Alessandra Bernardi

REFRAMING MIGRATION

where

public inertia

meets

social detachment

To home, ever evolving,
yet always holding the same place in my heart.

Reframing Migration:

Where Public Inertia Meets Social Detachment

Alessandra Bernardi
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Foreword

Why do people leave their home to embark on something completely uncertain and unfamiliar? I find myself dealing with this question from a thousand of kilometers away from my home.

I was born and raised in Italy, I did leave my home when I was 22. Moved to the Netherlands, which was to me completely unknown. Did I know what was waiting for me? Or, if there was something waiting for me? Absolutely not. Did I have strong, dramatic reasons to leave home? Absolutely not. A free country, a loving family, a lifetime group of friends, a stable economic situation. But I am here, thousands kilometers from home writing my thesis on design and migration.

What makes it odd, is that I am barely asked why I left home. Rather, my interlocutor looks at me with admiring eyes praising my courage and determination.

It's odd how I have never heard anyone addressing a migrant arriving in Italy from Senegal (just to take one as an instance) in such an admiring tone.

And yet they did the exact same thing as I did to a certain extent . Actually, they did more. I didn't risk my life, not for a second. I comfortably sat on a plane, with my Italian ID card and a few hours later I set foot in my new life, welcomed by my new landlord with a bunch of tulips.

What did the same Senegalese migrant find? After walking through the desert, uncomfortably sitting in a prison cell in Libya with their fake passport, and risking life in the Mediterranean waves? A bunch of hostile words and endless bureaucratic procedures.

I was brave. They were deranged. I was welcomed. They were rejected.

Growing up I have been surrounded by opposing views. Pro and open to immigration people on one side, anti-immigrants on the other. I realized that the latter had a bigger impact on me. The tone, the words used in their speeches showed anger, aggressivity. Not a shadow of empathy towards those people that have the same dreams and aspirations as all the people in the world have. Neither is a small effort to (try to) understand. Only accusations and repulsion. But of course, without generalizing because "I know that there are also good people coming, but…" but they should stay at their homes, "anyway here in Italy we don't even have jobs for Italians, how can we help them?".

Words of anger, dressed up with compassion. Oppressive words that became more and more inacceptable to me, controversial and unfounded. Steered by cherry-picked news, narratives in a frightful storytelling, denying every form of humanity for the protagonist. Numbers of deaths that remain only numbers, without a face or a soul. I couldn't fathom how people could address humans in such a dehumanized-apathetic way. And here is the key in my point of view.

The discourse around migration is so insistent, instilling drop after drop of alarmism and rejection, that it has created a vivid yet false concept in European society's imagination, one disconnected from the real people setting foot on Union territory.

The problem is that all this loudness within the political arena is, in fact, deaf. It does not matter whether it comes from the pro-migration or the anti-migration side: both are unable to see each other's perspective. Both struggle to build meaningful ways of addressing migration, as confronting the opposing political side seems to take precedence.

These reflections explain where I stood when I chose migration as the topic of my graduation project. For me, this project has been an exploration of how I can contribute as a designer to fostering a society that is more critical, responsible, and fair.

Alessandra

Acknowledgements

This graduation project has been for me a beautiful journey of growth and understanding, sparking curiosity about my future. It has been deeply enriching, at the same time both challenging and rewarding.
I believe this is one of those journeys whose beauty lies in sharing it with the people encountered along the way. And I have been lucky to share it with wonderful people.

First, I want to thank Matthijs van Dijk and Değer Özkaramanlı, chair and mentor of this project, for supporting me throughout the whole process with a perfect balance of freedom and guidance.
In the kickoff meeting I asked you to push me to learn as much as possible from this project. I believe that we achieved that objective thanks to the learning environment you were able to create, one where I felt valued not only as the student and designer, but especially as the person I am. One where I felt placed on the same level as you, despite my limited experience. You set the ground for me to flourish, and I couldn't be more thankful for that.

Matthijs, you are a great example of how important it is to take a position when designing, projecting your personal values into the world not to stand out, but to share what you believe in. I truly admire you for that. From our very first meeting you embraced my vision for this project with passion. Many times we thought alongside each other, navigating the complexity of this project, and you helped me to find the right words to voice my thoughts. I am deeply grateful for the contribution you brought to this project and to my growth.

Değer, since the first time we met I admired your ability to combine critical thinking with creativity, bringing in a positive perspective that is often easy to forget.

You use design as a way to understand critically, going beyond the surface of things to reach their true essence. You are a source of inspiration for that. You joined this project with immense passion for what design is, and you helped me shape my path by considering both the strengths and pitfalls of our discipline. Thank you for being part of this educational and personal journey.

I also want to thank two experts who helped me in shaping and reflecting on the project. Dominique Jolivet, expert on migration and welfare, who supported me in the early phase with her knowledge and personal perspective.
And Christine Schwöbel-Patel, expert on international law, who in the final phase helped me reflect on the project, contributing with her critical perspective on contemporary issues of international law.

Besides my supervisory team, I want to thank my peer support team. Chiara, Kalyani, Manel, and Ilia; you made this journey even more enjoyable. Over the past months we shared many moments, and many coffees; my time at the faculty would not have been the same without you. You have always been there to support, help, and share. Thank you.
Lotje, you are also part of this team. Having you by my side, working with the same method and receiving your advice was extremely helpful. All our reflections on the projects enriched this experience, both on a learning and personal level, nourishing a deep friendship.

I want to thank all my friends from Delft for being part of my life and this journey in one way or another, making my experience in the Netherlands so precious.
A special thanks to Francesca; you are always by my side, always pushing me to give my best in everything.

And you are always there for me, no matter what. I am truly grateful for that.
And a special thanks to Lorenzo, for understanding and supporting me all the time. Your friendship is sensitive and caring, and it always makes me feel welcome. I am deeply thankful.

Per concludere, ringrazio tutta la mia famiglia e gli amici di una vita. Siete parte di me e avete sempre contribuito al mio percorso di crescita, essendo fonte di ispirazione e conforto.
In particolare, grazie ai miei nonni, la mia certezza. Con la vostra presenza delicata e costante, ogni giorno mi insegnate l'amore incondizionato, fatto di piccoli gesti dal valore immenso.
Grazie a mia sorella, il mio sole. Sei sempre presente e pronta a sostenermi con la tua freschezza e sensibilità; pur essendo diverse, mi capisci e mi sproni a diventare una persona migliore.
Infine, grazie ai miei genitori, il mio esempio. Grazie per avermi dato tutto, per avermi permesso e per permettermi ogni giorno di essere la persona che sono. Grazie per l'amore infinito, per i valori che mi avete trasmesso e che porto con me in ogni momento. Grazie per darmi fiducia ed essere orgogliosi di me senza imprimere aspettative ingombranti. Grazie per essere il mio punto di riferimento, ovunque io sia. Tutti i miei successi, grandi o piccoli che siano, sono per voi.

Executive Summary

This graduation project aims to reframe migration by exploring the domain of "the relationship between European society and immigration, 2040." Using the Vision in Product Design (ViP) method, the project envisions possible futures of this domain and proposes design interventions within a context shaped by two dynamics: the use of public inertia as a political strategy to address immigration, and emotional detachment as the prevailing social atmosphere in European society.

In recent decades, Europe has experienced an influx of displaced people from non-European countries, placing migration at the center of public and political discourse. European politics initially framed this influx as an emergency, and later as a crisis, reviving historical patterns of "othering" and "national traditions." This framing has fostered exclusionary and politicized thinking while denying migration as part of a broader global transformation. Current migration policies, focused on restricting asylum systems and strengthening border controls, have proven ineffective, overlooking migration's potential value. Yet, policy strongly shapes how citizens interpret reality. Reframing migration within the policy sphere can therefore positively influence how European society engages with this phenomenon.

This project structures a future vision around two major forces. The first is "treating immigration with public inertia", expressed through three political strategies: a utilitarian framing of immigration, processing a fluid reality through rigid schemas, and preventing public influence. The second is an "emotionally detached society: high contact, avoiding dialogue", manifested at three levels of society: the macro-level (loud rhetoric fueling polarization), the meso-level (dehumanization and othering shaping collective fear),

and the micro-level (tensions and misalignments in everyday transformations).

When these two forces intersect, they generate nine future situations. These situations form the basis of nine design interventions, each unraveling a future meaning. The interventions aim to foster a more constructive relationship between European society and immigration by encouraging citizens to think critically and act responsibly, equipping them with tools to navigate uncertainties brought by societal challenges.

The main outcomes of this project are:
- A framework that maps how this future context may unfold and makes sense of its complexity.
- Nine design ideas that, collectively, represent a perspective shift capable of enabling meaningful change.
- The development of one concept, "The Civic Trial," as a concrete example of designing for this envisioned future.
- A methodological reflection on the design process.

The Civic Trial concept stems from the idea of educating citizens in dialogue. It envisions a pluralistic space for meaningful exchange, where people's needs can be expressed and translated into inputs for policymaking. The concept takes the form of an agonistic democracy embedded in a legal trial setting. Based on inclusion and citizen representation, it is designed to inform European Commission policy initiation, bypassing polarized politics that often feel distant from citizens.

Ultimately, this project demonstrates how design can add value to policymaking by equipping citizens with meaningful tools to navigate uncertainty and by fostering more constructive engagement with migration.

Glossary

Design Intervention: In this project, design intervention refers to the outcome of a design process carried out within a specific context and with a specific goal.

Emotional Detachment: In this project, emotional detachment refers to a lack of emotional connection, or the inability to connect deeply and meaningfully with others.

Fearism: In this project, fearism refers to the phenomenon in which fear shapes human and social behavior, culture, and politics.

Framing: In this project, framing refers to the way in which reality is organized, perceived, and communicated.

Identity: In this project, identity refers to the set of characteristics through which individuals recognize and define themselves.

Migration: In this project, migration refers to the movement of people to a new country or geographical area for various reasons.

Othering: In this project, othering refers to the act of labeling someone as not belonging to one's own group, thereby creating an in-group and an out-group.

Polarization: In this project, polarization refers to the phenomenon in which two opposing opinion or value groups become increasingly divided and extreme, rejecting overlap and exchange.

Public Inertia: In this project, public inertia refers to a sense of stillness within the public sphere, a resistance to change caused by established cultural and institutional structures.

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This chapter contextualizes the project, explains the assignment, and introduces the methodology employed. A dedicated section explores the application of design to policymaking, highlighting the relevance of design practices within this field.

INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

Context

In recent decades, Europe has experienced an influx of displaced people from non-European countries, bringing migration into the spotlight in public and political discourse. European politics initially framed this influx as an emergency and later as a crisis, reviving historical patterns of 'othering' and 'national traditions' while fostering exclusionary and politicized thinking, entirely denying the interpretation of migration as a global change. The depiction of migration as a 'crisis' not only stigmatizes immigrants but also justifies emergency measures, presenting them as unavoidable (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018) and resulting in controlling policies that address the symptoms rather than tackling the root causes of the challenges faced by displaced people (Ozkaramanli, Schwobel-Patel, 2024).

In addressing the refugee 'crisis,' Europe appears fragmented, with nation-states seeking to exempt themselves from responsibility. At the same time, the continent results contradictory, balancing its core value of solidarity with the perceived need to protect its borders from an alleged threat (Triandafyllidou, 2017).

Current migration policies focus on restricting asylum systems and strengthening border control while implementing deterrent measures to prevent migrants from seeking asylum and externalizing migration control (Scipioni, 2017). However, these policies prove ineffective, often leading to counterproductive consequences such as irregular migration and the marginalization of migrant populations (Making Migration and Migration Policy Decisions, n.d.). Moreover, they overlook the potential benefits that migration flows could bring to receiving countries.

Since policymakers shape public perception by emphasizing particular narratives at the expense of others (Policy Concepts in 1000 Words: Framing, 2016), reframing migration within the policymaking sphere can have a positive impact on how European society engages with this phenomenon. A more constructive approach could unlock migration's potential for fostering societal growth.

Problem Definition

Frames used in policymaking construct structural descriptions of policy issues, shaping one particular understanding over others. Therefore, framing is an exercise of power, as policymakers can not only reinforce dominant perspectives but also set political agendas, ultimately materializing in concrete governance actions. (Policy Concepts in 1000 Words: Framing, 2016)

Current framings of migration flows in Europe build upon a politicized vision that stigmatizes and problematizes the phenomenon, making 'fearism' the foundation of both national and individual reactions to migrants. ("Amsterdam Review of European Affairs," 2022)
'Crisis' frames draw a line between undeserving migrants (illegals) and deserving refugees (legal), distinguishing who deserves protection from who represents a threat to peace and security deserving criminalization and punishment (Ozkaramanli, Schwobel-Patel, 2024).

Developing new frames, starting from the understanding of the present context, aims to reshape how future European society perceives and engages with migration. These frames are designed to achieve a positive societal impact, creating value and contributing to social progress.

Assignment

To create a novel vision of migration to reframe the phenomenon in European policymaking, aiming to influence how European society understands and engages with it, ultimately fostering social progress.

To reframe migration within European policymaking, the Vision in Product Design (ViP) method, developed by Prof. Ir. Matthijs van Dijk and Prof. Dr. Paul Hekkert, will be adopted.
The project begins with an analysis of the present context, aiming to understand the instruments available to the European population for engaging with migration flows, the impact of these instruments on their perceptions of migration, the contextual factors shaping these interactions, and the underlying reasons behind them. Following this deconstruction of the current situation, the design phase will begin.
First, the domain of the design intervention is defined. Then, a set of contextual factors is generated through desk research and interviews, forming the foundation of a framework that will structure the context upon which the future vision is built.
To conclude, a concept is developed to exemplify how the vision can be transformed into a design intervention.

The project has a strong focus on framing, it draws from and builds upon the work of Deger Ozkaramanli and Christine Schwöbel-Patel, which discuss the frames around migration in the fields of law and design and the construction of the 'grateful refugee', simultaneously 'deferential' and 'entrepreneurial' (Ozkaramanli, Schwobel-Patel, 2024).

This project stems from my interest in migration as a highly polarized and politicized topic in European public discourse, as well as my curiosity about exploring the role of design in societal innovation, particularly its potential applications in the public sector.
Using the ViP method not only provides an opportunity to engage with and learn how to apply the approach but also enables me to work with a high level of complexity, develop a future vision, and create a roadmap for transitioning toward that vision. The project focuses on how migration is framed; since (re)framing is a key design competence, engaging with it will allow me to further develop this skill. In my view, these activities represent valuable learning experiences in the field of strategic design.

Applying Policy to Design

The context described in the previous section falls outside the traditional scope of design. The following paragraphs outline a rationale for why applying design in the field of migration policymaking is relevant.

A Shift in Design Practices

In the past decades, design practices have broadened, expanding beyond the product field and into the domain of social innovation. In this context, design has shifted its focus from the private sector to also include the public and social sectors, engaging in the design of complex service systems, organizations, policies, and strategies. The success of design in this realm has been supported by practices and principles such as problem framing, human-centered design, iterative design, and collaborative practices. (Van Der Bijl-Brouwer & Malcolm, 2020)

Framing

Challenges addressed in the societal innovation domain are open, complex, dynamic, and interconnected. Kees Dorst argues that design is valued by private and public organizations in this field because of the strategies it develops to manage such complexity, which build on design abduction—thinking from consequences back to causes and working principles. Framing is 'the key to design abduction' and involves a hypothetical way of looking at a problem to develop a solution. When framing a problem, enriching and expanding the context, embracing its complexity, and critically evaluating it leads to a deeper understanding of the needs and values within the broadened field, ultimately opening up a wider range of possible directions. (Dorst, 2015)

Design and Policymaking

The public and policymaking sectors have traditionally adopted a linear, rational approach to problem-solving. However, the challenges these sectors face are increasingly complex, requiring a more exploratory approach. In such complex systems, interventions based on traditional problem-solving methods can lead to unintended consequences. In contrast, applying design thinking in policymaking, with its human-centered focus, increases the likelihood of achieving intended effects and enhancing public value. (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016)

Design Competences

As described in the 'Context' section, the current policymaking approach to migration policies simplifies the inherent complexity of the issue, often leading to unintended consequences. As previously mentioned, a design approach would help navigate and embrace this complexity, increasing the likelihood of achieving the desired outcomes.

The following is a set of design competencies, outlined in the literature, that I believe play an important role in this project. As discussed above, (re)framing is one of the core design competencies. Conley defines this as 'the ability to identify a broad range of potential in a given problem statement,' meaning the ability to view a problem in a novel way and recognize the possibilities within it. Another key competence outlined by Conley is 'an approach to problem-solving that involves the creation and evaluation of multiple alternatives.'

This entails rapid cycles of divergent and convergent thinking, exploring a multiplicity of effective solutions. Moreover, design fosters 'the establishment of purposeful relationships between the solution and its context.' Greater value can be unlocked by exploring the context to gain deeper insights into the problem. (Conley, 2011)

These competencies would help the policymaking sector address the complexity of migration by starting with a context-driven, human-centered analysis.

Voute et al. highlight another design competence: 'working and communicating at varying and multiple levels of abstraction, and across disciplinary perspectives.' This involves strategically analyzing and eliminating details to focus on core issues while effectively communicating across different levels using skills such as visualization and storytelling. It enables the envisioning and reshaping of future scenarios in a multidisciplinary setting with multiple stakeholders. (Voute, 2020)

Method: ViP Approach

The ViP method is a human-centered and context-driven approach that supports designers in developing future visions that are relevant for society. In this method, the context is explored in depth, focusing on understanding the root causes that lead to the given situation. This deep understanding of the factors shaping the product-interaction-context systems we are considering, allows us to build a design direction that is valuable and relevant in our continuously changing world.

The ViP method stems from three most important premises:
Designing is about exploring what is possible tomorrow instead of solving the problem of today.
Designing is not only the making manifest of some object, but foremost the generation and development of the idea that provides the design output with a raison d'être.
A designer is an individual with preferences, values, beliefs and desires, like all other human beings.

The core idea behind the ViP method is to create meaningful design interventions within the future context. To achieve this, we need to develop a deep understanding of that context. In this case, design is understood as a systemic approach rather than speculation.
To unravel the future, we must objectively and respectfully explore what it may look like, and accept it. Designing for that future is an act of responsibility. The designer must take a stand and be accountable for their intervention.

The method is divided in two parts: the preparation phase, represented by the deconstruction of the present context; and the design phase, which articulates in several steps, from establishing the domain in the future context, to designing a roadmap to reach the future vision.
The deconstruction phase is aimed at understanding the why behind the world of solutions that are currently used and if they are still meaningful in the world of today.
While in the design phase, the aim is to make it possible to imagine multiple futures. This phase typically results in a future framework that helps to see the world in new ways and defines the design space from which possible solutions could emerge.

The design phase is articulated in the following steps:
1. Establishing the domain: describes the area and time where the contribution will take place.
2. Generation of context factors: collecting the "building blocks" of the future context.
3. Structuring the context: unifying the factors into a coherent whole.
4. Statement definition: the designer takes a position.
5. Establishing a relationship: determining what interaction will lead to the defined goal.
6. Defining product qualities: to elicit the desired interaction the product must have certain qualities.
7. Concepting: translating the vision into a manifestation.
8. Design and detailing: to transform the concept into an actual manifestation.
(Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011).

deconstruction   designing
preparation

past context   future context

1. domain/time
2. context factors
3. context structure
4. statement

context level

interaction   interaction

5. human-product
   interaction

interaction level

old product   new product

6. product qualities
7. ideas and concept
8. detailing

product level
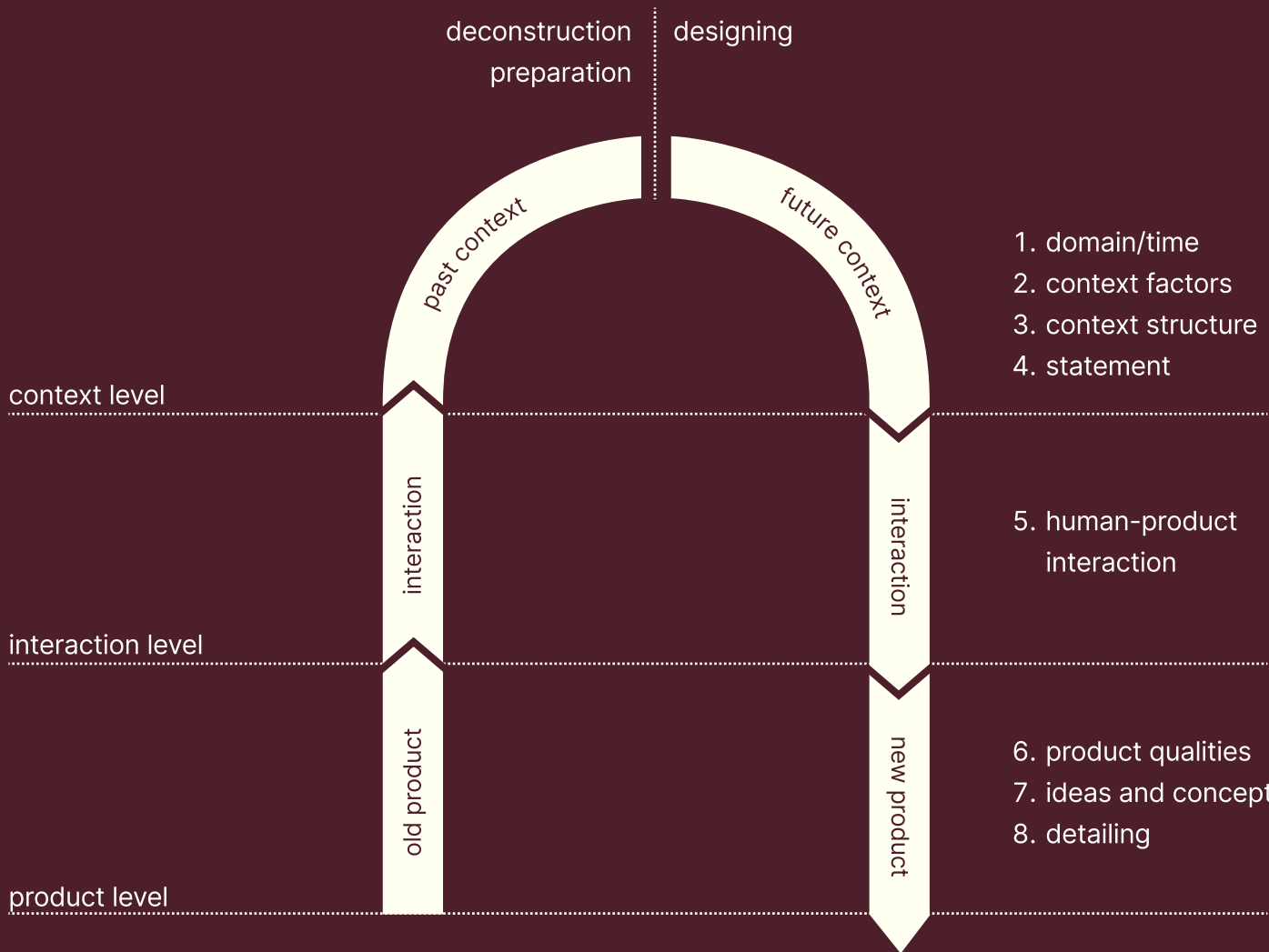
Figure 1: Visual representation of the ViP process

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public inertia

This chapter presents the results of the deconstruction phase, which aims to explore the current context. Informed by desk research, this phase focuses on analyzing the 'system of instruments provided to European citizens to address migration'. The resulting insight is that the relationship between European citizens and migration is both "selective and ideological".

UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT

social detachment

Deconstruction

During the preparation phase of the ViP method, existing design solutions are analyzed and deconstructed. Deconstruction is guided by the question: "Why is the design the way it is?" To answer this, the solution is examined on three levels: product, interaction, and context.

At the product level, the designer describes the existing solution in terms of its literal characteristics as well as its expressive qualities (what it communicates, including any figurative meanings).
At the interaction level, the design is envisioned in use, since product qualities gain meaning through the way they shape interaction with the user. Here, the designer describes how users engage with the design and the qualities of this interaction.
Finally, at the context level, the focus shifts to the contextual factors that may have influenced the designer's choices. This step allows the designer to understand products in relation to the underlying factors shaping their existence.

The deconstruction exercise is valuable because it helps free the designer's mind from preconceptions that could otherwise constrain the next steps in the design process. (Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011)

By deconstructing the present, we observe it as it is, with all its factors, aiming to understand whether the effect was intended and whether it remains desirable.
Analyzing the present context helps us to develop respect for it and to gain a deeper understanding of its complexity."

deconstruction
preparation

past context

context level

interaction

interaction level

old product

product level
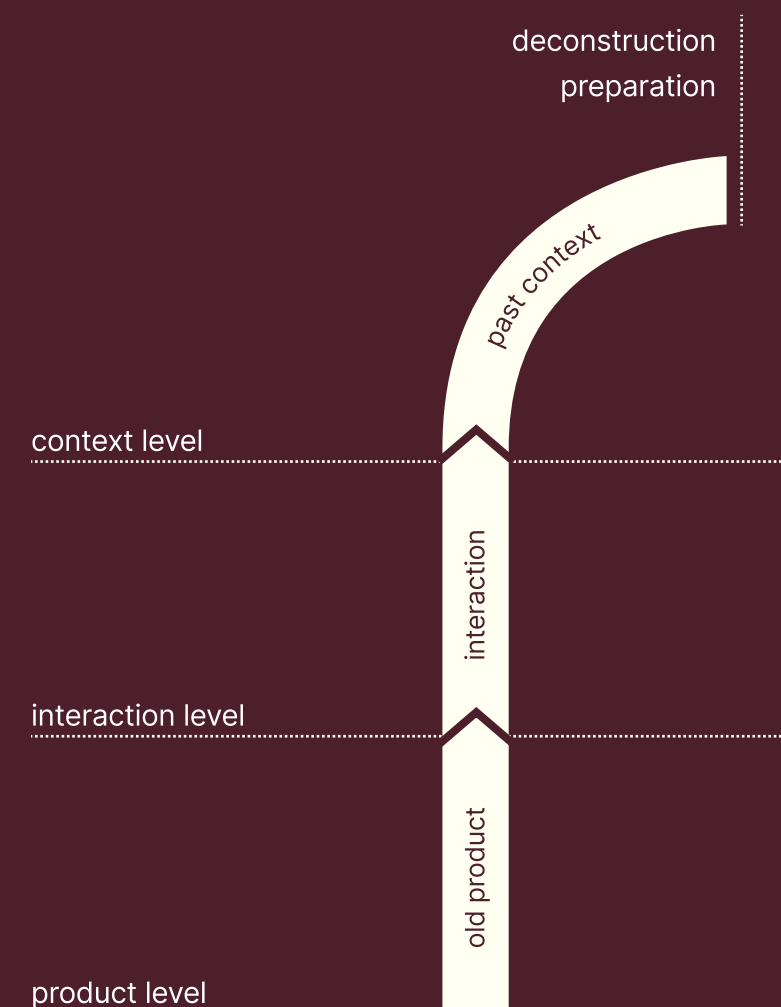
Insights from Desk Research

The 'Preparation' is the first phase of the method, aimed at understanding the raison d'être behind the current world. Before delving into the deconstruction phase, a desk research was conducted to collect information and perspectives on the domain of Migration.

Desk research was conducted in an exploratory manner, aiming to collect a wide range of information on various aspects related to the topic of migration. Based on the context outlined in the introduction, the topic has been examined from an institutional and political perspective, with a focus on how it is addressed in the fields of politics, law, and policymaking. The following section presents a summary of key insights, organized by topic.

Migration Policies

The research on migration policies focused on European frameworks and international law concerning migration.

The analyzed articles highlighted tendencies toward the delegation of responsibility and the selective adoption of international policies in the field of refugee protection and migration.

For instance, it has been argued that new migration patterns, driven by societal changes and geopolitical events, have been met with responses such as the tightening of national asylum systems and border controls, deterrence policies aimed at physically or legally preventing entry into the territory, and the externalization of migration control (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2014).

These responses demonstrate that formal support for international law does not necessarily translate into substantial political action (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2014). This tendency is reflected in the adoption of soft law as an important tool within the European Union during perceived times of crisis, where migration has often been addressed through legally non-binding agreements to facilitate decision-making (Slominski & Trauner, 2020).

Critical scholars argue that international law is considered by states only when it represents a "self-enforcing equilibrium" that serves their national interests (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2014).

In conclusion, the perceived ineffectiveness of European migration policies has been attributed to shortcomings in integration, primarily resulting from "intergovernmental bargaining between states with diverging preferences and spillovers arising from incomplete agreements" (Scipioni, 2017).

Political Framing of Migration

In recent decades, migration flows to Europe have been defined as a "refugee emergency" or "refugee crisis." This interpretation, developed in the political arena and diffused by the media, legitimizes the adoption of urgent measures while simultaneously stigmatizing migrants and adding an alarmist connotation (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018).

Migration, framed as an "issue of public-wide concern," has been politicized and transformed into a politically and ideologically constructed matter. The politicization of immigration enables political actors to demonstrate control over the 'problem'; however, it simultaneously reinforces the framing of migration as a problem (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018).

Within the European political landscape, the "refugee crisis" has been interpreted through two main frames: a moral frame, which emphasizes European values and calls for solidarity toward migrants depicted as victims fleeing conflict; and a threat frame, which portrays migration flows as unmanageable and unpredictable, mobilizing feelings of uncertainty. A third frame, grounded in rationality, combines solidarity with order, justifying security measures taken to re-establish stability by presenting them as an expression of responsible solidarity (Triandafyllidou, 2017).

As a consequence, the principle of solidarity emerges as a flexible tool, interpreted differently depending on the political framework adopted. The crisis faced by the European Union demonstrated how solidarity is invoked and applied by political actors according to their own interests in specific cases, rather than as a principle guiding unified action (Grimmel, 2020).

Othering

The framing of migration flows as a "crisis" in Europe has provided the basis for an exclusionary process of othering. Immigration has been problematized, and immigrants are often depicted as a threat to "European identity," shaping responses driven by fearism. When individuals are perceived as "other," they risk being dehumanized and consequently excluded from human values and civic rights.

European identity is constructed upon the notion of a "distinct and recognizable European character that sets Europeans apart from non-Europeans" ("Amsterdam Review of European Affairs," 2022).

Understanding the Present

The deconstruction began with an investigation into the instruments used to deal with migration in Europe.

As the project aims at creating a new relationship between European society and immigration, acting on policy frames, I refer to instruments as a set of services and activities that political and governance institutions provide to citizens.

This initial approach led to the first iteration of the guiding research question. At this stage, it became important to distinguish whether the focus should be placed on the instruments available to people seeking to migrate to Europe or on those provided to European citizens for dealing with immigration. The latter focus was chosen.

What are the instruments provided to European citizens to deal with immigration?

The contextual exploration was based on a review of institutional websites of European Union bodies. To gain greater clarity, I attempted to map out the various actors that appear to form part of the system providing instruments to citizens to address migration. This mapping was carried out intuitively, informed by the information found on these websites and combined with my own experience as a European citizen.

One of the key sources consulted in this phase was the Migration and Asylum page on the European Commission's website (Migration and Asylum, n.d.), which provides access to resources such as the EU Immigration Portal, Statistics on Migration to Europe, and the Pact on Migration and Asylum. The latter is particularly relevant, as it outlines a new set of "firm but fair rules" designed to manage migration and establish a common asylum system at the EU level (Pact on Migration and Asylum, 2025).

Of particular interest was the distinction made across many of the websites between migration in general and migration flows from Ukraine, triggered by the Russian invasion in 2022. For instance, the European Commission's migration management page (Migration Management, n.d.) includes a dedicated section titled "Welcoming Displaced People from Ukraine", which illustrates the measures taken by the EU to support Ukrainians fleeing war.

The most significant measure was the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive in March 2022. This directive was introduced in recognition, "drawing from past experience in managing migration", that EU countries would not be able to adequately process the exceptionally high number of asylum requests (Migration Management: Welcoming Displaced People From Ukraine, n.d.).

Moreover, the exploration of the context was informed by the insights gained during the desk research described above. By combining the analysis of institutional websites with findings from the literature review, I decided to conduct the deconstruction by considering the instruments provided to EU citizens for engaging with migration in two distinct situations: the inflow of Ukrainian refugees caused by Russia's attack in 2022, referred to as the "Ukrainian Refugee Crisis," and the inflow of migrants from Africa and the Middle East, referred to as the "Mediterranean Migrant Crisis."

This choice was guided by the intention to further explore the concepts of European solidarity, othering, and the crisis frame.

As the two deconstructions turned out to be significantly different, a third overarching deconstruction was subsequently carried out.

System of Instruments for EU Citizens

At the product level, the focus is on the system of instruments provided to European citizens to engage with migration. The interaction level examines the nature of the interaction European citizens have with these instruments, influenced by their inherent qualities. The context level explores the factors that shape both the instruments and the interactions.

The system comprises two 'polar' addressees, migrants and EU citizens, and 'institutional' actors who provide the services (instruments). The multiplicity of actors results in a diverse range of nuanced instruments. The system is complex, articulated through various policy types, sources of information, and forms of political representation.

To explore the actors and instruments the following sources has been researched:
- NGOs : Caritas Europa (www.caritas.eu, 2025);
- Policy: "Temporary Protection Directive" (Temporary Protection, n.d.) for the Ukrainian Refugee system, and the "New Pact on Migration and Asylum" for the Mediterranean Refugee system (Pact on Migration and Asylum, 2025);
- Institutional information: European Commission "Migration and Asylum" website (Migration and Asylum, n.d.);
- Media and Political Groups: various news media easily accessible by citizens, such as two major Italian newspapers, "La Stampa" (La Stampa, n.d.) and "La Repubblica" (La Repubblica, 2001).
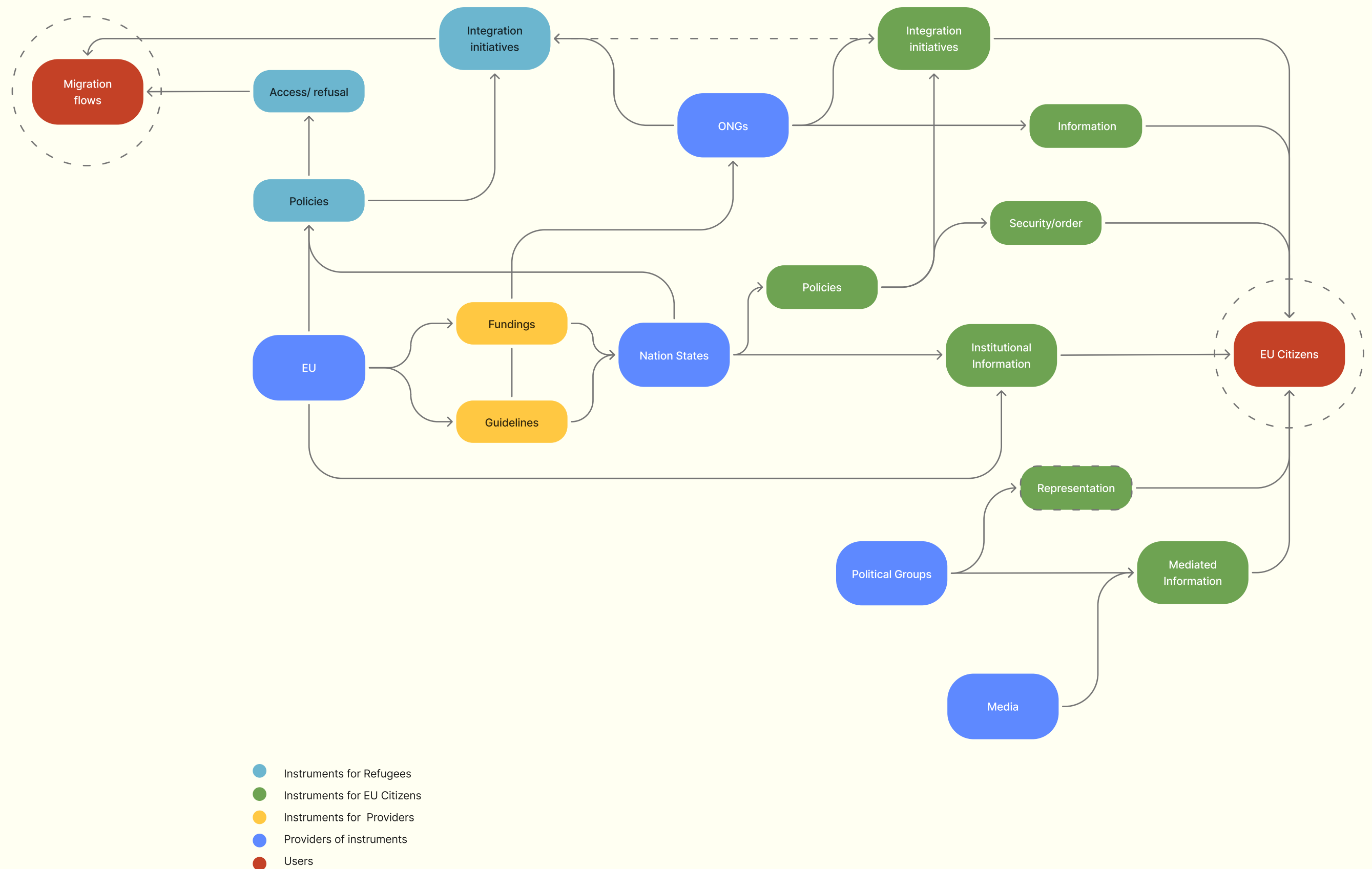

Figure 2: System of instruments for European citizens to relate with immigration

Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

Product Qualities:
Complex but unanimous, consistent, visible, accessible, inclusive, supportive, empathetic, apolitical, calling for action.

Interaction Qualities:
Humanitarian, almost effortless, fraternal, direct, moral driven, logical/straightforward, between-peers, unavoidable, undeniable but not imposed, heart-felt.

The relationship is "Moralistic"

Contextual Factors:
Mediatization of politics and public discourse, categorization of migrants, fear of unknown, influence of Covid-19 pandemic in shaping a sense of social and shared responsibility, Russian invasion had an impact also on European economy, wide mediatic coverage of the war events, influence of social media: war experiences and consequences were documented and widely shared on these platforms, geographical and cultural closeness, it's easier to empathize with someone who looks more similar to us and more familiar, in terms of appearance, culture, values, Russian invasion as a war at the door of Europe: "Europe cannot look away", the cause of fleeing is evident and has a "face".

Mediterranean Refugee Crisis

Product Qualities:
Complex, fragmented, hermetic/distant, supportive but cautious, political, polarized, reactive.

Interaction Qualities:
Undesirable, indirect, like a political choice, avoidable, cautious, welcoming with an effort.

The relationship is "Alarmist"

Contextual Factors:
Mediatization of politics and public discourse, categorization of migrants, fear of unknown, terroristic attacks, European fragmentation. mediatic coverage of cherry picked events, perceived cultural distance, it's easier to empathize with someone who looks more similar to us and more familiar, in terms of appearance, culture, values, economic disadvantage of poor countries, 'othering'.

Understanding the present context: An Ideology Dependent System

As we compare the results of the deconstruction of the system of instruments provided to citizens to deal with immigration, we notice that although the system remains unchanged, its qualities differ significantly.
Depending on who the migrant is, the interaction is directed in a certain way, which has a particular impact on how European citizens relate to migration.
The interaction shifts from being 'moralistic' in the case of the Ukrainian crisis to being 'alarmist' in the case of the Mediterranean crisis.

This led me to ask myself an important question: How can these two situations be so different when they involve not only the same system of institutional actors and services, but also the same addressee (a refugee) at least in theoretical terms?
A number of contextual factors appear to be critical enough to alter the qualities of the system and its impact, shaping a 'selective and ideological' relationship between European citizens and migration.

A number of contextual factors appear to be critical enough to alter the qualities of the system and its impact, shaping a 'Selective and Ideological' relationship between European citizens and migration.

2 where

public inertia

This chapter reports on the results of the initial steps of the design phase. Here, the future is envisioned by structuring the driving forces within the domain of "the relationship between European society and immigration in 2040." The future depicted is one shaped by public inertia, used as a political strategy to address immigration; and by emotional detachment, the social atmosphere in which European society finds itself immersed.

STRUCTURING THE FUTURE

social detachment

Designing

The ViP method aims to understand what the future may be, in order to enable a meaningful design intervention. Since design is always context-dependent, it is important to begin shaping the future by identifying the conditions that will influence it and then uncovering how these conditions relate to one another. In doing so, we must observe without value judgment.

Domain

The Domain definition consists of a description of the area in which the designer aims to make a contribution. The Domain guides the assessment of the observations and considerations that need to be taken into account during the design phase. It should function as a 'lens' through which the designer observes the world. The formulation of the Domain should be open enough to allow for exploration of what the future could look like.
Moreover, the definition of the Domain sets the time horizon for which the designer is going to design.(Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011).

Context Factors

The Future context is constructed of "building blocks", the context factors. The factors are observations, thoughts, theories, laws, considerations, beliefs or opinions. They are value-free descriptions of the world phenomena as they appear to the designer. (Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011)

Context factors are divided in four types:
Developments: phenomena that are currently changing or expected to change in the near future and are quantifiable.
Trends: changes in tendencies in the behaviour, values or preferences of people in the near future.
Principles: immutable laws or general patterns that can be found in human beings or nature.
States: a surrounding world condition that will probably not change in the near future.

Moreover, factors are collected from various fields of expertise that relate more or less directly to the domain.

Clusters

To build the Future Context, the collected context factors must be transformed into a unified whole, a coherent structure that explains how the individual elements are interconnected (Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011).
This coherent structure is developed in two steps. First, the factors are grouped into overarching clusters. These clusters represent the driving forces of the future context; they emerge from the connections among the various context factors. Each cluster reveals something significant about the future.
Once the driving forces are defined, they are organized into a framework that represents the Future Context.

Context Structure

The second step in building the Future Context is to organize the clusters into a framework that transforms them into a coherent structure, representing a unified whole. The framework is constructed by identifying relationships between clusters.
During this step of the ViP method, the designer develops a clear, judgment-free understanding of the future world (Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011).

designing

future context

1. domain/time
2. context factors
3. context structure
4. statement

context level

interaction

interaction level

new product

product level

"THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EUROPEAN SOCIETY AND IMMIGRATION IN 2040".

The following breakdown of the domain aims to provide clarity on how every component was intended in this project, as each part of the sentence carries different meanings and interpretations.

Immigration

Refers to the inflow of people from non-European countries into Europe, for diverse reasons and with varying goals.

European society

Is understood as a broad term that encompasses European citizens as a collective, along with their social structures, institutions, and culture.

Relationship

Refers to how European society relates to migration—how it is perceived, evaluated, and engaged with.

Domain

"The relationship between European society and immigration in 2040" is the area where this project aims to make a contribution.

As highlighted through desk research and the deconstruction phase, the relationship between European society and migration is multilayered. It results from a complex system of instruments made available to the population to engage with migration.

The selected time horizon is 15 years into the future. This choice reflects the typically slow pace of change within the policy realm. Since the focus of the project is on policymaking, it is essential to consider timing when envisioning the future context in which the design will be implemented.

The Future Context
Building Blocks

The construction of the future context begins with analyzing and understanding the conditions that will drive it, researching them within the chosen domain.

For this project, 148 context factors were gathered through desk research, readings, and conversations with peers and with an expert in the field of migration.
These factors come from multiple disciplines, such as sociology, political science, economics, and demography.
The "building blocks" were collected based on their relevance within the domain, personal interest, and their potential to shape the future context, and consequently, the design intervention.

A complete list of the context factors can be found in the appendix A.

9 Framing is the way we understand a (policy) problem.

Policymakers exercise power to generate one particular understanding at expenses of others through selective presentation of facts coupled with emotional appeals. Power also relates to political agendas setting.

States - Policy

(Policy Concepts in 1000 Words: Framing, 2016)

88 The quality of life for Europeans will increasingly depend on where exactly they live.

By 2050, the EU's level of urbanisation will increase to almost 84 %. At the same time, various parts of Europe will be increasingly difficult or even impossible to live in due to water stress, extreme weather or heat.

Development - Demography

(European Parliament et al., 2024)

Emerging Patterns

Context factors, when considered individually, are not sufficient to shape the future context. To build the future, it is essential to uncover the relationships among these building blocks and to highlight the emerging patterns that connect the analyzed conditions.

In this project, the context factors have been grouped into 14 clusters. In the following section, each cluster will be presented with a title and a summarizing narrative.
A more detailed description of the connections between the factors can be found in the appendix B.

1

Fearism, fed by dehumanizing narratives, prevents social contact with the 'other', reinforcing the Eurocentric vision that offers support for those who are seen as similar, hence deserving.

Fearism is a framework that shapes social engagement and identity building. A diffuse fear of the 'other' prevents social contact with groups perceived as different from one's own, leading to social closure and a protective stance.

Due to this lack of contact, prejudices arise, fueling stereotypes and widening the distance between one's own group and the 'other.' Moreover, the process of othering can lead to dehumanization. When we fail to consider and acknowledge other ways of thinking, we deny the intellectual validity of the 'other.'

This tendency is reinforced by the Eurocentric perspective embedded within European society.

Narratives play a central role in determining whether the 'other' is perceived as human or non-human, as storytelling has the power to build, or deny, empathy in its audience.

A direct consequence of dehumanization is the withholding of compassion and support. Those perceived as non-human are not considered deserving of moral treatment.

1, 3, 36, 46, 49, 58, 59, 65, 66, 95, 146

2

Political participation is a mechanism for articulating interests and shaping policy decisions. However, the future of democratic representation has to deal with growing disengagement with traditional politics.

Political participation is the most effective mechanism for articulating interests and monitoring the actions of decision-makers. Consequently, limitations on political participation impose constraints on democratic governance.

Diverging trends are associated with this principle. On one hand, technology can enhance transparency in policymaking and make democracy more accessible. Increased engagement in civic activities and a widespread sense of responsibility lead to more representative and responsive governments,

thereby boosting trust in institutions and creating a positive feedback loop of trust.

On the other hand, during times of hardship, democratic governance is often questioned. Among disadvantaged or disaffected groups, limited engagement with democratic processes can lead to a vicious cycle of misrepresentation and further disengagement.

Additionally, the youth population is increasingly turning away from traditional politics and institutional structures, displaying a growing disinterest in participating as representatives of the broader society.

17, 23, 24, 30, 32, 33, 39, 43, 57, 60, 74, 92, 105

3

The digital public sphere increasingly becomes a space of division rather than dialogue. The constant exposure to reaffirming content within ideological bubbles strengthens users' existing beliefs, narrowing their perspective and making common ground harder to find.

