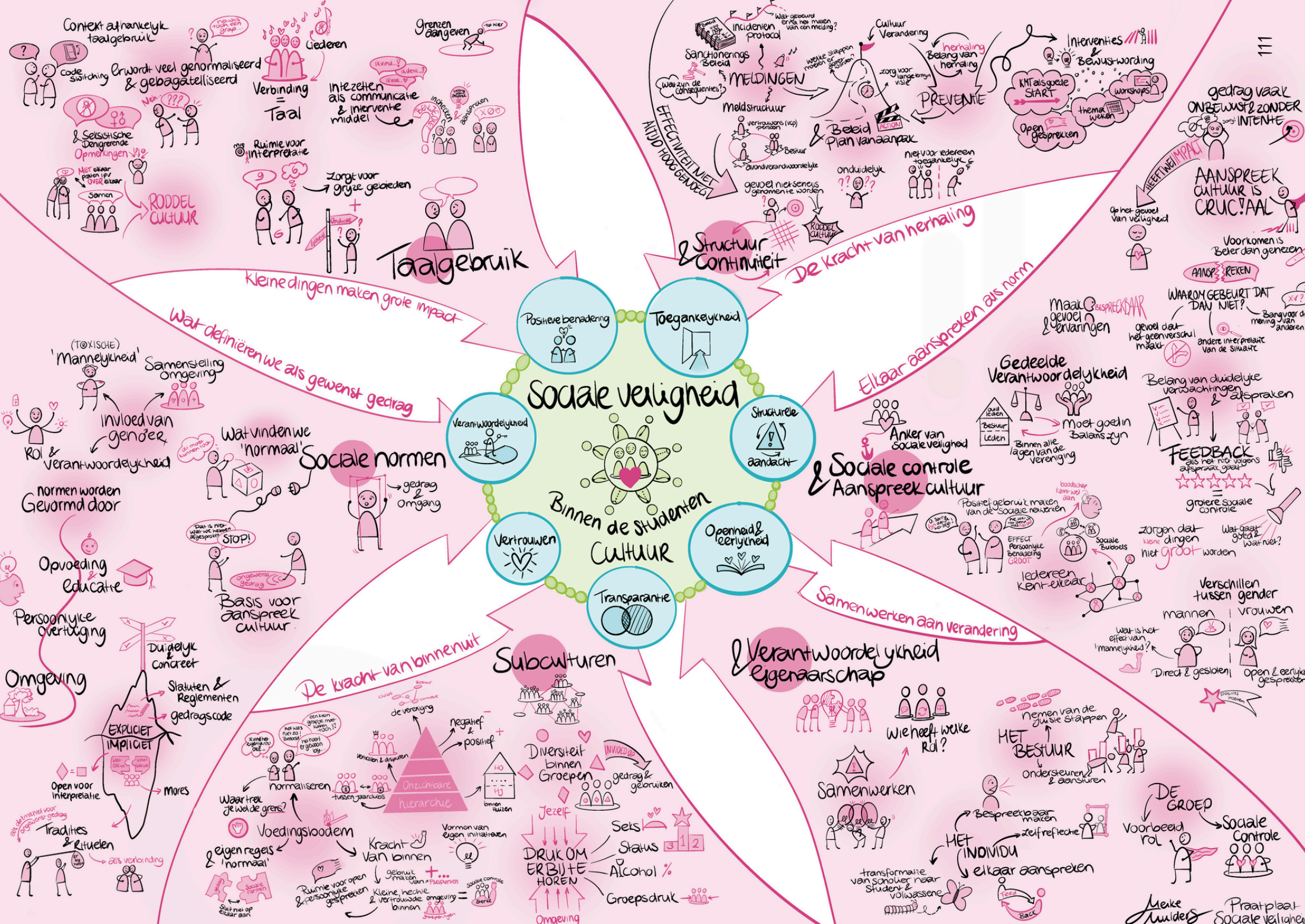
_____	_____	_____
Naam onderzoeker	Handtekening	Datum

Contactgegevens van de onderzoeker voor verdere informatie:

The template was created after the interview setup was complete. All participants received the document before the session and signed it before the interview began.