Online media allow for widespread sharing of opinions. A large portion of the youth population uses online platforms to express their views on political and cultural topics.

Moreover, political content is increasingly taking on entertainment-oriented formats, making it ubiquitous and easily accessible.

As a result, we witness a rich expression of political opinions. However, social media users often end up in like-minded bubbles, where they are exposed to a narrowed perspective on the issues discussed. These bubbles function as echo chambers, where users easily find content that resonates with their interests.

Although there is a high level of expression within these bubbles, dialogue between them is rare. The consequences are evident in the growing polarization among the youth population, where the male segment is becoming increasingly conservative, in contrast to a more liberal female segment.

A key consequence of such ideological polarization is the risk that one viewpoint prevails over the other, especially as certain groups hold dominant positions in society.

6, 28, 45, 87, 93, 102

4

When societal transformations, perceived competition, and the fear of the unknown intersect, they can generate a hostile social climate.

According to competition theory, in times of economic hardship and rapid societal change, people are more likely to perceive culturally different groups as threats, especially when competing for limited resources.

Europe is currently undergoing major changes in various fields (such as demography, the environment, the labour market, and culture) that are reshaping society in the long run. These transformations are experienced by people through early signs in their everyday lives, sometimes creating a sense of displacement.

Fear of the unknown -which is a natural part of human psychology - arises from a lack of information or uncertainty. It can be intensified by stereotypes and a lack of contact, creating a feedback loop that reinforces social divisions.

The combination of these transformations and the perception of competition contributes to a growing climate of hostility and exclusion within the European Union.

37, 47, 51, 85, 115, 124, 125, 133, 136

5

Openness and tolerance are fostered by increased social contact resulting from a growing area of freedom, urbanization, and multilingualism. Yet, individuals often feel emotionally and socially disconnected.

The expansion of the European Union means not only an enlarged area of freedom of movement, but also one where the principles of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion are embraced, fostering a rich circulation of diverse cultures and beliefs.

Continuing urbanization adds to this dynamic, bringing more and more people to live in cities and increasing their exposure to social contact with diverse groups. Social contact, as expressed by contact hypothesis theory, can lead to cohesion and tolerance, thereby boosting societal development.

The rise in the number of people speaking multiple languages in Europe supports this by breaking down the communication barriers that often prevent engagement with different cultures.

While these factors can help reduce hostility and strengthen trust and community, a paradox persists: despite growing urban proximity, many Europeans still experience loneliness, reflecting the isolating effects of modern mass society living in close quarters but within an atomized social structure.

14, 18, 22, 25, 38, 55, 67, 78, 89, 91, 100, 111, 135

6

Media play a central role in shaping the collective imaginary, heavily influencing how the public understands and interprets issues.

Media - such as information media, digital and social media, and cultural media - play a crucial role in shaping public perception and the collective imagination.

In Europe, media are closely connected to politics, serving as a platform for political debate and enabling it to reach the public.

Often, dominant discriminatory views are embedded within political and institutional systems, disadvantaging marginalized groups and normalizing social inequality. Media can therefore become a tool for perpetuating these entrenched biases.

Moreover, systemic problems are frequently obscured by oversimplified portrayals in the political discourse. Narratives surrounding these issues often spread skewed content and disinformation, creating a distorted and frequently one-sided perspective.

The prevalence of biased media content and the influence of negativity bias reinforce these distortions, making it difficult to address the root causes of sensitive issues.

50, 52, 53, 61, 64, 113, 142, 145, 147, 148

7

Economic inequality, environmental change, and migration are transforming Europe, highlighting tensions between material security and persistent social inequalities that impact well-being and opportunities.

In Europe, environmental and geographical conditions are changing, driving economic and social transformations. As a result, quality of life in Europe is becoming increasingly localized, contributing to growing inequality. This, in turn, can lead to a climate of tension and discontent, compounding non-negotiable factors - such as place of birth -that already influence living conditions.

Moreover, these changing external conditions are reshaping patterns of human mobility, both within Europe and from outside its borders.

Despite the growing challenges posed by global change, Europe remains an attractive destination for migrants, offering advantages - such as work-life balance, safety, and ease of travel - that represent significant privileges for those who lack such opportunities elsewhere.

Thanks to relatively strong material security, much of the European population is able to shift focus from material to non-material needs. This shift influences individual values and shapes how people experience and interpret the world.

16, 20, 21, 29, 42, 72, 73, 86, 88, 118, 129

8

European states tend to act opportunistically, using flexibility to preserve the status quo that benefits the current power structures and to avoid inconvenient responsibilities.

In a global context of high interconnectedness and interdependence between countries, where political and economic decisions in one state influence the course of action in others, European states increasingly rely on non-binding agreements to retain flexibility and protect national interests.

European countries often adopt opposing strategies to preserve the status quo, which benefits certain actors.

On one hand, they delegate and externalize inconvenient responsibilities; on the other, they re-centralize authority.

While soft-law tools are often framed as pragmatic solutions, particularly in times of crisis, they frequently serve to delay meaningful policy change and shift burdens away from states, thereby undermining solidarity and limiting the effectiveness of collective action.

8, 10, 12, 35, 62, 63, 76, 77, 106, 109, 123

9

Migration has always been a fundamental component of human development, yet its recognition in policy and public opinion often remains selective and utilitarian.

Migration is a multilayered and fundamental feature of humankind. It is driven by interconnected global forces such as climate change, inequality, and demographic shifts, many of which are rooted in historical processes. However, many dimensions of migration remain invisible or subtle and are often overlooked in the mainstream discourse on the topic.

While Europe relies on migration to counter population aging and support economic growth, public acceptance is often conditional and centered solely on economic utility.

This narrow perspective overlooks the deeper societal role of migration, resulting in ineffective policies and treating migrants as temporary resources rather than as full members of society.

Even within the economic sphere, migrants are frequently bound by legal contracts that place them in a precarious, emergency-like status, limiting their agency and access to social rights. The ability to participate in society is a powerful mechanism that shapes both inclusion and exclusion.

5, 27, 68, 71, 80, 81, 82, 83, 96, 110, 112, 114, 117, 121, 122, 134

10

Traditional institutions are collapsing in the face of global instability, giving rise to new, fluid forms of social organization.

We are living in a time of profound transformation, where both traditional and collective institutions—such as conventional politics, religious institutions, and social groups—are crumbling under the weight of global instability. Despite their authority, state governments often appear powerless or unwilling to respond effectively to crises, fueling a cycle of uncertainty in which they seem incapable of guaranteeing protection.

This instability is not only a reflection of failing systems but also a catalyst for change, opening up new possibilities and forms of collective organization. Boundaries are being reshaped—or erased altogether.

In a constantly shifting and interconnected reality, vulnerable to overlapping forces such as globalization and technological progress, society increasingly demands fluid and adaptable structures that reflect the flexibility and impermanence of our times.

2, 11, 44, 54, 78, 84, 90, 99, 103, 141, 144

11

Moralization in European politics leads to polarization, intolerance and difficulty to compromise, deviating the attention from pressing systemic issues.

In Europe, public discourse around controversial topics often deflects attention from systemic issues by scapegoating or redirecting public focus to an easily identifiable "issue."

European political discourse is increasingly moralized, drawing on ideological beliefs justified by narratives that frame tradition as something under threat and in need of protection from change. These narratives generate a sense of danger, prompting reactions of closure and hostility toward perceived "others."

Political identity and belonging are progressively shaped through moralized contrasts with those seen as outsiders, leading to polarization, intolerance, and a diminished capacity for compromise, as political actors increasingly fail to consider opposing perspectives.

European identity itself is often constructed in opposition to non-European "others," reinforcing internal divisions even as political groups selectively invoke shared notions of Europeanism.

13, 15, 26, 40, 48, 75, 97, 120, 137, 138, 139, 143

12

Rhetoric and framing shape public perception and political agendas on controversial issues, amplified by global media and emotional appeals.

Public support for controversial policies is heavily influenced by rhetoric, which shapes how people perceive issues. Even objective facts are often framed to elicit emotional responses and secure public support. Politicized elements, when presented through strong rhetoric, can achieve political gains at the expense of balanced and constructive dialogue.

Policymakers use framing to cultivate a specific understanding of a situation, thereby shaping political agendas accordingly.

In today's interconnected media environment, where political content often overlaps with entertainment, competing narratives amplify the persuasive power of rhetoric and contribute to growing polarization.

While the EU upholds freedom of expression and media pluralism, the way information is framed and presented remains a crucial factor in shaping public opinion and influencing political decision-making.

4, 7, 9, 34, 41, 56, 69, 94, 101, 116, 140

13

Culturally and emotionally charged artificial constructions are used to shape reactions to sensitive topics, creating urgency and polarization.

Societal reactions to sensitive issues are shaped by cultural norms, beliefs, and artificial constructs that often go unquestioned.
In European society, Eurocentrism plays a key role in shaping public perception by promoting European values as inherently superior. These deeply embedded constructs enable politicians to exploit emotional appeals, polarize discourse, and manipulate public sentiment for political gain.

However, when these constructs begin to falter - recognized not as absolute or natural, but as relative and socially constructed - they become problematic, triggering public concern.
Such issues are often exploited in political propaganda to attract support. While urgent rhetoric is common in pre-election campaigns, it frequently fails to translate into meaningful political action once elections are over.

66, 70, 79, 98, 104, 107, 108, 130, 131, 132

14

Personal experience shapes individual understandings of the world, leading people to reconsider their convictions.

Direct personal experience of the world shapes individuals' meanings and ideas and it is able to change the relevance of or reconsider the collective ideas embedded in individuals' mind. Convictions are not immutable. Even though deeply rooted in a society's cultural sphere, convictions can be changed.
Personal experience of reality can support this process, as it enables individuals to distance themselves from collective ideas and develop a critical evaluation of their experiences.

119,127,128

Structuring the Future Context

Once the emerging patterns among context factors were uncovered and illustrated in the clusters, the following step was to structure them into a coherent whole, in the form of a framework.

The framework describing the future takes the form of a 3×3 matrix, in which the two axes represent fundamental dimensions shaping the future context.
These dimensions arise from overarching themes that emerge from the combination of driving forces. Each dimension is articulated through three qualities, which themselves result from the synthesis of other clusters.
The intersection of these qualities creates nine cells, each representing a possible situation within the future context.

The development of the framework followed an iterative and intuitive process. The process began with the definition of the axes of the framework, which represent the driving forces of the future context, the conditions that steer its direction and shape the other cells of the matrix. While creating the clusters, I already sensed that some appeared more influential than others. I therefore used these to define the first axis, and then examined each remaining cluster in turn to see whether and how it related to this axis. I repeated this process iteratively until I arrived at the most convincing structure.

During the elaboration of the clusters, several connections emerged, beginning to shape the fundamental conditions of the future context.

On one side, I identified a tension between Cluster 14, which highlights how personal experience shapes the understanding of the world, and Cluster 5, which describes the paradox between the openness promised by European conditions and the social and emotional detachment that is present. This, in turn, connects to Cluster 3, which explains how ideological bubbles reinforce the inability to create meaningful dialogue.

On the other side, a connection emerged between Clusters 11, 13, and 10, which focus on how morality and culturally or emotionally charged artificial constructions are used to divert attention from systemic issues, creating polarization and urgency, and on the collapse of traditional institutions in the face of instability and a fluid reality. Additionally, another important theme arose from the connection between Clusters 8 and 13, emphasizing polarization and the opportunistic preservation of the status quo adopted by European states.
From these connections, the framework depicts a future context within European society, driven by two fundamental dimensions: "Treating Immigration with Public Inertia" and "Emotionally Detached Society: High-Contact Avoiding Dialogue" .

Political Strategy

Treating Immigration with Public Inertia

Emotionally Detached Society

Social Atmosphere

Figure 3: The future context driving forces

The first driving force relates to European public, political, and societal structures. It refers to those invisible or semi-visible systems that are deeply entrenched in European society, embedded in its social fabric and cultural-historical heritage.

The second driving force relates to the social climate, how people behave and engage with each other, with groups, and with the events they encounter. It is closely tied to individuals, lying at the intersection of personal experience and broader societal phenomena.

Treating Immigration with Public Inertia

[Clusters 13 + 8] When it comes to immigration, the public and political spheres are held in a state of suspension.

As the phenomenon proves inconvenient for certain actors in the public arena, it becomes advantageous to maintain the status quo. This leads to a sustained sense of inertia.

The inertia surrounding immigration is built upon artificial constructs, culturally embedded and emotionally charged, that are deeply rooted in European society. These constructs are "artificial" in the sense that they are neither natural nor absolute. Yet, because they are ingrained within societal norms and narratives, they are difficult to unmask or even recognize.

At the political and legal level, European states often resort to non-binding agreements and soft laws, strategically using them to delegate responsibility or centralize control.

In this context, inertia manifests as a policy and political impasse

This dimension illustrates how European political structures manage immigration, shaping public response and constraining the possibility of action. The public is left in a state of passive anticipation, excluded from the opportunity to influence or redirect political developments.

Inertia is thus achieved through three political strategies: the utilitarian political framing of immigration, the processing of a fluid reality through rigid schemas, and the prevention of public influence.

A. The utilitarian political framing of immigration:

[Cluster 9] Migration is a multilayered phenomenon; however, many of its layers are perceived as problematic and remain invisible in public discourse, while the more convenient aspects (such as economic benefits) are selectively emphasized. Recognition of immigration is partial, and this partiality is maintained through policies and socio-legal frameworks.

Inertia is sustained through the utilitarian handling of migration's convenient and inconvenient dimensions, resulting in limited and fragmented recognition.

B. The processing a fluid reality through rigid schemas:

[Cluster 10] Europe is experiencing widespread instability, which is not only a reflection of failing institutional systems but also a catalyst for change driven by an increasingly fluid and dynamic reality. [Cluster 11] In contrast to this fluidity stands the inflexibility of moralized politics spreading across Europe. Morality is employed as a rigid framework for interpreting events, relying on fixed convictions that lead to polarization and hinder political action.

Inertia emerges from the inability to effectively process this fluid reality through rigid, moralized schemas.

C. The prevention of public's influence:

[Cluster 2] Political participation is the primary means of articulating interests and influencing the political agenda. While technology can make political participation more accessible, the population is increasingly disengaging from its traditional forms, thereby limiting its impact.

Inertia is sustained through the maintenance of conventional political structures, which no longer resonate with much of the population, leading to disengagement and, consequently, a diminished capacity to influence political outcomes.
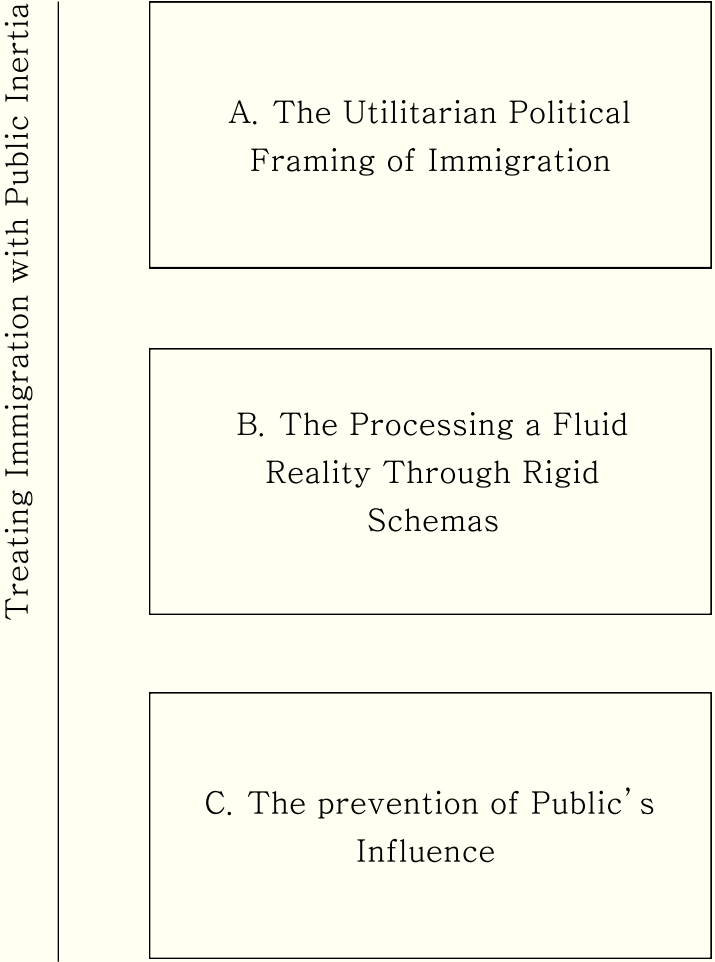
Treating Immigration with Public Inertia

A. The Utilitarian Political Framing of Immigration

B. The Processing a Fluid Reality Through Rigid Schemas

C. The prevention of Public's Influence

Figure 4: Axis composition

Emotionally Detached Society: High-Contact Avoiding a Dialogue

[Clusters 5 + 3] Society has widespread opportunities for contact but remains unable to engage in meaningful dialogue.

The contact hypothesis, supported by the European context, suggests that hostility decreases when social contact becomes more frequent. Openness is fostered by an expanding sphere of freedom, mobility, multilingualism, and ongoing urbanization within the European Union.

As a result of these favorable conditions, European society becomes more tolerant of diversity due to increased exposure. Yet, simultaneously, societal atomization leads to emotional isolation.

A similar tendency is evident in the digital public sphere. While everyone can share their opinions on digital platforms, these platforms often reinforce echo chambers of like-minded individuals, resulting in growing polarization. Thus, despite high exposure to diverse ideas, meaningful dialogue is lacking, and a common ground remains elusive.

This dynamic reflects the European social atmosphere in the future context, characterized by emotional detachment. An abundance of expression and exposure, including social contact, does not necessarily lead to genuine exchange or dialogue.
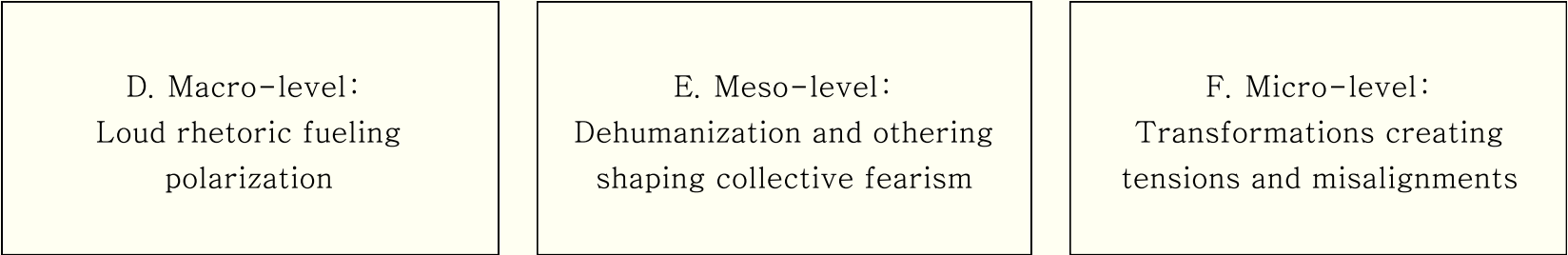
This atmosphere of emotional detachment is shaped in different ways by the three levels of society. The macro, meso, and micro levels each contribute distinctively to this fundamental dimension of Europe's future social context.

D. Macro-level: Loud rhetoric fueling polarization:

The macro-level encompasses EU-wide institutional actions, political discourses, cultural narratives, and structural conditions.

[Cluster 12] Rhetoric elicits emotional responses to certain elements, which in turn become politicized and fuel polarization. It helps create a particular understanding that stands in opposition to another, thereby denying the possibility of common ground. [Cluster 6] The media reinforce the effects of rhetoric by spreading skewed and partial content, perpetuating dominant and entrenched biases.

These forces operate on the macro level of society through social structures and institutions. They lead to emotional detachment because, while they strongly influence opinions, beliefs, and even political agendas, they also create rigid ideologies that make meaningful dialogue impossible.

E. Meso-level: Dehumanization and othering shaping collective fearism:

The meso-level includes institutional and group dynamics, the collective scale. [Cluster 1] Fearism is shaped by dehumanizing narratives and stereotypes, influencing, or even preventing, the way we engage with groups perceived as 'other'. [Cluster 4] It can be fueled by uncertainty brought about by societal transformation and perceived competition, which together create a sense of hostility.

These forces operate at the meso-level of society, influencing group and collective dynamics. As fear and suspicion often hinder social engagement, detachment emerges at the collective or group level. Groups, formed around a shared sense of identity and belonging, become reluctant to engage with those they perceive as 'other'.

F. Micro-level: Transformations creating tensions and misalignments:

The micro-level refers to the individual scale. [Cluster 7] Europe is undergoing extensive environmental and societal transformations that localize quality of life and create inequalities, resulting in social tension and discontent. These transformations are also reshaping living conditions, impacting opportunities and needs, and influencing individuals' values and personal meanings of life through a more or less non-material orientation.

[Cluster 14] Personal exposure to events influences how individuals experience the world and the meanings and ideas they develop about it. These ideas can differ from the cultural convictions embedded within society and may lead individuals to reconsider them. While transformations reshape individuals' living conditions and increase exposure to diversity, allowing for the development of new meanings and values, detachment is fostered by social tensions, discontent, and a misalignment between personal understanding and society's representations.

D. Macro-level: Loud rhetoric fueling polarization	E. Meso-level: Dehumanization and othering shaping collective fearism	F. Micro-level: Transformations creating tensions and misalignments

Emotionally Detached Society

Figure 5: Axis composition

Refining the Framework

The qualities describe what drives the future context and how it is structured. By crossing the horizontal axis with the vertical axis, the qualities generate nine cells that represent nine possible situations in the future context.

Each cell represents the result of the two qualities crossing, a narrative describes the situation manifestation and how citizens will react to it, creating the starting point to decide what the design intervention wants to achieve.

The description of the nine situations in the future context helped refine the framework, which in turn clarified the cells and informed the goals of my design interventions. Through this process, I defined the targets of each column and identified underlying motives in each row.

The nine cells are organized into three columns, corresponding to the three levels of society represented by the horizontal axis: Macro, Meso, and Micro. At the Macro-level, citizens are part of cultural and institutional structures that act top-down, shaping legal status, rights, responsibilities, and collective identity. These forces are often invisible yet enduring. At the Meso-level, citizens belong to collective groups that mediate between individuals and macro-systems, influencing daily life and personal development. At the Micro-level, citizens are considered as individuals, exercising and experiencing citizenship through personal values, beliefs, and identities.

Horizontally, the cells group into three rows, linked to strategies that maintain public inertia. The first row, "the utilitarian political framing of immigration," reflects understanding: immigration is complex, and its perception is shaped by political narratives. The second row, "the processing of a fluid reality through rigid schemas," reflects morality: rigid frameworks are employed to interpret instability. The third row, "the prevention of public influence," reflects civic responsibility: as politics becomes less responsive, active engagement in public life gains importance.

These underlying motives and structural targets provide a way to make sense of the complexity within the future context.