# **Appendix E:**

# **Praatplaat**



# **Appendix F:**

# **Workbook design**



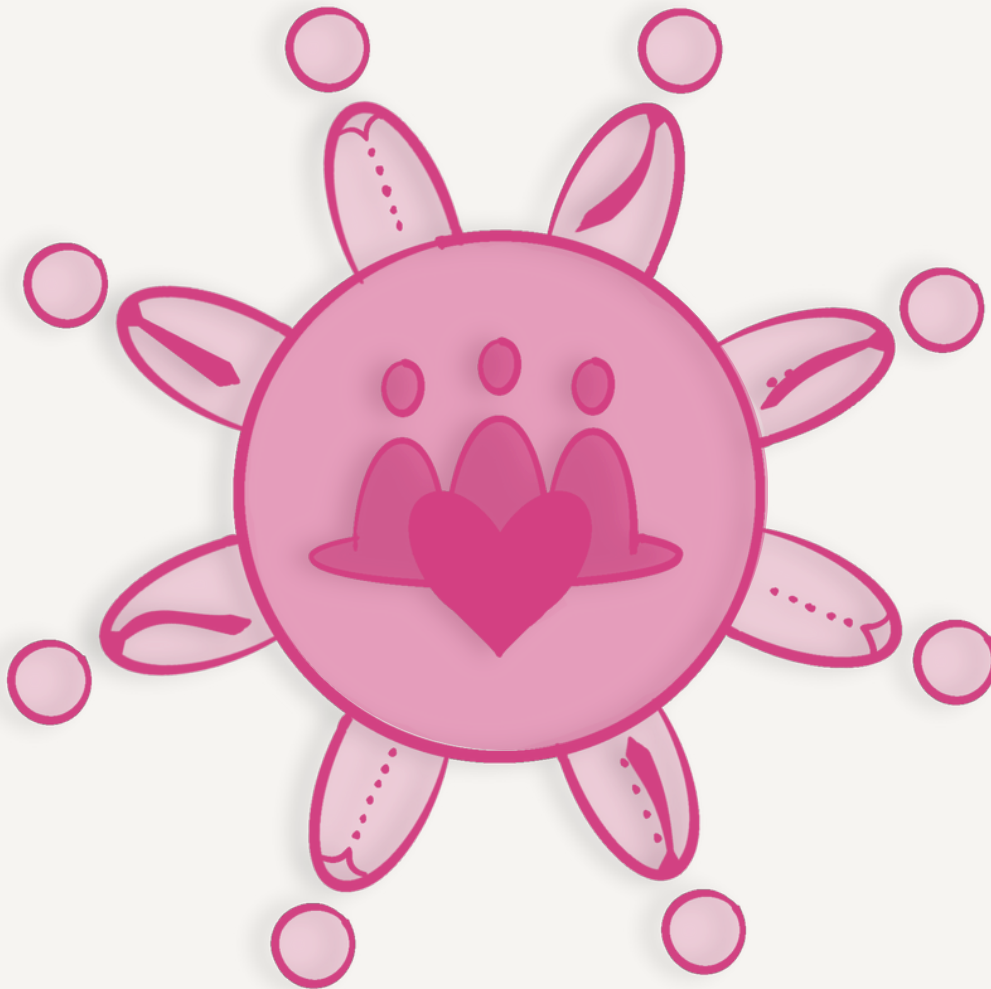
The workbook consists of 176 pages and is written in Dutch. By scanning the QR code you will go to the digital version of the workbook.

# **Appendix G:**

## **Personal Learning goals**

# PERSONAL LEARNING GOALS





"The approach to a socially safe association is in the hands of the students who are part of it. Be inspired by the content, conversations and insights. There is no right or wrong, there is only progress as you invest time in what YOU care about."

*Meke Mulders.*