EUROPEAN CITIZENS AS PART OF/ AS:
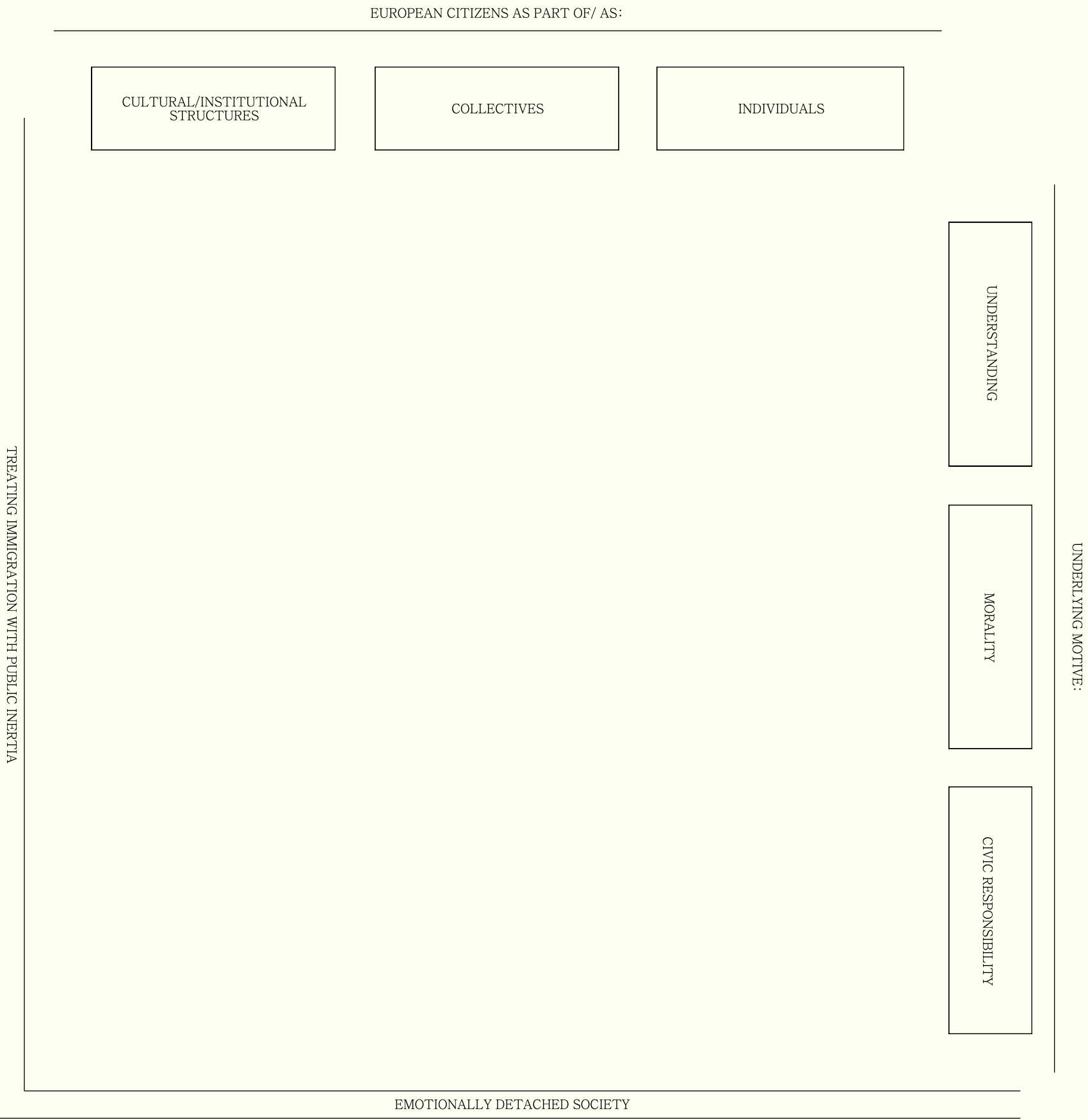
CULTURAL/INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

COLLECTIVES

INDIVIDUALS

TREATING IMMIGRATION WITH PUBLIC INERTIA

UNDERSTANDING

MORALITY

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

UNDERLYING MOTIVE:

EMOTIONALLY DETACHED SOCIETY

Figure 6: Framework detailing

CULTURAL/ INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

COLLECTIVES

INDIVIDUAL HUMAN

UNDERSTANDING

MORALITY

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

UNDERLYING MOTIVE :

TREATING IMMIGRATION WITH PUBLIC INERTIA

EMOTIONALLY DETACHED SOCIETY

1 2 3

4 5 6

7 8 9

A. THE UTILITARIAN POLITICAL FRAMING OF IMMIGRATION

B. THE PROCESSING OF A FLUID REALITY THROUGH RIGID SCHEMAS

C. THE PREVENTION OF PUBLIC INFLUENCE

D. MACRO-LEVEL: LOUD RETHORIC FUELING POLARIZATION

E. MESO-LEVEL: DEHUMANIZATION AND OTHERING SHAPING COLLECTIVE FEARISM

F. MICRO-LEVEL: TRANSFORMATIONS CREATING TENSIONS AND MISALIGNMENT

8. European states tend to act opportunistically, using flexibility to preserve the status quo that benefit the current power structures and to avoid inconvenient responsibilities.

13. Culturally and emotionally charged artificial constructions are used to shape reactions to sensitive topics, creating urgency and polarization.

9. Migration has always been a fundamental component of human development, yet its recognition in policy and public opinion often remains selective and utilitarian.

11. Moralization in European politics leads to polarization, intolerance and difficulty to compromise, deviating the attention from pressing systemic issues.

10. Traditional institutions are collapsing in the face of global instability, giving rise to new, fluid forms of social organization.

2. The importance of political participation and an increasing distance from traditional forms of politics.

12. Rhetoric and framing shape public perception and political agendas on controversial issues, amplified by global media and emotional appeals.

6. Media play a central role in shaping the collective imaginary, heavily influencing how the public understands and interprets issues.

1. Fearism, fed by dehumanizing narratives, prevents social contact with the 'other', reinforcing the Eurocentric vision that offers support for those who are seen as similar, hence deserving.

4. When societal transformations, perceived competition, and the fear of the unknown intersect, they can generate a hostile social climate.

7. Economic inequality, environmental change, and migration are transforming Europe, highlighting tensions between material security and persistent social inequalities that impact well-being and opportunities.

14. Personal exposure shapes individual understandings of the world, leading people to reconsider their convictions.

5. Openness and tolerance are fostered by increased social contact resulting from a growing area of freedom, urbanization, and multilingualism. Yet, individuals often feel emotionally and socially disconnected.

3. The digital public sphere increasingly becomes a space of division rather than dialogue. The constant exposure to reaffirming content within ideological bubbles strengthens users' existing beliefs, narrowing their perspective and making common ground harder to find.
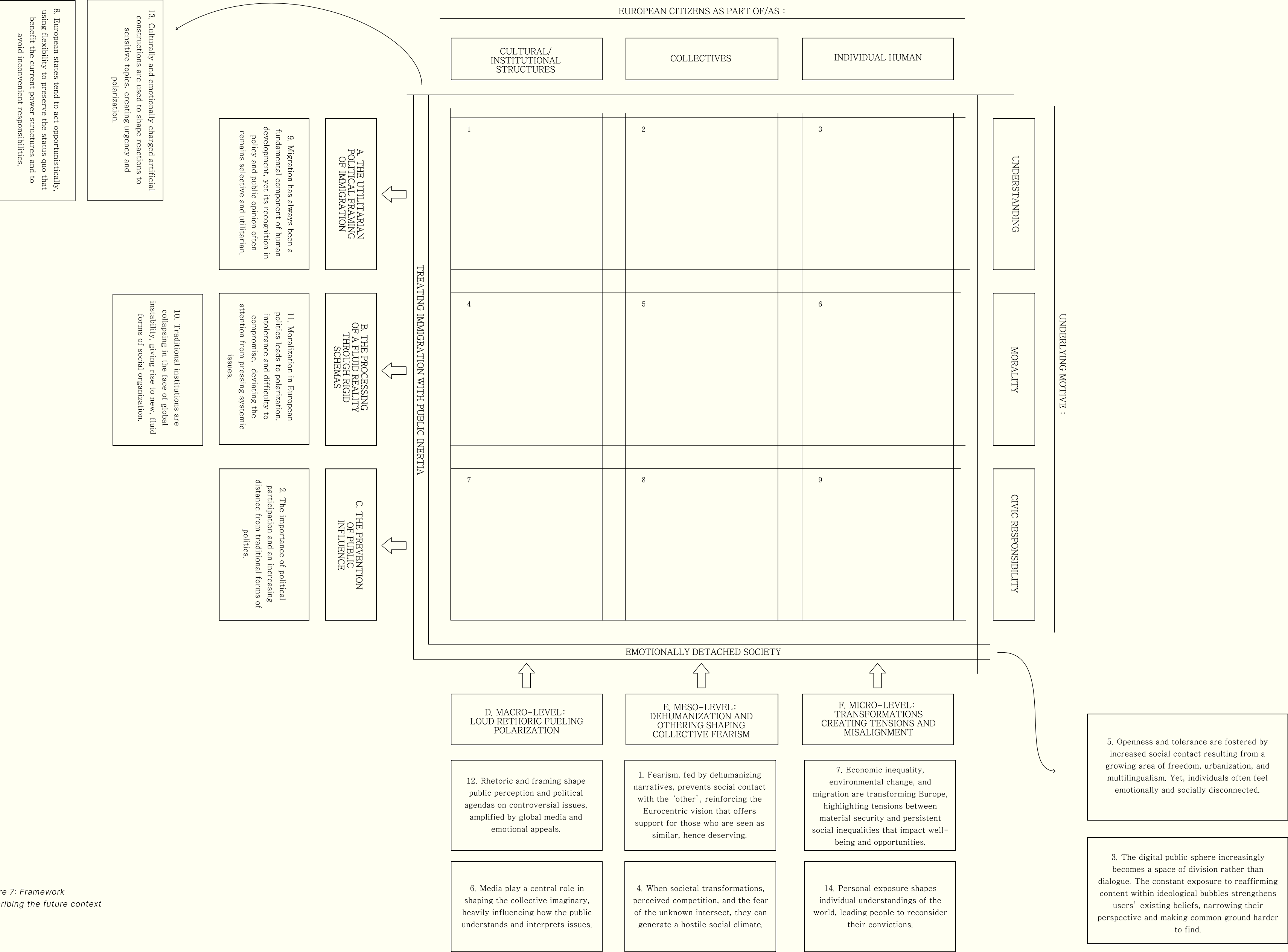
Figure 7: Framework describing the future context

DESIGNING FOR A FUTURE DRIVEN BY PUBLIC INERTIA AND SOCIAL DETACHMENT

Contributing Through Design

The framework depicts a future context in which the relationship between European society and immigration is shaped by two major forces: the institutional and political structure, rooted in historical heritage and geopolitical governance, and a socially detached climate where people face rapid change, instability, diversity, and high connectivity but struggle to make sense of it or engage in meaningful dialogue.

What happens when these two forces intersect? Conditions for impasse emerge. The axes reinforce each other: loud rhetoric, skewed morality, and opportunistic delegation of responsibility fuel atomization, polarization, fear, disinterest, and discontent. In turn, how can superficiality, uncertainty, fearism, and resignation enable citizens to relate differently to immigration if institutional and cultural structures fail to support them?

At this point, a question arose: Given this future context, how can we design to create a new relationship between European society and immigration? And on a personal level, how and where do I want to contribute as a designer in shaping this new relationship?

The answer emerged during the next steps of the method, while exploring the nine situations defined by the framework.
While describing these situations, I realized that to foster a new relationship between European society and immigration, within a context where immigration is treated with public inertia and society remains detached and unable to dialogue, we need to act on European citizens first. We must design to make them critical and responsible, providing tools and support to help them find their own direction and feel confident enough to navigate the uncertainty and novelty that migration, like all societal changes, naturally brings.

public inertia

This chapter is dedicated to unveiling the future by unfolding nine meanings. Nine future situations are presented, each of which informs both the goals of the corresponding design interventions and the design idea through which those goals are pursued. Taken together, the nine future meanings represent a shift in perspective, enabling a meaningful step forward in the future relationship between European society and immigration.
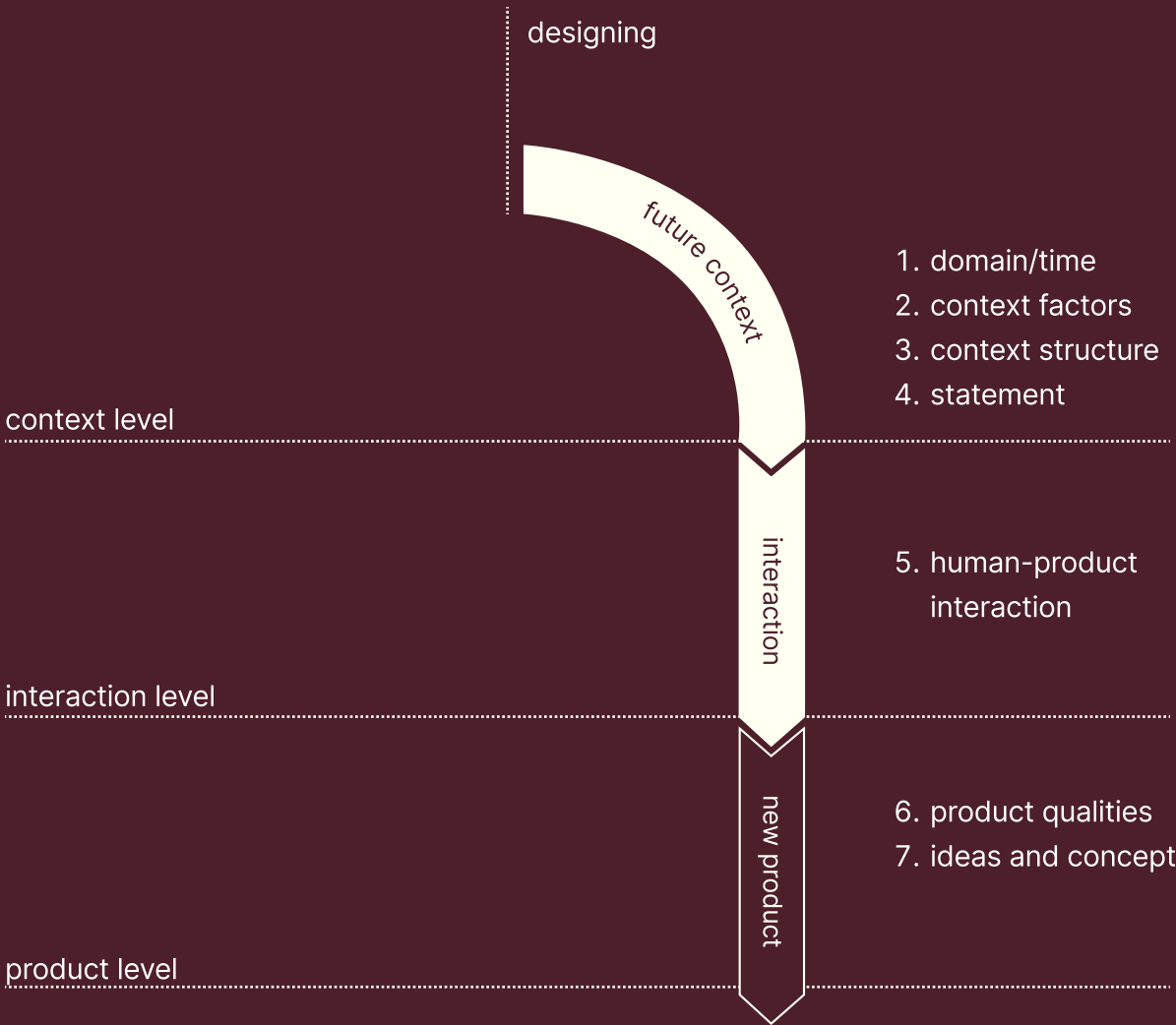
UNRAVELING THE FUTURE

social detachment

Future Meanings

As mentioned above, nine future situations arise from the intersection of the axes' qualities, serving as the starting point for the designer to define the goal of his or her design.

The design goal is expressed in the form of a statement, in which the designer clearly states his or her intentions. When using the ViP method, up until this step of the process, by formulating the context factors and building the future context, the designer makes choices that reflect his or her personal way of looking at the world, while possibly avoiding judgment or taking a moral position. With the statement, the designer defines how her or his response to the future he or she envisioned should be (Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011). The statement is highly personal and represents the designer positioning her, or himself and his or her work within the defined future context.

The next step in the ViP method aims to define what kind of relationship will lead to the goal set with the statement, in a specific context.

Defining the relationship between the user and the design intervention, without specifying what it is, allows the designer to understand how the design will fit the context. To do so, an analogy describing the same situation in another domain is developed. Moreover, the analogy allows designers to extract the qualities that the design intervention needs to have. To elicit the defined interaction, the design intervention must possess specific qualities, which can be identified by analyzing the means used in the situation described in the analogy.

In the ViP method, concepting is regarded as the translation of the designer's vision, encompassing the statement, analogy, and product qualities, into a concept idea that describes the type of outcome to be designed and what it can achieve. The concept is not yet the final manifestation of the design intervention but rather addresses various aspects of it in an initial, exploratory way. (Hekkert & Van Dijk, 2011).

designing

future context

context level

1. domain/time
2. context factors
3. context structure
4. statement

interaction

5. human–product interaction

interaction level

new product

6. product qualities
7. ideas and concept

product level

DESIGNING TO MAKE EUROPEAN CITIZENS CRITICAL AND RESPONSIBLE.

Unraveling the Future

The following section illustrates nine meanings of the future. These meanings, through which the future unfolds, derive from nine possible situations and the results of the subsequent steps of the method as applied to each of them.

Each situation is explained through a narrative, followed by the statement, the analogy, and the derived product qualities. To conclude, a concept for a possible intervention is presented in a paragraph.
The concept, which is the outcome of the ideation process, represents a possible design intervention aimed at achieving the goal expressed in the statement and is informed by the qualities defined through the analogy. Each situation and statement could lead to many different interventions; therefore, the concepts presented here should be considered as examples of possible directions.

The framework helped me understand what the future will be, laying the foundations for creating meaningful design interventions that can address the complex relationship between European society and immigration, while creating value for both people and institutions.

The nine meanings arise from an objective, judgment-free understanding, and are then developed through value-driven design interventions. In fact, the statement portrays the future as I ought it to be, rooted in how I position myself both as a designer and as a person.

To grasp the value of these nine meanings, it is essential to see them as nine sub-goals which, when combined, contribute to achieving the desired future.

1

Blind acceptance of policy representations and negative dominant communication undermines citizens' understanding of immigration.

The gap between convenient and inconvenient layers of immigration will widen. Convenient layers will be maximized: policies will focus on making the most out of immigration. How? By treating immigration as an asset, valued solely for its economic contribution. On the other hand, inconvenient layers will be kept hidden or will be portrayed through negative lenses, maintaining a distance from the convenient ones. In this case, rhetoric and media will play a key role.

We will see how different layers of immigration will be processed by different institutional structures. Indeed, due to the push to maximize the convenient layers, these will be handled within the policy arena. The processing will be objective.

Meanwhile, the inconvenient layers will be processed through public discourse and media, turning them into subjects of heated political debate and embedding dominant views within the broader structures of society. This processing will be emotional.

Consequences:

From this perspective, immigration will appear as multiple, fragmented phenomena. There will be no comprehensive or unified picture of it. Citizens will get detached by the convenient layers of immigration as they will be kept in the policy arena. But they will be exposed to the inconvenient layers that will mostly be filtered through negative and alarmist lenses by media, which use emotional appeals to communicate.

How will citizens react? European citizens will more easily accept the convenient layers. That sphere will be kept at a distance and relegated to the policy/governance area: it's regulated and it's convenient, so there is no need to deepen the topic or to intervene. These layers will be separated from the understanding of the inconvenient ones.

On the other hand citizens will develop an emotional understanding of the inconvenient layers, related to the narrative they decide to listen to. These layers will be central in the public-political arena, therefore will be related to the citizenship sphere, with its rights, duties and instruments.

Citizens will exercise their rights and feel responsible for fulfilling their duties, but they will be driven by emotional reasons. Citizens action will be mostly reactive and protective, as the dominant view on the topic is alarmist.

Leverage Points:
Acceptance of convenient layers, citizens' sense of responsibility.

I WANT CITIZENS TO EXPAND THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF IMMIGRATION BY BECOMING AWARE OF ITS MULTIPLE LAYERS, HELPING THEM EXPLORE THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THESE LAYERS AND SHOWING HOW THEY RELATE TO THEIR CIVIC SPHERE.

When you buy a product at the supermarket and you check the ingredient list on the label, you learn about the composition of the product and you might need to look for information to understand what some ingredients are.

- **Official, Complicated, Extensive, Checked, Trustworthy.**

IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL INFORMATION WEBSITE

The concept consists of an official website where the multiple layers of immigration are explained extensively. Each theme is explored through the connections between layers, illustrating news, official data, regulations, and practical implications.

The website is developed by an external, independent body and draws on the work of existing organizations researching and investigating immigration, policies, and integration. The body in charge of the website is politically independent and composed of experts from different fields, including policy, immigration research, economics, journalism, and others.

The website aims to provide citizens with an official and verified extensive overview of immigration, allowing them to explore the topic in depth. This exploration is made accessible through a combination of visual tools (e.g., journey maps, value maps, infographics) and practical examples, such as case studies, to ground the information in reality. Accessible language is also key.

2

A utilitarian approach to immigration leads to interactions that are either avoidant or purely instrumental.

Engagement with immigration will be instrumental, not reaching a human connection which is differently reached in the own identity groups.

Engagement with immigration will become increasingly fragmented and utilitarian. In different contexts, social groups will engage with immigration in varying ways. This means that the very same group of people will choose to engage, or not engage, with another group depending on their perceived "usefulness" within a given context.

This tendency will reinforce the atomization of groups, which will interact only in instrumental terms, avoiding deeper human connections with those perceived as outside their own social bubble. As a result, hostility and suspicion between groups will increase, hindering the development of society.

Consequences:
Engagement with immigration will happen within the convenient layers' context shaped by policies and stereotypes. It will remain instrumental , failing to foster genuine human connections, which will instead be confined to interactions within one's own group, bound together by a shared identity. Communities will perceive and understand outer groups as extraneous, treating them with suspicion.

So, understanding of immigration will be fragmented, arising from partial engagement coming from an instrumental relation with convenient layers and a lack of connection with inconvenient layers, prevented by collective fear.

How will communities react?
Communities will develop a dual reaction to immigration. On one side, within the inconvenient layers of immigration, they will close up and seek refuge within their own identity group, developing a specific othered identity for the immigrant group, and avoiding contact with it. On the other, they will develop a instrumental-neutral relation (neutral in the sense that it's not questioned neither deepen) based on convenience.

Leverage Points:
Meeting points offered by convenient relations.

I WANT COMMUNITIES TO RESHAPE IDENTITY BOUNDARIES BY EXPANDING AND ADDING NUANCE TO THE CONVENIENT LAYERS OF IMMIGRATION THROUGH A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR IMPORTANCE IN SHAPING SOCIETY'S EVERYDAY LIFE.

When you stop by to observe a building on your way to work. You read the plaque you discover it was a shelter during WWII, so your consideration of it changes because you see its importance in your history.

- Eyeopener, Transformative, Attentive, Informational, Reflective .

VIDEO IMMIGRATION IMPACT ON EUROPEAN SOCIETY

The concept consists of a video that tells the story of immigration's impact on daily life and its role in shaping European society. It begins with convenient relations connected to superficially accepted layers of immigration and then dives deeper into how these layers influence society. This exploration reveals touchpoints with European citizens, encouraging them to reconsider the significance of immigration, not only in everyday life but also in enabling European society to be what it is today.

The video will center on the story of a product manufactured by immigrants. Initially, it will present the product's value and use, followed by the story behind its production. It may also illustrate what the product, and, by extension, society,would look like without immigrant contributions.

One example could feature Italian leather, a symbol of national identity and renowned craftsmanship, revealing the immigrant workers in tanneries who make this industry possible, and exploring what would happen without their labor.

3

The instrumental use of immigration lies outside the realm of citizenhood.

Immigration will be limited to the context related to its convenient layers, regulated by policies and socio-legal frameworks. It's representations and explanations will be partial and fragmented, focused on convenient layers that will be used with utilitarian/instrumental goals, serving material needs of society.
At the same time, European society will face the implications of mayor environmental-societal changes, experiencing inequalities, tensions and discontent, which will lead to social detachment.
Therefore, individual citizens are not enabled to develop a personal non-materialistic meaning of immigration as their personal exposure will be limited by social detachment and confined to utilitarian interactions.

Consequences:
Individual citizens will fail to see and engage with the inconvenient layers of immigration (such as cultural diversity) in the sphere of citizenship. They wil also fail to reflect on and develop a personal meaning of immigration through non-materialistic lenses.
How will individual citizens react?
They will stick to societal/institutional representations- sense making of immigration, without seeing the connection with their personhood and citizenship, failing to attribute themselves with a role in society in relation with immigration.

Leverage Points:
Non-materialistic lenses.

Statement

I WANT EUROPEAN CITIZENS TO UNCOVER THE HIDDEN LAYERS OF IMMIGRATION THROUGH NON-MATERIALISTIC LENSES BY EDUCATING AND GUIDING THEM TOWARD A BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH IMMIGRATION.

Qualities - Analogy

Becoming vegetarian and following the recipes of a famous chef's cookbook to discover how to cook and be vegetarian making the best out of it. By following the recipes you discover new ingredients, flavors, preparations.

- **Esteemed, Accessible, Explanatory, Extensive, Pragmatic.**

IMMIGRATION WORKBOOK

The concept consists of an online platform that provides citizens with information and guidelines on immigration, showing them how to build a relationship with immigration that is meaningful and rooted in their personal experiences and values.

The platform takes the form of a workbook, curated by a body of migration experts. It publishes information and detailed studies through diverse media formats, such as videos, articles, and illustrations, and combines them with guidelines and exercises that demonstrate practical implications. Citizens can explore their relationship with immigration through these activities and provide feedback on their experience and the type of relationship they find most fitting. This feedback can then be used to develop additional guidelines and serve as a starting point for future research and developments.

The workbook aims to raise awareness of inconvenient layers of immigration and help citizens attribute personal meaning to the phenomenon, ultimately encouraging them to position themselves in relation to immigration within society. For this reason, the concept is composed of a series of diverse activities.

4

Surreal interpretations justify political inaction.

Immigration will be analyzed and interpreted through moral lenses, leading to increasingly rigid and polarized views that diverge from reality, which is dynamic and multifaceted. These interpretations, made appealing through rhetoric, will be adopted in political discourse and amplified by the media, eventually becoming embedded in societal convictions. However, because they are disconnected from actual conditions and highly polarized, political discourse will fail to establish common ground and will serve primarily to justify growing inaction - or the absence of meaningful action - on immigration issues.

Absence of action includes lack of instruments that support citizens in relating with immigration.

Consequences:

At the macro-level of society, understanding of immigration will become surreal and strongly related to the chosen morality.

Understanding will be created through convictions that are detached from the reality. Citizens will find themselves in between polars, facing representations of immigration that do not reflect the reality, therefore hard to truly understand. Yet they will be captured by the morality that resonate with their values. Justified political inaction, will reflect in fading of the political sense within citizens. In fact, morality differs from political responsibility, as the first is related to the private or universal sphere (e.g. what is right or wrong) whereas, the latter is public and institutionalized.

How will citizens react? Citizens will develop a surreal understanding of immigration, they will adhere to one of the polar, embrace that morality and become intolerant toward the other. Their reaction will be driven by morality, there will be no sense of political responsibility toward it. This will result in blind acceptance of the (in)action supported by the political polar opposite they chose, and detachment from reality.

Leverage Points:

Clash between moralized politics and reality.

I WANT CITIZENS TO RECOGNIZE AND QUESTION POLITICAL INACTION AROUND IMMIGRATION BY DRAWING A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN MORALITY AND POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY, HIGHLIGHTING THE CLASHES BETWEEN MORALIZED DISCOURSE AND WHAT IS ACTUALLY ACHIEVED IN PRACTICE.

Reading a magic realism novel, in which you distinguish fiction from reality by recognizing the magic elements. When it make sense within the story, but you're doubting if it's really happened and then you see some magic elements that make clear the distinction between what's real and what's not.

- Immersive, Engaging, Sly/cunning (clever in a sneaky or manipulative way).

SCENARIO BUILDING POLITICAL INACTION

The concept consists of a scenario-building activity designed to reveal political inaction as a consequence of the moralization of politics. Scenario building is a technique used to project potential futures based on a set of information and logical assumptions (Fahey & Randall, 1998).

In this case, the starting point of the scenario will be the moralized discourse surrounding immigration. The scenario will illustrate how the future might look if all political promises were fully implemented. The outcome is intended to provoke reflection, highlighting the differences between moralized representations and reality, and explaining why these gaps exist.

The activity is both engaging and provocative, helping citizens develop critical thinking skills. Additionally, it could serve as a practical tool in politics to evaluate the current political course. Traditionally, scenario-building is used to prepare strategies for possible future situations; in this exercise, the methodology is applied in reverse, starting from moralized expectations to analyze their implications for reality.

5

Moralized politics fuel fearism between communities.

Morality will be used to cope with instability, reinforcing fear and identity as primary frameworks for communities to engage with the groups perceived as 'other.'

Political discourse around immigration across Europe will increasingly rely on rigid moral narratives that offer a sense of certainty, yet fail to capture its complexity and consequential societal transformation, ultimately fostering polarization and hindering meaningful political action.

In this context, politics will focus on preserving rigid structures by fueling fearism which limits social engagement, leads to widespread emotional detachment and deeper social fragmentation across European societies.

Consequences:

Rigid moralized representation of immigration are appealing for people because they offer a sense of certainty that help them to cope the incertitude brought by immigration - an all the other societal-global changes. However, these representations results partials and unable to capture some of the layers of immigration, unleashing fearism as framework of engagement with others.

How will communities react?

Due to fearism, communities will seek for protection within their own group and avoid contact with the othered groups. To do so, they will rely on a sense of identity, which makes members feel part of a community. Moralized and skewed representations of immigration will drive communities to build their identity in contrast with the one of the othered group, which is already strongly defined, yet stereotyped, in their imaginary.

Leverage Points:
Seek for sense of safety, EU morals.

I WANT CITIZENS TO DEVELOP A SENSE OF SAFETY AND TRUST IN THEIR COMMUNITIES BY BUILDING THEIR IDENTITY FROM WITHIN, FOCUSING ON SHARED VALUES AND MORALITY RATHER THAN STEREOTYPED DIFFERENCES WITH OTHERS.

A toddler looking for his parents to be comforted. They find comfort in a deeper and stronger bond, not in one that exclude other people.

- **Official, Complicated, Extensive, Checked, Trustworthy.**

EUROPEAN VALUES HOLYDAY

The concept consists of a European holiday celebrating the founding values of the European Union. The holiday provides a space to display and highlight the importance of these foundational values. By celebrating them, the values can become embedded within society, serving as a framework with which citizens can identify. This framework helps citizens construct an identity that does not rely on comparison or contrast with an "other."

To achieve greater impact, the holiday should be supported with complementary activities and sustained through social and governance structures. It should be recognized as an official holiday celebrated uniformly across Europe. Local celebrations can take place in different cities, with activities organized in schools, youth centers, and community spaces.

To ensure the values are deeply embedded, a scaling strategy can be developed to expand and reinforce participation, making the holiday a lasting tool for fostering a shared sense of European identity and community trust.

6

Slippery morality fails to provide a sense of security.

Europe wil face dynamic changes and instability, while morality is used in the political discourse as a rigid framework to interpret events and making sense of them, resulting in polarization and impossibility to act. Instability and transformations create at the same time potential exposure to novelty and diversity but also social detachment. People are presented with a fluid, instable reality and refuge in social detachment and in moralized explanations that provide them with a sense of security. However, there will be a discrepancy between morality and fluid reality and morality will become progressively unable to provide explanations and certainty.

Consequences:
Individual citizens will be provided with explanations that are no longer efficient and sufficient. Morality will become slippery, individuals will lose grip on it, yet they will still be presented with transformation and instability.
How will individual citizens react?
Individuals will keep looking for explanations of reality that can provide them with a sense of certainty.

Leverage Points:
Questioning of politicized morality, dynamicity of events.

I WANT INDIVIDUALS TO FEEL SECURE IN AN UNSTABLE REALITY AND WHEN FACING CHALLENGES RELATED TO IMMIGRATION BY PROVIDING THEM WITH THE APPROPRIATE TOOLS RATHER THAN MORALIZED NARRATIVES.

A child learning how to cycle, he's given a helmet, training wheels and protection. He's also given instructions and support by his parents.

- **Secure, Reliable, Multiple, Additional, Given.**

EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION WELFARE SYSTEM

The concept consists of designing a European migration welfare system that offers support and care to citizens experiencing the challenges posed by migration and the instability of their environment. The system connects citizens directly with the European Union, bypassing individual member states, to allow for more flexible interventions. It can include different types of support depending on citizens' specific needs.

The system would create a tangible link between migration and citizens, demonstrating that, with the right tools and resources, migration can be managed calmly and effectively. Its primary aim is to provide citizens with the means to feel confident and secure in situations of uncertainty and instability.

7

Political debate detached from polités' reasoning.

The political discourse will increasingly follow a top-down logic, imposed on society and progressively disconnected from everyday realities. Dominant narratives and rhetoric will reinforce existing power structures and deepen polarization. In this stagnant context, the preservation of rigid and unresponsive political systems will erode the perceived value of political participation at all levels of society.

Consequences:
Politics will become increasingly detached from the polités (citizens), transforming into a framework devoid of meaningful content and unresponsive toward citizens needs. This means that the topics/matters discussed and faced within the political arena will get increasingly far from the citizenship sphere, so from the citizens' rights, duties and responsibilities.
How will citizens react? Citizens will increasingly rely on public debate as an outlet to express their needs, placing greater value on a discourse made of compelling and persuasive rhetoric rather than on actual politics.

Leverage Points:
Disengagement with traditional politics, growing public discourse

I WANT CITIZENS TO VALUE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BY FINDING ITS IMPORTANCE IN PARTICIPATING IN A PUBLIC DIALOGUE THAT GIVES VOICE TO REAL LIFE MATTERS AND IS BASED ON A CONSTRUCTIVE OPPOSITION OF DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, PRODUCING A MEANINGFUL AND WORKABLE OUTPUT.

Participating in the Olympic games. For athletes it's important and prestigious to participate in it, performing their disciplines and competing. Victory is only achieved through participation of multiple athletes and the respectful competition between them.

- **Agonistic, Renowned, Sportsmanlike, Challenging**

MOCK TRIAL

The concept consists of an adaptation of the Mock Trial pedagogy to initiate and educate citizens in meaningful public dialogue.

Citizens participate in the Mock Trial by suggesting themes or cases for debate and taking on roles as prosecution, defense, or jury. The trial focuses on topics of political debate or public interest, particularly those that are polarized in real-world discourse. Participants engage in analytical activities and critical thinking and are encouraged to defend points of view that may differ from their own, fostering the ability to understand and respect alternative perspectives. The outcome of the trial is an evaluation of the issue presented, which can serve as input for policy development or social initiatives. Additionally, the Mock Trial can function as a tool to assess the effectiveness of policies or political actions.

The Mock Trial can involve both citizens and governance representatives, increasing dialogue and collaboration between the public and policymakers. The concept could achieve greater impact if scaled to reach broader audiences.

Application to immigration: Immigration is a topic of heated and polarized debate. Applying the Mock Trial methodology to immigration cases, drawing on political discourse or citizens' concerns, can provide a constructive approach to the subject. It educates citizens in meaningful dialogue between perspectives and demonstrates the value of participating in deliberative processes, helping to bridge divides and promote informed, respectful discussion.

8

Collective reorganization into pragmatic political communities.

As conventional political structures will remain intact, population will step away from them, losing the opportunity to articulate their interests. Collectives will reorganize internally in response to the uncertainty brought about by societal transformation. These new organizational forms are not recognized by institutional politics and therefore lack the ability to influence it directly. For this reason they will develop alternative strategies to bypass formal political processes and pursue pragmatic solutions to achieve an internal stability.

Because of fearism communities will atomize growing internal cohesion and deepening external fragmentation.

Consequences:
Fear and hostility will lead to closure and atomization. At the same time people will see denied their opportunity to articulate their interests.
In this context, a patchwork of fragmented actions by reorganized collective groups will begin to shape social life, operating at a distance from formal politics to achieve the group interests.
How will communities react?
Atomized communities will reorganize into political communities adopting pragmatic solutions to protect and achieve group interests. Substituting the role of political institutions. Citizens will step away from traditional institutional politics, and rely on their community.

Leverage Points:
Internal cohesion and reorganization .

I WANT CITIZENS TO EXTEND THEIR CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY BY SHARING ADVICE BASED ON THE EFFORTS THEY HAVE MADE TO ACHIEVE THEIR COMMUNITY INTERESTS WITHOUT POLITICAL ASSISTANCE, SUPPORTING OTHER COMMUNITIES FACING SIMILAR CHALLENGES.

An hiker building a stoneman to signal the trail for other hikers, because he struggled finding his way due to lack of traditional signage. He's moved by a sense of responsibility toward people hiking in the mountains, because he identifies himself with hikers, but he's helping people struggling with trail uncertainty.

- **Directing, Universal, Practical, Precisely Located.**

COMMUNITY CONSULTANCY AGENCY

The concept consists of a consultancy agency providing support to communities undergoing internal reorganization. The agency builds on the emergence of fragmented actions carried out by communities striving to achieve their goals and serves as a resource for other groups in comparable situations.

As instability increases and political structures become more distant from citizens, the consultancy functions both as a reference point and as a celebration of the achievements of communities that have developed functional solutions through internal cohesion. By sharing their expertise, communities take responsibility toward other groups, transcending the boundaries that divide them.

The consultancy agency could operate as a European project across multiple locations. Its team could include both professional consultants and citizen-experts. In addition to offering consultancy services, the agency could organize activities such as festivals celebrating community initiatives, further reinforcing collaboration, learning, and civic engagement.

9

Loud and void politics distance citizens from ideologies.

Political disengagement will rise resulting in limited possibility for citizens to influence the political course and to articulate their interests. Adding to deep transformations in life conditions, needs and values, inequalities and discontent.

Politics will keep discussing immigration as a topic of heated public debate, providing discursive representations and meanings of the phenomenon but denying the possibility to citizens to concretely act on or modify them.

Moreover, citizens will experience detachment from society caused by tensions and misalignments.

Consequences:

Individual citizens are exposed to a loud political discussion of immigration that charges them with tools/structures to interpret and make sense of it on a discursive level. However, this will remain on the discursive level and will distance from them as they recognize the impossibility to act upon it. They will also experience detachment, given by novel personal experiences that no longer align with political/societal representations.

How will individual citizens react?

They will disengage with traditional politics and and gradually step away from the loud political discourse and at the same time from societal representation of immigration.

Leverage Points:
Moment of detachment from political discourse and societal convictions.

I WANT INDIVIDUALS TO DEVELOP CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY BY CREATING DETACHMENT FROM POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND PROVIDING THEM WITH THE MEANS TO EXPLORE ALTERNATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF IMMIGRATION AND EXPERIMENT WITH THEM.

Moving out from your parents' house, becoming at the same time independent and free to choose how you want to live, and responsible for your own life and house. You look for alternative ways of doing and being and experiment yourself.

- **Multiple, Suitable, Neutral, Experientiable, Promising.**

EXPLORATIVE PROGRAM ON IMMIGRATION

The concept consists of a program in which citizens examine alternative migration realities. The program allows participants to step back from political and societal narratives of migration and develop their own understanding and sense of responsibility regarding the phenomenon. To achieve this, the program presents representations of immigration that go beyond political framing, showing how migration operates in practice. These representations are accompanied by activities that connect the insights gained to everyday life and practical experiences. The program concludes with a personal reflection activity, encouraging participants to integrate their learning and form their own perspectives.

The program follows a structured framework and can be organized in collaboration with organizations working in the field of immigration. Partnerships allow citizens to explore additional realities and engage in volunteering activities. A potential scaling strategy could involve participants becoming ambassadors of the program, further extending its reach and impact.

THE FUTURE LIES IN NINE MEANINGS

The Value of the Framework

As the framework depicts how the future context is, the design process carried out for the nine meanings unravels how the future ought be.

Rather than focusing on a singular design outcome, the strength of the design lies in the completeness of the framework, the bigger picture. The value of the project does not stem from nine design ideas that are simple and more or less innovative interventions, but from what these nine ideas represent: a possibility to make a difference (even if minimal) in a context where complexity seems to hinder any positive development, and consequently discourages attempts to create change.

The completeness of the framework demonstrates that a shift in perspective, grounded in contextual analysis, can enable meaningful intervention.

As previously mentioned, the new relationship between European society and immigration begins by acting on citizens. Each situation described in the future meanings expresses what citizens need to build that relationship, and each design idea, rather than being a final outcome, serves as a means to address that need.

Nine Means to Address the Future

The power of design interventions does not lie on their surface but in the sub-goals they aim to achieve.

The table on the right summarizes the objectives driving each concept, based on insights from the future context, and the means used to reach them.

To illustrate how these sub-goals can be realized, I develop one of the concepts and translate it into a design intervention.
The following section is dedicated to explaining it.

It is important to note that this single concept is not intended to address the entire relationship between European society and immigration. Instead, it seeks to achieve a small but meaningful goal that represents a step toward the envisioned future.

1. OFFICIAL IMMIGRATION INFORMATION WEBSITE	2. VIDEO IMMIGRATION IMPACT ON EUROPEAN SOCIETY	3. IMMIGRATION WORKBOOK
Develop extensive understanding of immigration > Provide complete and official information	Reshaping identity boundaries > Showing critical representations of identity	Develop and find a personal meaning of immigration > Provide explanations and space to reflect
4. SCENARIO BUILDING POLITICAL INACTION	**5. EUROPEAN VALUES HOLYDAY**	**6. EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION WELFARE SYSTEM**
Develop extensive understanding of immigration > Provide complete and official information	Develop extensive understanding of immigration > Provide complete and official information	Develop extensive understanding of immigration > Provide complete and official information
7. MOCK-TRIAL	**8. COMMUNITY CONSULTANCY AGENCY**	**9. EXPLORATIVE PROGRAM ON IMMIGRATION**
Educate to meaningful dialogue > Provide a space for meaningful exchange of ideas	Develop shared responsibility > Create space for collaboration and recognition	Explore immigration and develop a self–position > Show alternative possibilities

Figure 8: Summary table of the concepts and the sub-goals they aim to achieve

4 where

public inertia

This chapter presents the development of one of the concepts, offering an example of how design can address a future context. The concept, "the Civic Trial," draws on the philosophy of agonistic democracy and the methodology of the mock trial. Its aim is to create meaningful dialogue among citizens, where needs are expressed and opposing opinions confronted, ultimately generating workable input for European policymaking.
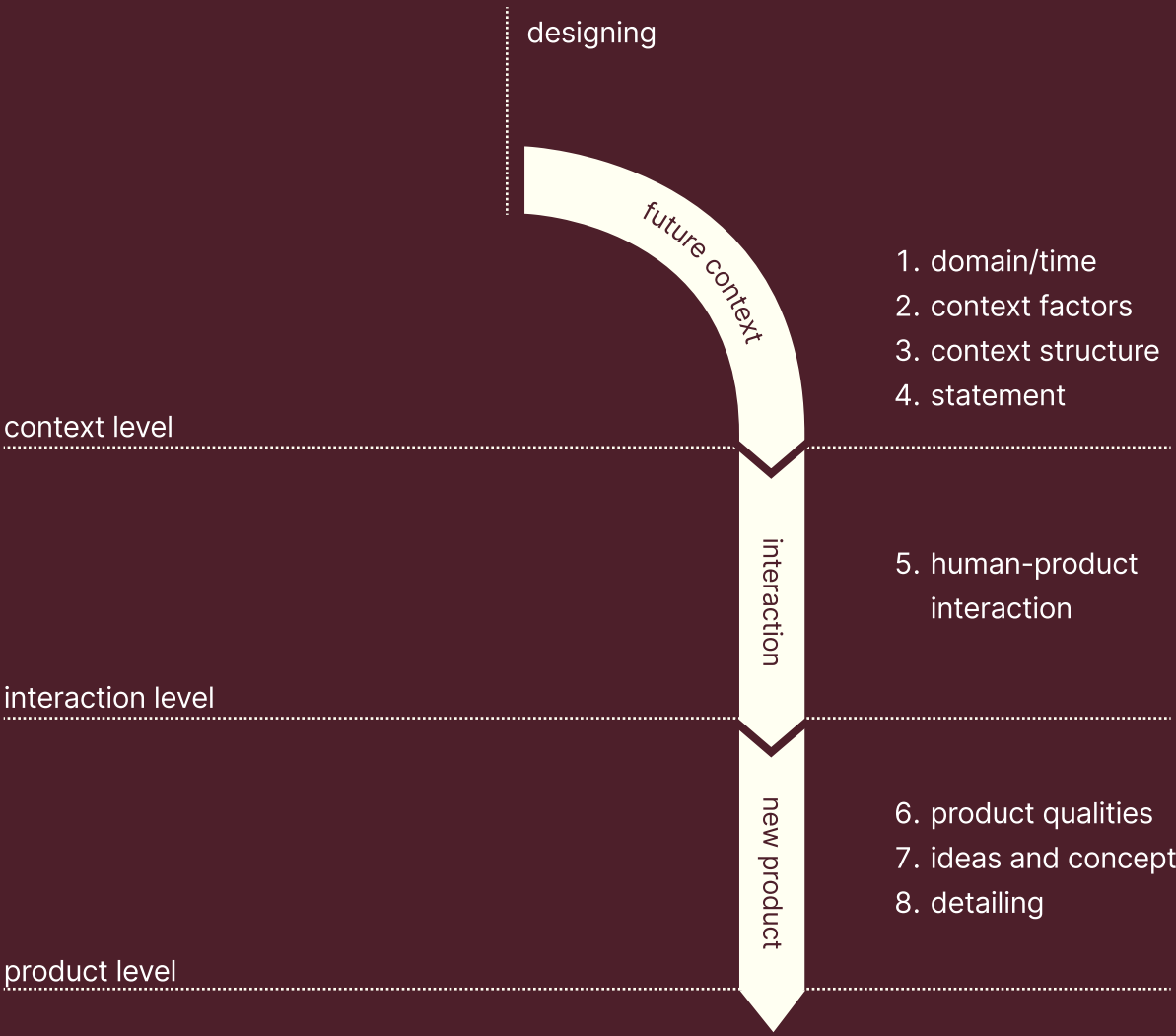
DESIGNING for
THE FUTURE

social detachment

Designing and Detailing

The last step of the ViP method consists of transforming the concept into a final manifestation. In this process, the vision remains the main driver, guiding the complete expression of the concept and translating the idea into something tangible. Since the design intervention is grounded in the real world, decisions made based on the vision must also account for additional constraints.

Designing is about achieving the desired effect defined in the statement. Many ideas could serve this purpose, and the chosen concept represents just one possible solution.

In the ViP method, the vision is highly explicit, clearly defining what needs to be designed, along with its components and qualities.

designing

future context

1. domain/time
2. context factors
3. context structure
4. statement

context level

interaction

5. human-product interaction

interaction level

new product

6. product qualities
7. ideas and concept
8. detailing

product level

7

Political debate detached from polités' reasoning

The political discourse will increasingly follow a top-down logic, imposed on society and progressively disconnected from everyday realities. Dominant narratives and rhetoric will reinforce existing power structures and deepen polarization. In this stagnant context, the preservation of rigid and unresponsive political systems will erode the perceived value of political participation at all levels of society.

Consequences:
Politics will become increasingly detached from the polités (citizens), transforming into a framework devoid of meaningful content and unresponsive toward citizens needs. This means that the topics/matters discussed and faced within the political arena will get increasingly far from the citizenship sphere, so from the citizens' rights, duties and responsibilities.
How will citizens react? Citizens will increasingly rely on public debate as an outlet to express their needs, placing greater value on a discourse made of compelling and persuasive rhetoric rather than on actual politics.

Leverage Points:
Disengagement with traditional politics, growing public discourse

I WANT CITIZENS TO VALUE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BY FINDING ITS IMPORTANCE IN PARTICIPATING IN A PUBLIC DIALOGUE THAT GIVES VOICE TO REAL LIFE MATTERS AND IS BASED ON A CONSTRUCTIVE OPPOSITION OF DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, PRODUCING A MEANINGFUL AND WORKABLE OUTPUT.

Participating in the Olympic games. For athletes it's important and prestigious to participate in it, performing their disciplines and competing. Victory is only achieved through participation of multiple athletes and the respectful competition between them.

- **Agonistic, Renowned (well organized, almost institutional), Sportsmanlike, Challenging, Checked (uncorrupted)**

MOCK TRIAL

The concept consists of an adaptation of the Mock Trial pedagogy to initiate and educate citizens in meaningful public dialogue.
Citizens participate in the mock trial by suggesting themes or cases for debate and taking on roles as prosecution, defense, or jury. The trial focuses on topics of political debate or public interest, particularly those that are polarized in real-world discourse. Participants engage in analytical activities and critical thinking and are encouraged to defend points of view that may differ from their own, fostering the ability to understand and respect alternative perspectives. The outcome of the trial is an evaluation of the issue presented, which can serve as input for policy development or social initiatives. Additionally, the Mock Trial can function as a tool to assess the effectiveness of policies or political actions.

The mock trial can involve both citizens and governance representatives, increasing dialogue and collaboration between the public and policymakers. The concept could achieve greater impact if scaled to reach broader audiences.

Application to immigration: Immigration is a topic of heated and polarized debate. Applying the Mock Trial methodology to immigration cases, drawing on political discourse or citizens' concerns, can provide a constructive approach to the subject. It educates citizens in meaningful dialogue between perspectives and demonstrates the value of participating in deliberative processes, helping to bridge divides and promote informed, respectful discussion.

democracy

by constructive

competition

THE CIVIC TRIAL

The Civic Trial

The Civic Trial is a concept designed to achieve one of the sub-goals within the context of the relationship between European society and immigration in 2040.

It addresses a future situation where loud politics is unable to sustain conversation. Opposing poles are deafened by their own voices, while their discourse drifts further away from citizens, preventing them from participating. Citizens are left with their own concerns, expressed only in fragments of public discourse.

The goal of the design is to engage citizens in constructive public dialogue that brings together different, and even contrasting, points of view to produce workable outcomes. The aim is to help citizens understand that plurality of ideas is valuable, and that creating a space where every voice is heard can lead to greater achievements.

The design intervention provides an agonistic space for dialogue where needs and concerns can be expressed. Democratic agonism teaches how to engage with and respect differing opinions, to see and acknowledge others' perspectives and values.

Moreover, the concept aims to demonstrate how meaningful and respectful debate can positively influence politics, by serving as a foundation for policymaking.

As expressed through analogy, the relationship the design intervention seeks to create with European citizens is comparable to the relationship between athletes and the Olympic Games.
The Olympic Games thrive on agonism between athletes who respectfully compete while valuing each other's participation. During the Games, sport is the true protagonist. Competition is based on fairness and requires training and commitment. The Olympic Games are an institution grounded in a stable set of norms, rules, and practices adopted to achieve a shared purpose. They require not only complex and precise organization, but also checks and balances that ensure fairness and success.

The Civic Trial draws inspiration from the concept of agonistic democracy and the pedagogical methodology of the mock trial. It is an activity of agonistic democracy in which citizens engage in public dialogue aimed at fostering meaningful exchanges of ideas while addressing themes of public interest, such as social and political issues that are often divisive.

As the title suggests, the activity consists of simulating a legal trial, where prosecutors and defenders compete in front of a judge who ultimately delivers a verdict.

A topic of public interest is chosen, and citizens are selected to participate and assigned specific roles. Each side prepares statements to advocate for their assigned position, gathers evidence, and plans questioning sessions for witnesses, as well as cross-examination.
The judge is impersonated by a group composed of both citizens and experts, who listen to the proceedings, engage in debate, and ultimately deliver a verdict.

The Civic Trial serves as a practical application of agonistic democracy. By defending and challenging opposing ideas through structured contestation in a formal setting, each side is given an equal opportunity to express its point of view, supported by critical thinking. This process makes conflict visible and acceptable, demonstrating that opposing perspectives can coexist while themes of public interest are debated and processed in a meaningful manner.

Rationale

The chosen meaning, "Political debate detached from polités' reasoning", depicts a future situation where political discourse will continue to follow a top-down logic, with dominant narratives reinforcing existing power structures and stripping politics of meaning. In such a scenario, citizens disengage from political participation, and political debate becomes increasingly detached from the realities of everyday life.

I envision a form of politics that is accountable to its community, a politics where citizens are empowered to engage and participate. To achieve this, it is essential to create mechanisms for bottom-up influence, ensuring that community concerns are given space for expression and become relevant to decision-making processes.

Within the future context, citizens' needs often remain unfulfilled because there are no meaningful opportunities to articulate them. Public debate, which should serve this purpose, is instead polarized and rhetorical, reflecting both social detachment and the example set by political institutions.

My aim is to leverage the existing debate as a starting point to address these unmet needs. However, citizens must first be equipped for meaningful dialogue, one grounded in plurality, where ideas can diverge and compete yet coexist respectfully and consciously, overcoming the barriers imposed by social detachment. In doing so, I seek to enable citizens to rediscover the meaning of politics and reclaim their agency within it.

The table on the right summarizes the goals of the concept, grounding them in the contextual research conducted to build the future context.
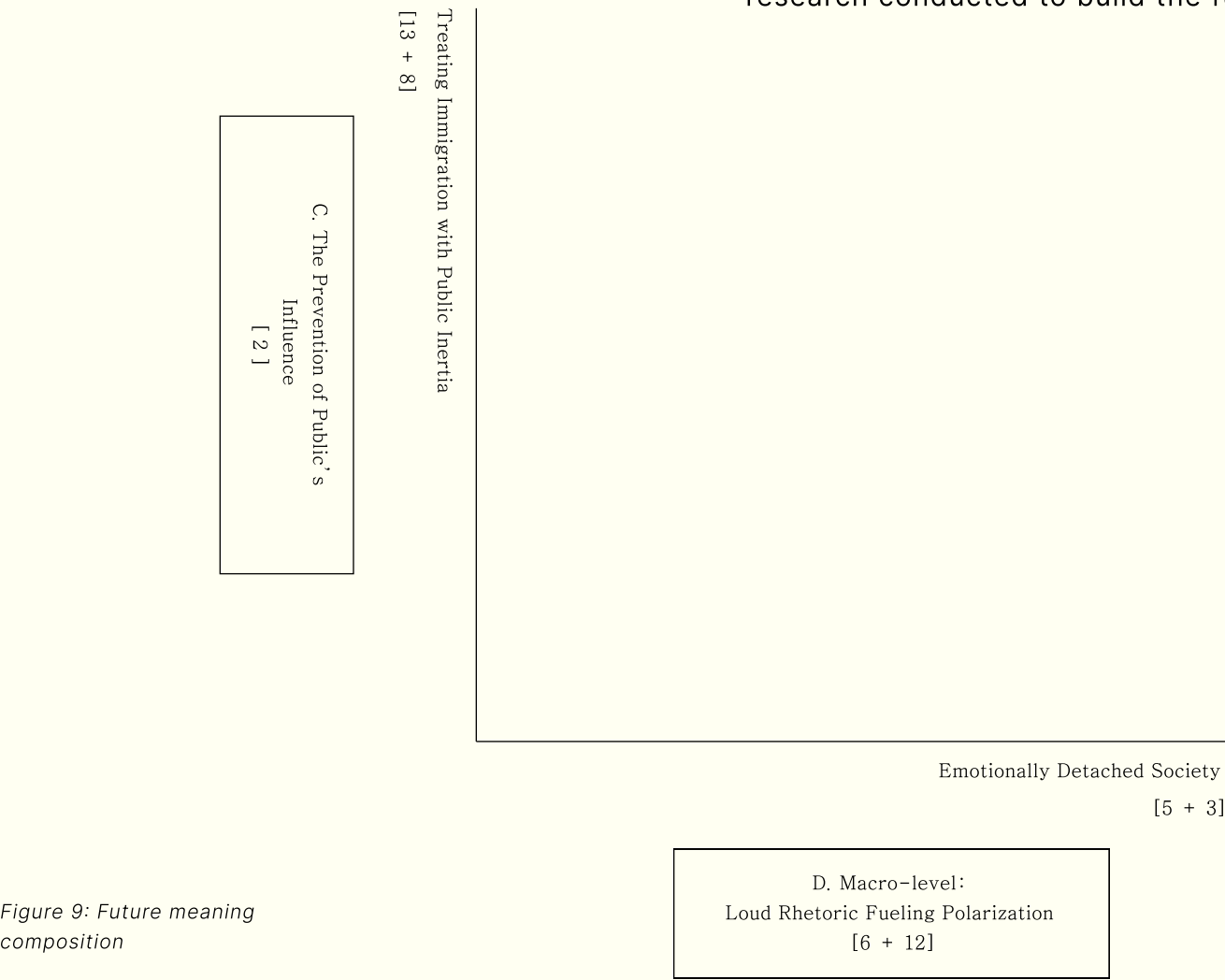
Treating Immigration with Public Inertia
[13 + 8]

C. The Prevention of Public's Influence
[2]

Emotionally Detached Society
[5 + 3]

D. Macro-level:
Loud Rhetoric Fueling Polarization
[6 + 12]

Figure 9: Future meaning composition

Contextual Research	Concept Goal
Cluster 13. Urgent political rhetoric often fails to produce meaningful action.	Show that politics thrives on dialogue aiming for pragmatic outcomes.
Cluster 8. EU politics often delegates or centralizes responsibility instead of collective action.	Demonstrate the power of collective action.
Cluster 2. Democracy may not be efficient, but civic engagement and responsibility lead to responsive governments.	Enable citizens to value participation and rediscover democracy.
Cluster 5. Urbanization increases social contact, but atomization prevents engagement.	Enable citizens to connect and foster meaningful interaction.
Cluster 3. Social media expression occurs in like-minded bubbles, reinforcing polarization.	Break bubbles and nurture pluralism through acceptance and recognition.
Cluster 6. Political debate feeds biased, simplified views; media amplify skewed content.	Promote engagement with diverse perspectives and ideas.
Cluster 12. Political content is entertainment, using rhetoric for gain, creating polarization. Citizens still have freedom of expression.	Foster critical thinking and awareness of rhetoric and misinformation.

Figure 10: Concept contextual grounding

Theoretical Background

The following sections are a brief introduction to two concepts core of the design idea: 'agonistic democracy' and 'mock trial methodology'. To write these paragraphs two sources has been reviewed: "Agonistic Democracy: Rethinking political institutions in pluralist times." (Paxton, 2019), and "The Mock Trial: A Dynamic Exercise for Thinking Critically About Management Theories, Topics, and Practices." (Farmer et al., 2012).

Agonistic Democracy

Agonistic democracy is a theoretical approach that identifies disagreement as the essence of democratic decision-making, framing it as something to be valued rather than suppressed (Paxton, 2019). In pluralistic societies, avoiding engagement with conflicting viewpoints risks reinforcing stereotypes and fostering forms of "othering," where opposing groups are perceived as illegitimate or hostile. Conversely, attempts to achieve complete consensus can exacerbate inequality, dilute democratic debate, and lead to political apathy or disaffection. Even more critically, such approaches can fuel resentment by denying citizens the opportunity to confront the moral and political controversies underpinning public issues.

Proponents of agonistic democracy, such as Mouffe (2000), advocate for converting antagonism into agonism, transforming the "enemy to be destroyed" into a "legitimate adversary" with whom one can engage in democratic contestation. Similarly, Connolly (1995) and Tully (1995) emphasize inclusive practices such as critical responsiveness and mutual recognition, encouraging citizens to listen to others, reflect on their own assumptions, and strive to understand alternative perspectives on their own terms.

According to Paxton (2019), agonistic democracy rests on three core principles. Political contestation seeks to revive passion and engagement in the political sphere, favoring direct and expressive interactions over detached, rational deliberation. Contingency underscores the provisional nature of consensus, which must always remain open to challenge in light of evolving social contexts. Finally, necessary interdependency positions conflict as a productive force that unites citizens through shared democratic processes rather than common values, which are often absent in pluralistic societies.

By institutionalizing respectful disagreement and reframing conflict as a constructive democratic practice, agonistic democracy offers a model for revitalizing democratic life. It envisions politics as an ongoing process of engagement where diversity is not merely tolerated but embraced as a source of democratic strength.

Mock Trial Methodology

The Mock Trial methodology provides an interactive framework for cultivating critical thinking and engaging in democratic dialogue. At its core, critical thinking involves both cognitive skills, such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation, and affective dispositions, including inquisitiveness, open-mindedness, intellectual honesty, and a willingness to reconsider one's views (Facione, 2004). When participants engage in a Mock Trial, they are required to interpret and evaluate incomplete or conflicting information, formulate arguments, and defend positions that may not align with their personal beliefs. This process mirrors the agonistic democratic ideal of confronting opposing perspectives in a structured and respectful manner.

The primary objectives of the Mock Trial are to strengthen participants' ability to evaluate complex bodies of knowledge and make informed decisions based on evidence. Rather than presenting a single authoritative perspective, the Mock Trial acknowledges the contingency of knowledge, encouraging students to uncover underlying assumptions and question the legitimacy of dominant narratives.

This aligns with the principles of Critical Management Studies, which seek to challenge passive acceptance of established norms and promote reflective skepticism toward taken-for-granted assumptions (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Akella, 2008).

Importantly, a Mock Trial is not a quest for "truth" in the absolute sense. Instead, it highlights the multiplicity of interpretations and the provisional nature of consensus. By role-playing as prosecutors, defenders, witnesses, or jurors, participants adopt diverse perspectives, enhancing empathy and reinforcing the value of pluralism. The interactive nature of the exercise fosters active listening and dynamic exchange, enabling participants to modify their viewpoints based on reasoned dialogue rather than dogmatic adherence to initial positions.

Ultimately, the Mock Trial offers a practical exercise in agonistic democracy, using structured contestation to transform conflict into a productive force for learning and democratic engagement. It cultivates intellectual rigor, mutual respect, and the capacity to navigate disagreement, skills that are essential for both academic inquiry and civic life.

Design Manifesto

This design manifesto explains the rationale behind my concept. It illustrates how I position myself both as a person and as a designer, and how I aim to contribute, even if minimally, to reshaping the relationship between European society and immigration.

Public inertia, achieved through the prevention of public influence, combined with social detachment shaped by polarization fueled by the loud rhetoric of the institutional and cultural structures that citizens are part of, is the conditions leading to a political discourse detached from its people. To citizens, politics loses credibility and meaning, relying on loud rhetoric to disguise its inconclusiveness on issues that truly matter. As a result, citizens withdraw, lose trust, and disengage.

At the same time, people use public debate as an outlet to voice needs and express opinions. Yet this expression often remains at the surface level, limited to exposure rather than leading to genuine exchange or interiorization.

This is where I want my design intervention to act: to encourage citizens to value political participation through the discovery of pluralistic and agonistic public dialogue.

I believe people often avoid engaging with different opinions because of the examples set before them. Politics frequently follows a model of arrogance and dominance, silencing perspectives that diverge from its own. This "culture" is embedded within the European macro-level, transferred from institutions to citizens. Combined with the noise of loud rhetoric, it blinds and deafens people, limiting their capacity to form independent opinions.

My design seeks to counter this trend by equipping citizens with the tools to become critical and responsible. I want to leverage their disengagement from loud, inconclusive politics and instead rediscover a new form of engagement, one that grows from dialogue among diverse, even conflicting, perspectives. I aim to transform public debate from a space of mere exposure into one of meaningful exchange.

I value plurality of opinion rooted in respect and kindness. Citizens should be empowered to decide what they believe in. Educating for agonistic democracy through a mock trial is one way to reach this goal.

By participating in dialogue, being exposed to diverse perspectives, and sometimes even having to defend ideas they may not personally agree with, citizens exercise open-mindedness and critical thought. Scaling up the outcomes of such debates fosters a sense of responsibility: participants are not only expressing needs but are also accountable for how those needs are acknowledged and addressed.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH PLURALISTIC AND AGONISTIC PUBLIC DIALOGUE.

The analogy of the Olympic Games illustrates the core ambition of the concept. The Games symbolize agonistic participation, where victory is not merely a medal but the achievement of new records, possible only through competition among strong adversaries. Athletes are trained to compete, and sportsmanship is a central value of the event.

From this analogy emerges the vision of embracing agonistic democracy: building democracy through constructive competition.

The Civic Trial stages an arena where adversaries defend conflicting opinions through critical thinking, achieving victory not by silencing others but by ensuring citizens' needs are expressed, recognized, and elevated to policy.

The mock trial methodology requires citizens to impersonate and advocate viewpoints they may not personally share. In doing so, they are not only deeply connected to an external perspective but also learn to respect it.

Concept Articulation

The Civic Trial is the core activity of the concept, but its effectiveness relies on two additional components: an online debate platform for engaging citizens in public dialogue, the Civic Forum, and a governing body that manages and organizes trial sessions while scaling up their outcomes, the Civic Hub.

The Civic Hub is the organization responsible for organizing the Civic Trial. It is a politically independent body dedicated to bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers, established to support the European Union's objective of designing better policies and strengthening citizen participation in the early stages of policymaking (Vanyskova et al., 2025). The Hub administers the Civic Forum, hosts the Civic Trial, and translates its outcomes into actionable prompts and guidelines for policy development.

The Civic Forum is a debate platform that monitors public discussion and identifies cases of interest for the Civic Trial. It also serves as a preparatory space where citizens can access information and exchange opinions on public matters they consider relevant. The debate platform leverages citizens' inclination to express their views online and to use public discourse as an outlet for voicing their needs.

The entire Civic Trial system collaborates with multiple stakeholders, including citizens, subject-matter experts, municipalities and other hosting organizations, as well as European Union policymakers.
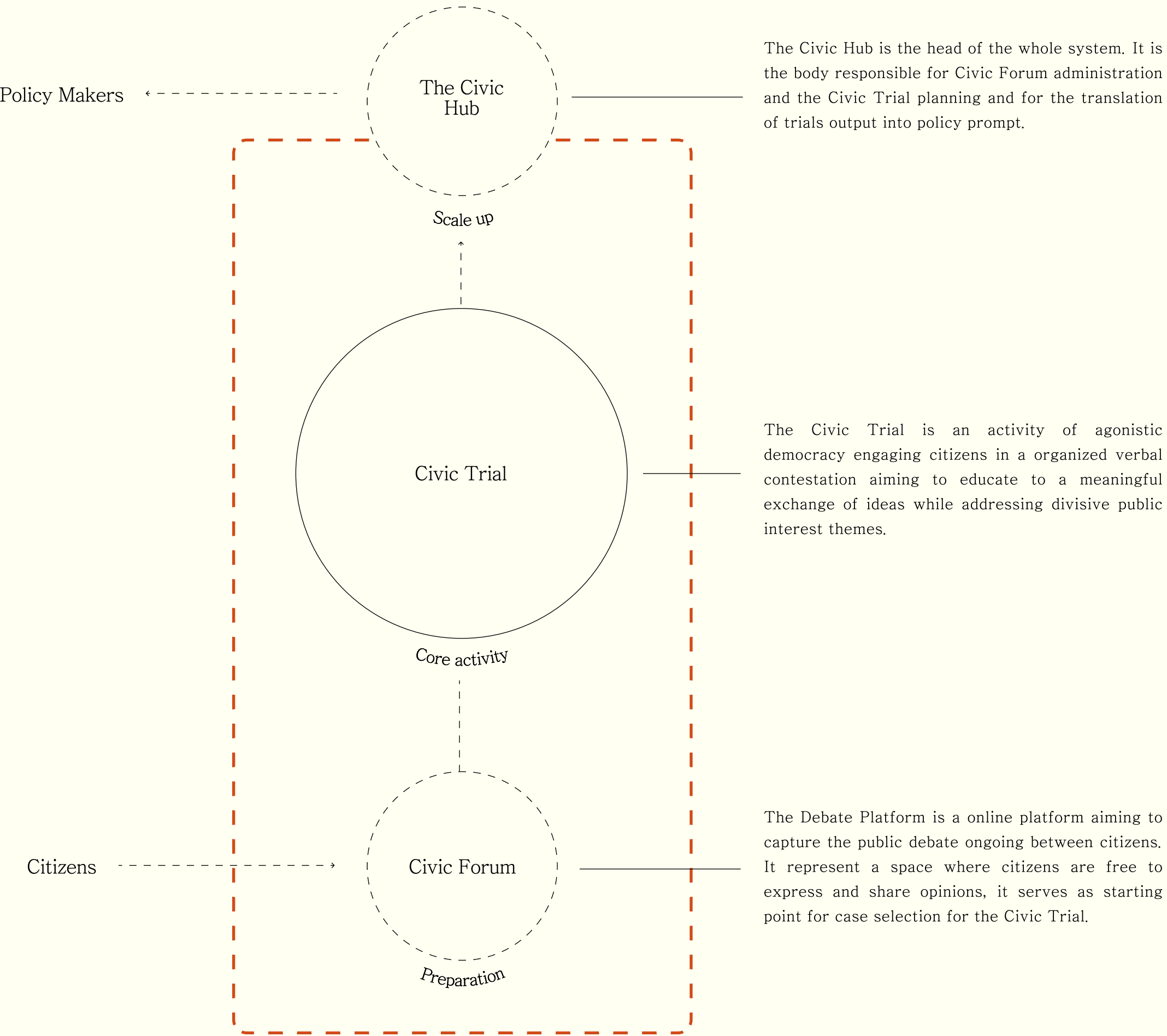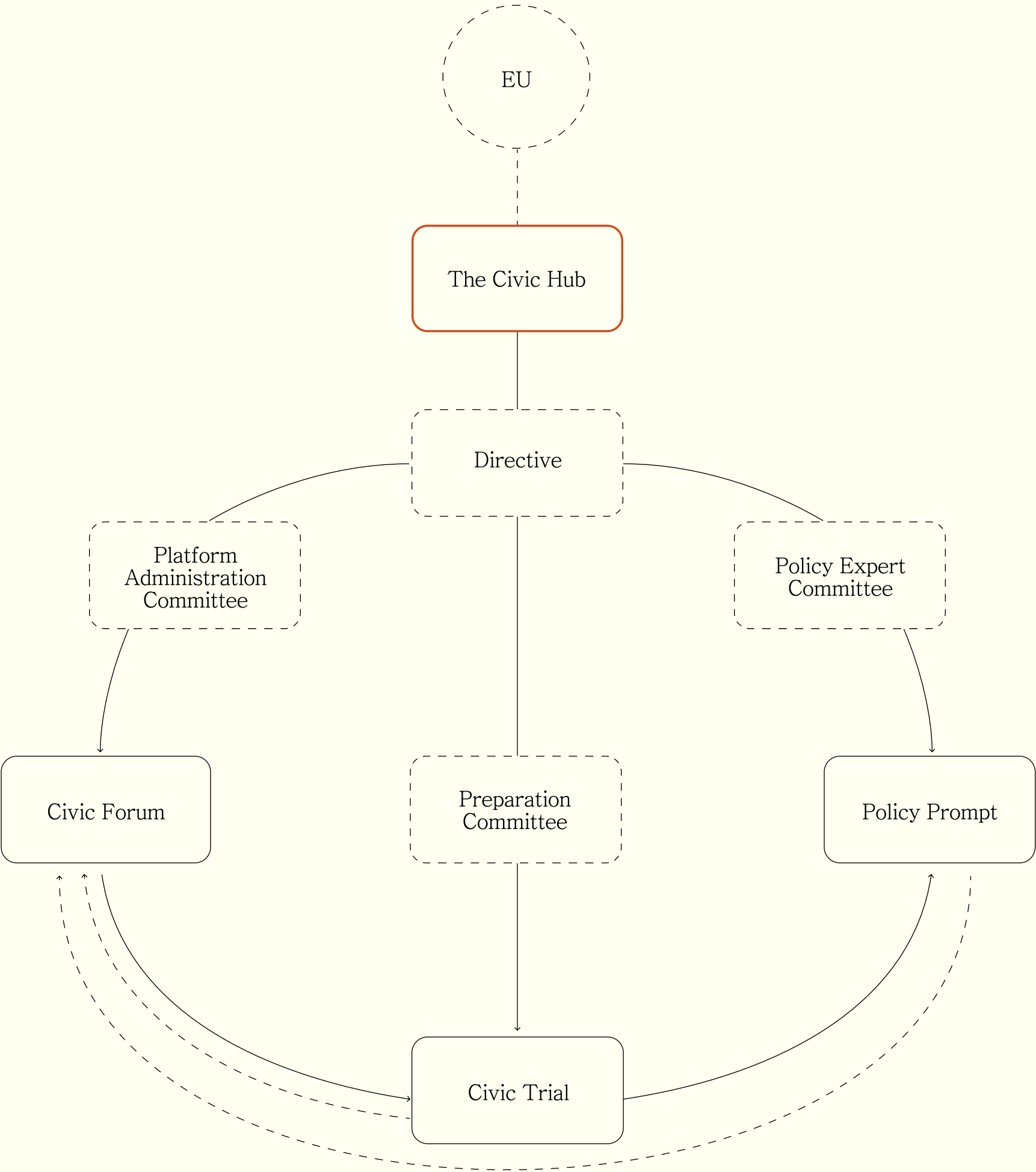
The Civic Hub is the head of the whole system. It is the body responsible for Civic Forum administration and the Civic Trial planning and for the translation of trials output into policy prompt.

The Civic Trial is an activity of agonistic democracy engaging citizens in a organized verbal contestation aiming to educate to a meaningful exchange of ideas while addressing divisive public interest themes.

The Debate Platform is a online platform aiming to capture the public debate ongoing between citizens. It represent a space where citizens are free to express and share opinions, it serves as starting point for case selection for the Civic Trial.

Figure 11: Concept articulation

The Civic Trial System

The Civic Trial is part of a system headed by the Civic Hub.
The Hub delivers three main outputs: the Civic Forum, the Civic Trial, and the resulting policy prompt. It is structured into several departments, managed by the directive, its core body.

The Platform Administration Committee is responsible for managing the Civic Forum. It designs and operates the Forum, monitors citizen engagement and interest, and communicates its findings to the other bodies within the system. The committee is also responsible for displaying information about upcoming trials, their results, the policy prompts, and the related legislative procedures.

The Preparation Committee oversees the planning and execution of the Civic Trials. It selects participants and supports them throughout the entire preparation process and trial sessions. This committee provides participants with relevant information and case materials, and coordinates with experts on the trial's topic who can support citizens during the activity. As the initiative grows, multiple preparation committees will operate in parallel, each managing different trials.
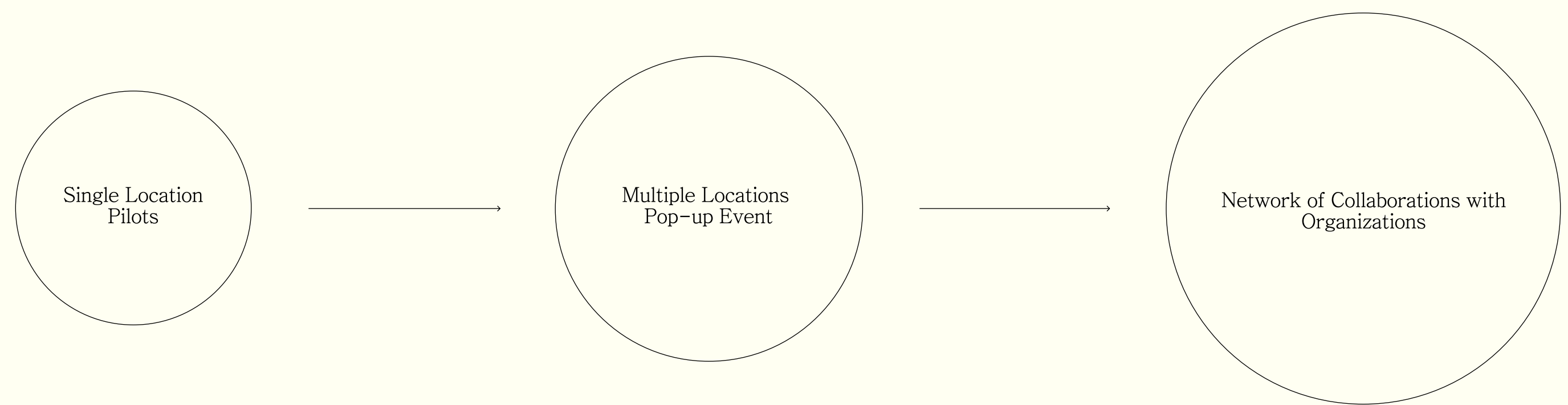
The Policy Expert Committee is tasked with scaling up the outcomes of the trials by translating them into policy prompts, comprising suggestions, requests, and guidelines for policymakers. It is composed of experts in policymaking, working in collaboration with subject-matter experts related to the specific trial themes.

The three outputs of the Civic Hub follow a sequential flow: beginning with the Civic Forum, moving through the Civic Trial, and culminating in the policy prompt. Each step builds on the previous one. The results of the Civic Trials and the policy prompts are published on the Civic Forum, ensuring transparency and enriching public dialogue. Making these outcomes visible not only highlights the value of engaging in meaningful, agonistic dialogue but also deepens the impact of the concept. Additionally, the public dissemination of results could facilitate the scaling-out of the Civic Trial, reaching a wider audience.

The Civic Hub is a politically independent body, supported by the European Union. In particular, it collaborates with the European Commission. The integration of the Civic Hub within the European Union legislative system is illustrated later in this report.

Scaling Plan

Single Location
Pilots

Multiple Locations
Pop-up Event

Network of Collaborations with
Organizations

Figure 13: Scaling plan

The Civic Trial is designed as a Europe-wide activity, engaging citizens in every member state. Its diffusion follows three scaling steps.

In the first phase, Civic Trials will be conducted one at a time as pilot projects. This stage serves to introduce the activity to citizens while allowing space to refine and improve its structure.

The second phase involves organizing multiple trials in different locations across Europe, thereby reaching a broader audience and a more diverse range of participants.
In the final phase, the Civic Trial will collaborate with a network of European organizations, such as municipalities, schools, and local events. These collaborations will help embed the activity within the European civic fabric and contribute to its institutionalization.

Integration within the EU system

The European Union legislative system

The European Union's administration is led by four main decision-making institutions: the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission. These bodies have different roles and collectively provide policy direction for the EU.

The Ordinary Legislative Procedure

Policies and laws that apply throughout the EU are usually created through the Ordinary Legislative Procedure. In this process, the European Commission proposes new legislation, while the European Parliament and the Council examine, amend, and adopt it. Member states then implement the laws, and the Commission ensures proper application.
(Types of Institutions, Bodies and Agencies, European Union, n.d.)

Three main types of acts can be produced through this procedure. Regulations are directly binding in all member states as of the date specified. Directives define the results to be achieved but leave national governments the freedom to decide how to adapt their laws in order to reach those goals. Decisions are binding in specific cases, involving particular authorities or individuals.
(Ordinary Legislative Procedure, n.d.)

The Civic Hub is not intended to replace or duplicate these mechanisms. Instead, it complements them by offering a structured way for citizens' concerns to be voiced early in the policymaking cycle, before the Commission begins drafting proposals. In this way, the Hub strengthens the connection between institutional processes and everyday concerns of European citizens.

The Role of the European Commission

As previously mentioned, the Civic Trial Hub is supported by the European Union and collaborates with the European Commission.

The European Commission serves as the EU's main executive body, representing the common interests of the Union. It holds the exclusive right of initiative to propose new legislation, which is then examined and adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. Beyond lawmaking, the Commission manages EU policies and the budget, while ensuring that member states correctly apply EU law.
The Commission's representation offices act as its voice throughout the EU. They track and assess public opinion in their host countries, share information on EU policies and operations, and support cooperation between the Commission and national governments.
(Types of Institutions, Bodies and Agencies | European Union, n.d.)

As the EU's politically independent executive arm, the Commission alone is responsible for drafting legislative proposals and implementing the decisions made by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.
(European Commission – What It Does | European Union, n.d.)

EU Citizens' Participation

By definition, European citizens have the right to actively participate in the political life of the EU.
Citizens can provide their views, suggestions, or complaints on policy to the European Commission through: Commission public consultations, a European Citizens' Initiative, or a formal complaint. (European Commission – What It Does | European Union, n.d.-b)

Other participation instruments provided by the EU include: Public consultations and feedback (Have Your Say portal), the European Citizens' Engagement Platform and Citizens' Panels, European and local elections, and the right to petition the European Parliament. (Participate, Interact, Vote – Your Rights | European Union, n.d.)

Citizens' Panels

Citizens' Panels are a regular feature of democratic life in the EU.
They are EU-wide forums where randomly selected citizens from all 27 member states come together to discuss major policy proposals. Panels are designed to reflect the EU's demographic diversity, using quotas based on factors such as age, gender, education, occupation, and geography. Around one-third of participants are young people.

Citizens work in small groups and plenary sessions, supported by facilitators, to develop recommendations. These recommendations are then considered by the European Commission when shaping policies and initiatives.
(European Citizens' Panels, n.d.)

European Commission Expert Groups

While the Commission has substantial internal expertise, it also relies on external specialists to support well-informed policymaking. This input can come from expert groups, independent consultants, or dedicated studies.

A Commission expert group is a consultative body set up by the European Commission to provide specialist advice and expertise. These groups, composed of public and/or private sector members, support the Commission in drafting legislation, shaping policies, and implementing EU laws and programmes.
They serve as forums for high-level discussion on specific subjects, offering recommendations and reports. Their input is not binding, and the Commission also draws on other sources, such as studies, agencies, consultations, and hearings, to ensure broad stakeholder perspectives.
(Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entities, n.d.)

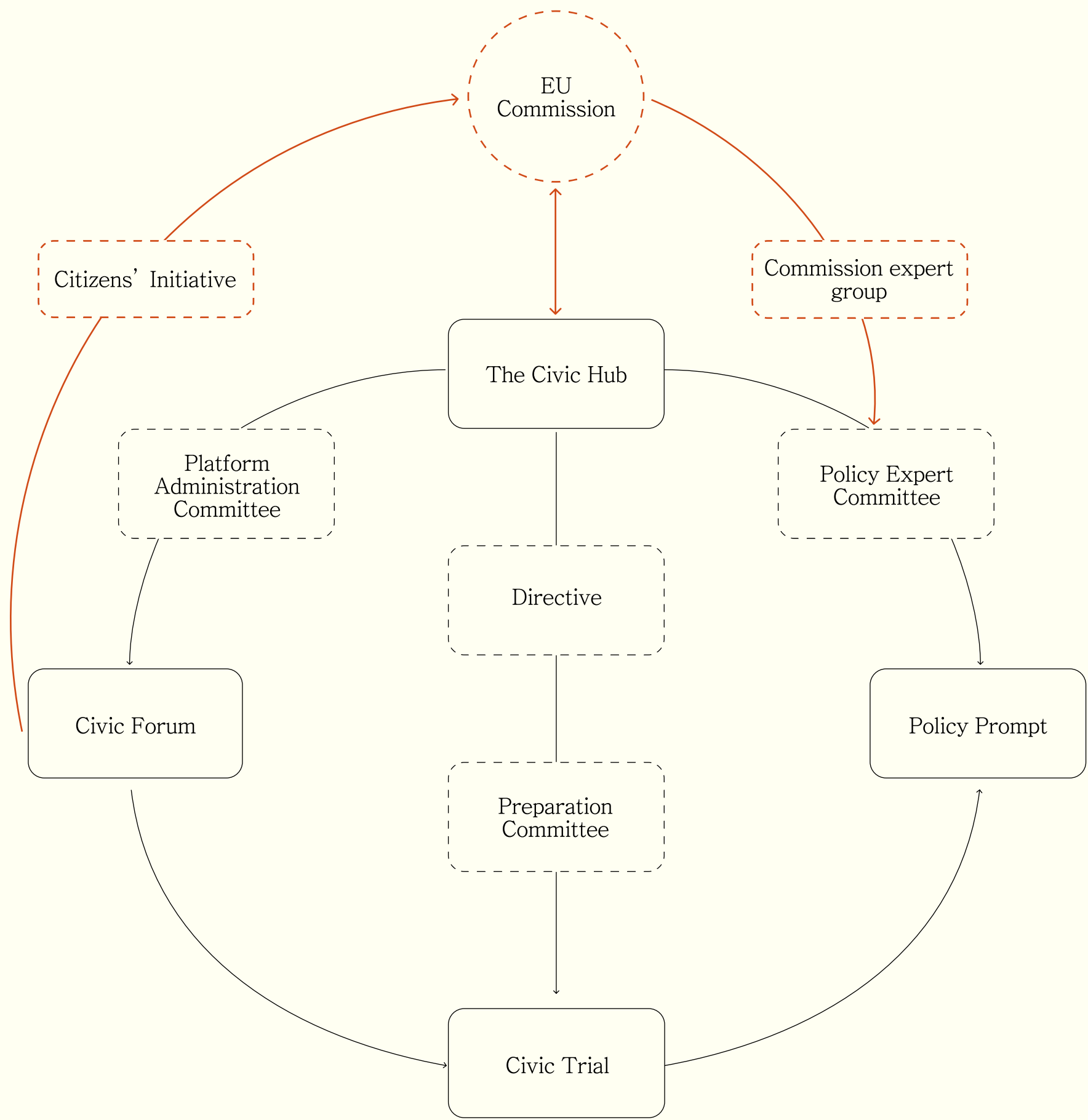## The Civic Trial within the EU system

Figure n: Visual representation of concept integration within EU system

The Civic Trial is an additional participatory tool that helps the EU bridge the gap between citizens and institutions. In this way, the Civic Trial Hub informs the European Commission during the early stages of policy agenda setting and assesses its actions.

The Hub is a democratic initiative of the European Union: it is politically independent but supported by the EU and funded through research and innovation programmes such as Horizon Europe. The European Commission and the Civic Trial Hub are tied by a mutual relationship: through the Civic Forum and the Civic Trial, the Hub informs the Commission's actions, while the Commission monitors the Hub.

The Civic Trial functions in a manner similar to the European Citizens' Panels, as it engages citizens in discussions aimed at shaping policy proposals. However, the Trial introduces a distinctive and complementary approach. While Citizens' Panels rely on deliberation and consensus-building, the Civic Trial provides a structured agonistic setting, transforming conflict into a constructive and visible part of the democratic process.

As noted earlier, the European Union promotes active citizen engagement. The Civic Forum can serve as one such engagement platform, monitoring public discourse. Moreover, the Forum can inform new European Citizens' Initiatives. Through these initiatives, by collecting one million signatures from at least seven member states, citizens can formally request the European Commission to act in an area within its competence.

The Policy Expert Committee is the department most closely involved in collaboration with the European Commission, providing policy prompts derived from the trials. The European Commission can also set up a Commission expert group, which may collaborate with the Policy Expert Committee by participating in drafting a policy prompt based on the outcomes of Civic Trial sessions within its domain of expertise.

Figure 14: Concept integration within EU system

Governance and Participation

The Civic Trial system is designed to ensure transparency, fairness, and broad representation at every stage of its operation.

Transparency is achieved by giving citizens open access to information and data about the Civic Hub. An online archive documents each case from selection to policy prompt. Results are published on the Civic Forum, where citizens are invited to provide feedback. These contributions are used to improve the Hub's functioning and keep citizens at the core of its activities.

Fairness is maintained through rotating mandates for the Directive, the Preparation Committee, and the Policy Expert Committee, preventing power centralization. As with the European Commission's expert groups, all members are listed in a public register and must declare potential conflicts of interest. The Civic Hub is supported by the EU and accountable to the European Commission, which is periodically informed about its actions.

It is essential to include a wide range of citizens from diverse backgrounds to ensure that the Civic Trial is representative of the European population. The selection of participants is gender-balanced and ensures the participation of young people, while special attention is given to marginalized communities. Recruitment is based on random selection, guided by European Union statistics, and renewed for each trial session.

As agonistic democracy thrives on the coexistence of differing perspectives and values, the inclusion of marginalized groups becomes crucial. Such groups are often excluded when consensus is sought (Paxton, 2019). Practicing agonistic democracy therefore requires acknowledging these forms of exclusion, avoiding their reinforcement, and encouraging the contestation of dominant views (Paxton, 2019). As Mansbridge (1999) highlights, in contexts of mistrust, marginalized groups are more likely to have their policy needs effectively represented by members of their own communities (DEŽELAN & European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, 2023b). For these reasons, the Civic Trial ensures their involvement both through direct participation in trial sessions and by integrating their perspectives into case selection.

The selection of cases debated during the trials is based on their relevance to citizens and the need to represent a wide range of perspectives, including those of marginalized groups. To avoid favoring certain groups over others, the choice of topics is carefully monitored, and proposals suggested by diverse users are considered. Case proposals are made through the Civic Forum, drawing from the monitoring of public debate, user suggestions, or recommendations from the Directive and the Policy Expert Committee, especially when a theme is highly relevant to the EU.

Marginalized groups' inclusion

Marginalized communities may be difficult to reach, which can compromise their engagement with the Civic Trial. The Civic Hub collaborates with local organizations, such as municipalities and NGOs, to ensure widespread outreach and to include groups at risk of being overlooked.

Special programs for promotion and support can be developed to build trust and encourage engagement with the Civic Forum, the Civic Trial, and, equally important, the feedback loop.
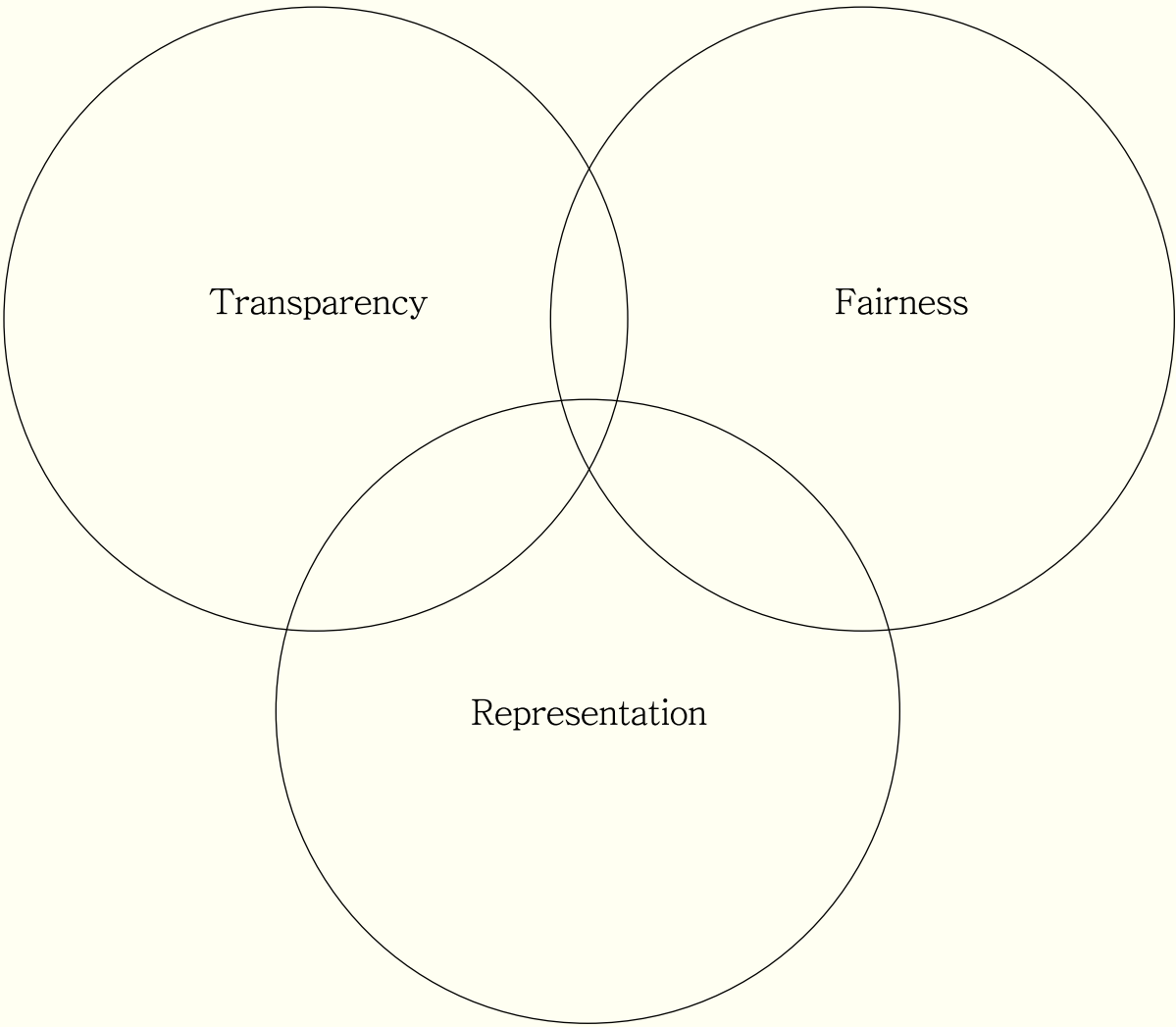

Figure 15: The Civic Trial core values

The Civic Trial Process

The Civic Trial is an articulated activity that requires both a preparation phase before the trial session and an elaboration phase following it.

Preparation begins with the selection of a debate topic within the Civic Forum, informed by citizens' interests. Once the case is chosen, the Preparation Committee organizes the trial session by selecting participants and assigning them specific roles and positions to defend.

Participants are then supported in preparing for the trial. The Preparation Committee provides them with relevant information and materials to help them build statements, gather evidence, and prepare witness examinations and cross-examinations. Citizens may also collaborate with experts during this phase to strengthen their arguments.

During the trial session, prosecutors and defenders present their statements and evidence, question their own witnesses, and cross-examine those of the opposing side. Another group of citizens acts as the judge: they attend the session, deliberate, and engage in a debate that leads to a final verdict.

Once the trial session concludes, the outcomes, including not only the verdict, but also the debates, statements, and examinations, are translated by the Policy Expert Committee into a policy prompt for policymakers.

In the next section, a blueprint illustrates in detail the phases of the Civic Trial, highlighting the actors involved, as well as the internal and external activities and touchpoints.
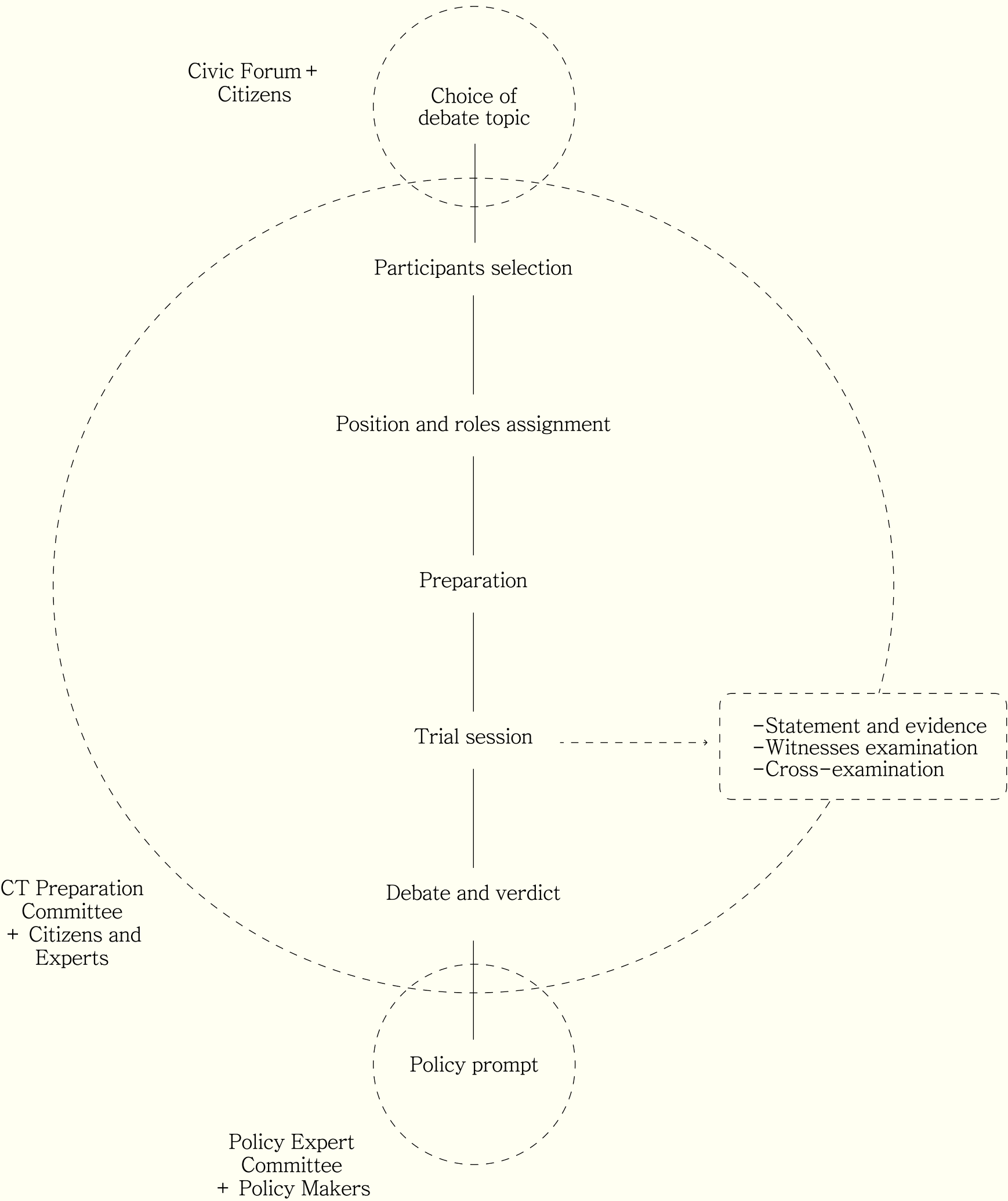

Civic Forum + Citizens

Choice of debate topic

Participants selection

Position and roles assignment

Preparation

Trial session

−Statement and evidence
−Witnesses examination
−Cross−examination

Debate and verdict

CT Preparation Committee + Citizens and Experts

Policy prompt

Policy Expert Committee + Policy Makers

Figure 16: The Civic Trial process

The Civic Trial Blueprint

external Activities	Exchange opinions and engage in public debate	Give suggestions	In teams prepare material for trial session, look for information and ask support	Participation in the trial session		Get information on the trails results and give feedback
Touchpoints	Civic Forum	Civic Forum	Civic Trial	Civic Trial		Civic Forum

Citizens

	Topic Generation	Case Selection	Preparation Phase	Trail Session	Elaboration	Publication

Civic Trial Hub

Department	Platform Administration Committee	Platform Administration Committee	Preparation Committee	Preparation Committee	Policy Expert Committee	Platform Administration Committee
Internal Activities	Public debate monitoring, notice public interest	Examine public interest and select case for trial session	Select participants, prepare positions, assign roles and instruct participants, contact experts	Moderate session, provide support to participants	Translate the trial session's results into a policy prompt, communicate with policymakers	Publish results of the trial session and collect citizens' feedback
External actors			Topic Experts	Topic Experts	Policy Expert on the Case	

EU Participation

EU Citizens' Initiative				European Commission expert groups	

Figure 17: The Civic Trial blueprint

The Civic Trial: an Example

The pamphlet presents an example of the Civic Trial activity.
It is designed as a prototype from the future context, summarizing one of the trial sessions to illustrate a possible application of the concept.

The leaflet introduces the reader to the goal of the Civic Trial and explains what was discussed during a specific session (No. 3, September 26th, 2040, Delft). It lists the initial claim, the opening statements of the prosecution and the defense, selected quotes from testimonies, and questions from the cross-examination. It concludes with some of the key questions that shaped the debate and ultimately led to the verdict.

From Courthouse to Democratic Arena

The Civic Trial draws on the Mock Trial methodology, which stages a tribunal as a learning environment where critical understanding and reflection are exercised, and pluralism is valued. In this setting, prosecution and defense do not argue to persuade in favor of their stance, but rather to illustrate the reasons behind it, offering different perspectives. Agonism, in this sense, is understood as the opposition between points of view and their equal co-existence. The verdict in the Civic Trial is not conceived as the triumph of right over wrong; rather, victory lies in the constructive dialogue between perspectives.

Moreover, the traditional courthouse is an exclusionary niche environment, where judges and lawyers represent an elite, the language used is specific and inaccessible, and dominance is neither gender- nor population-representative. Conversely, the Civic Trial "courthouse" is based on the values of transparency, fairness, and representation. Its structure ensures that people from diverse backgrounds are equally represented in the different roles. The Civic Trial is designed as a participatory and inclusive space, with settings that favor accessibility for all participants.

For these reasons, rather than being a courthouse, the Civic Trial can be understood as an arena, one in which democracy is staged and exercised.

democracy

by constructive

competition

THE CIVIC TRIAL

"Democracy by constructive competition"

expresses the essence of the Civic Trial.

It is a trial-inspired activity aimed at voicing people's needs by fostering meaningful dialogue among differing, even contrasting, points of view.
We believe in the plurality of ideas rooted in respect, and we are convinced that engaging in an exchange of competing perspectives is an exercise in open-mindedness and critical thought.
Moreover, we want this dialogue to serve both as an example and as a driver for governance, ensuring that citizens' voices are heard. To achieve this, we build on the outcomes of the Civic Trial sessions and use them to inform European Union policymakers.

The following pages summarize the discussions held during Civic Trial Session No. 3, on the 26th of September 2040.

"Asylum seekers should be guaranteed access to the labor market before their asylum claim has been processed and a decision has been taken."

Under Article 15 of Directive 2013/33/EU, asylum seekers in the EU have the right to work if their asylum application has not received a first decision within nine months, as long as the delay is not caused by the applicant. Each EU country can set its own rules about how and when asylum seekers can work, but they must make sure that access to jobs is real and practical.

To protect their labor markets, countries can give priority to EU citizens, European Economic Area nationals, and third-country nationals who already have legal residence. Once an asylum seeker is allowed to work, this right cannot be taken away while they appeal a decision, as long as the appeal suspends the previous decision. The right to work continues until the applicant receives a final negative decision on their asylum claim.

Structure

Prosecution: supports the claim made.
Defense: contests the claim made by supporting an opposite stance.
Witnesses: bring testimony, lived experience, or expertise.
Judge: listens, debates, and delivers a verdict.

Prosecution Statement

ASYLUM SEEKERS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO WORK EARLIER BECAUSE IT HELPS THEM INTEGRATE, BUILD LANGUAGE SKILLS AND SOCIAL TIES, AND BECOME SELF-RELIANT. EARLY WORK REDUCES DEPENDENCE ON WELFARE, CONTRIBUTES TO TAXES, AND SUPPORTS MENTAL HEALTH BY PREVENTING FRUSTRATION AND ISOLATION.

Defense Statement

RESTRICTING WORK RIGHTS PROTECTS CITIZENS FROM JOB COMPETITION AND WAGE PRESSURE, AVOIDS ENCOURAGING MORE ASYLUM APPLICATIONS, AND PREVENTS ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM BEING EXPLOITED IN INFORMAL OR INSECURE JOBS. EARLY ACCESS ALSO CREATES ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES FOR EMPLOYERS.

Prosecution Testimony

"Allowing asylum seekers to work early is crucial for integration. Evidence from OECD studies shows that employment helps them learn the language faster, build social networks, and gain self-confidence, which reduces their dependence on welfare. Countries that permit earlier access to the labor market also report faster integration and higher economic contributions from asylum seekers."

(OECD, 2019; European Migration Network, 2019)

Defense Testimony

"Permitting asylum seekers to work immediately can create challenges for the local labor market. Low-skilled citizens may face increased competition, especially in sectors like agriculture or hospitality. Moreover, without careful safeguards, asylum seekers risk being exploited in informal jobs. Many member states delay labor market access precisely to prevent such problems and ensure orderly administration."

(EMN, 2019; Migration Policy Institute, 2016)

Cross-Examination

Question for the Prosecution

How can we ensure that allowing asylum seekers to work immediately does not negatively affect low-skilled workers already in the labor market?

Question for the Defense

Is delaying labor market access truly effective in preventing exploitation, or does it risk pushing asylum seekers into informal and unregulated work anyway?

Claim

"Asylum seekers should be guaranteed access to the labor market before their asylum claim has been processed and a decision has been taken."

Reflections Leading the Verdict

IN SHAPING POLICY, HOW CAN WE BALANCE THE NEED TO PROTECT JOB SECURITY WITH THE DESIRE TO REDUCE WELFARE DEPENDENCY?

IN WHAT WAYS CAN INTEGRATION BE TURNED INTO A SHARED VALUE THAT STRENGTHENS BOTH LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE JOB MARKET?

WHAT POLICIES OR VALUES COULD MAKE THE EU EQUALLY ATTRACTIVE TO THOSE ARRIVING AND THOSE ALREADY LIVING HERE?

"Democracy by constructive competition"

Confronting opposing views does not necessarily lead to agreement. Instead, the Civic Trial embraces disagreement, transforming it into a space for critical reflection from which European society as a whole can benefit.

5 where

public inertia

This chapter concludes the graduation project by offering both a methodological and a personal reflection on the entire process. A section is dedicated to limitations and recommendations, and to the contribution of this graduation project to future practice.

CONCLUSION

social detachment

Methodological Reflection

The following pages reflect on the project, illustrating the process and the insights gained from both a methodological and a personal perspective.

This graduation project has been an interesting and challenging journey, one that has fostered both professional and personal growth, while also fueling my curiosity for future work.

On the ViP Approach

Using the ViP method for this graduation project has been an interesting exercise in systemic understanding, critical thinking, and self-positioning.

The ViP methodology stems from the desire to create meaningful design interventions, recognizing that designing is always about the future. The method approaches the future by embracing the complexity of the context and engaging with it respectfully. The collection of "building blocks" and the structuring of the future context are based on a systemic, objective understanding of the factors at play and the tensions between them. One of the challenges in shaping the future context objectively is that the outcome may be something we do not agree with or even like. This is particularly difficult for designers, who are often driven by the impulse to intervene and make things better. In this sense, I believe the ViP method helps us learn to observe and understand without judging, while at the same time fostering critical reflection.

Ultimately, this critical reflection leads to another challenge: understanding how you, as a designer, want to contribute to that future. At this stage, personal and professional values confront the depicted context and merge into the aim of designing a meaningful intervention. The beauty of the method lies in the fact that the design becomes an expression of the designer's positioning, manifesting the future they believe ought to be and taking responsibility for it.

Application to Migration
Migration is a complex societal phenomenon that is shaping the world and its future. It also stands at the center of diffuse political and public debate, often framed in heated and polarized terms.

The ViP method proved to be highly relevant for addressing the complexity of this topic while seeking to design something meaningful to improve the relationship between European society and immigration. In fact, it illustrates how a systemic understanding of the phenomenon within European society can open pathways for positive development.

On Ideation

In this project, the ideation phase comprises the steps of the ViP method from the development of the statements to the definition of the concepts. This phase proved particularly demanding due to the complexity inherent in the Future Context and within each situation. Adding to this complexity, the sensitivity of the topic made me question how I, as a designer, could intervene in a way that is both meaningful and respectful.

In the following section, I reflect on the methodological process I followed to complete the ideation phase, manage its complexity, and share key learnings. Two practices, in particular, proved essential: iterating and framing.

Iterating

As mentioned earlier, in the ViP method, the concept builds upon and is informed by the development of the statement and the analogy. In this project, the ideation phase followed a highly iterative process, where each step mutually supported and refined the others.

To begin with, I extrapolated leverage points from each narrative. In systems analysis, leverage points are areas within a complex system where a small shift can produce significant change across the entire system (Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System – Donella Meadows Project, 2012).

In this project, leverage points were interpreted as potential areas for intervention capable of triggering change within the situation. However, given the methodological and temporal scope of the project, their identification was not grounded in a full system analysis. These leverage points helped me

scope the goal of each design intervention and served as reference points in the subsequent steps. When defining the statements, the realization that I needed to act on citizens to create a new relationship between European society and immigration guided me in understanding what I aimed to achieve through design. Reflecting on the analogies helped refine these statements, adding nuances or adjusting the focus. Conversely, once the statements became clearer, I used them to validate the analogies.

Similarly, these steps supported idea development, which in turn acted as a checkpoint to verify the suitability and completeness of the statements and analogies.

Iteration, therefore, functioned as a reflexive process, enabling me to gain a deeper understanding of the factors at play during the design phase and to develop more appropriate responses.
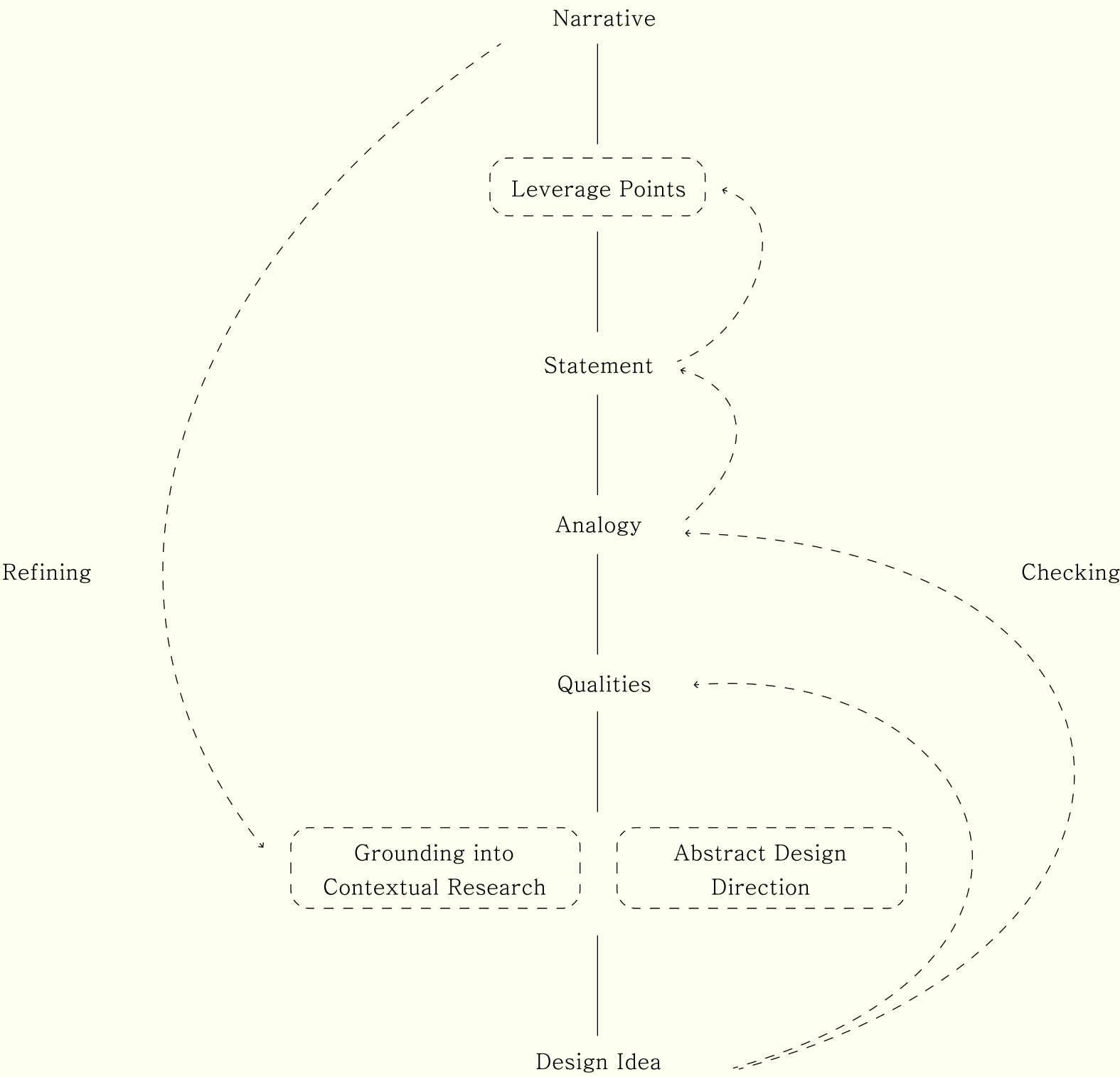

Figure 18: Process iterations

Framing

Framing emerged as a recurrent and crucial practice throughout this project. It is a concept of interest in many disciplines, including design, where is defined by Dorst as "the key to design abduction" and involves a hypothetical way of looking at a problem to develop a solution (Dorst, 2015). Schön describes it as the process of setting a problem by deciding which "things of the situation" to include or ignore and by defining the relationships that direct the change that needs to happen. These frames are dynamic and evolve through reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983).

The statements articulate the goal and underlying values at a highly abstract level, as the intended impact is systemic change within a complex context. This level of abstraction made it challenging to translate the goal into a tangible design intervention capable of achieving it. Two actions helped me manage this challenge:

Grounding the process in theory, revisiting details from the research that informed the Future Context.

Creating an intermediate level of abstraction, a design direction that could act as a bridge between the abstract goal and the concrete design idea. The Future Context in the ViP method is a representation of the future world organized into a coherent and complete structure, built upon abstractions derived from clustering context factors and identifying their connections. The nine future situations are rooted in this theoretical research of the chosen domain.

The theoretical background supported concept development by providing details that helped me ground the abstract goal in a pragmatic set of considerations drawn from clusters and context factors. This process can be seen as a framing exercise: by shifting the focus to different elements of the situation, I was able to translate an abstract goal into a design idea.

Part of this exercise involved creating a mid-level abstraction, a design direction, that was open enough to allow exploration of different possibilities while incorporating details that progressively led to a concrete design concept.

The process followed throughout the ideation phase lays the foundation for future projects in complex domains. This was, in fact, the first project in which I engaged with such a high level of complexity. The practices of iterating and framing, supported by theoretical grounding and the use of varying levels of abstraction, proved to be effective strategies for designing within complex contexts.

On Design

This project has been for me an interesting journey into unfolding what design is and what it can achieve.

Design is the ability to dive deep into the essence of things, to understand them critically, and to dare to take a step toward change, even if minimal, that makes a difference.

Design is about embracing complexity, accepting situations for what they are, and taking responsibility for the interventions we make in pursuit of what they ought to be.

Designing means being willing to create something small, acknowledging the limits of the area where we intervene, while keeping an eye on the bigger picture.

Designing also means reflecting and positioning ourselves, projecting our values into the world to build a desirable future.

The Civic Trial Concept

The Civic Trial concept exemplifies what it means to design.

The concept is not intended to solve the entire complex relationship between European society and immigration on its own. Rather, it seeks to achieve a small change that, when combined with the other eight sub-goals of the framework, acts within a context shaped by public inertia and society's emotional detachment.

The Civic Trial aims to counter detachment from politics and the ongoing public discourse by educating citizens toward meaningful dialogue. By providing a space for genuine exchange of ideas, it equips citizens to develop critical understanding, form informed opinions, and act responsibly in relation to immigration and to the wider societal challenges of our time.

Grounded in a deep understanding of the future context, the concept influences the system of instruments that citizens are provided with to engage with migration (mapped out during the deconstruction phase) by making citizens themselves the protagonists of a tool that policymakers can use to relate to migration. Citizens are enabled to express their needs and concerns, and to translate them into policy directions, thus initiating a feedback loop that reshapes how society relates to immigration.

In this way, by intervening in a limited area (creating a space for meaningful dialogue), the project reaches a broader scope: it influences not only how citizens make use of the instruments provided to engage with migration, but also the very tools they are given, such as policies and politics.

Scaling

Inherent to the project is the need to scale the design interventions. The project aims at fostering social innovation, which involves changes to rules, resource flows, cultural beliefs, and relationships within a social system across multiple spatial or institutional scales (Moore, Riddell, & Vocisano, 2015).

Within the Civic Trial concept, bringing the outcomes of the trials to the policy level is fundamental to addressing the macro-level of society. Scaling up a social innovation means tackling the broader institutional or systemic roots of a problem and ensuring that the innovation reaches everyone who needs it (Westley et al., 2014).

Limitations and Recommendations

This graduation project represented a high level of novelty for me. It was both my first time applying the ViP method and my first time engaging with such a complex theme as migration.

As the ViP methodology is itself complex, using it for the first time was at times challenging, adding to the inherent difficulty of the project. Rather than simply following its steps, the approach requires a deep understanding of, and commitment to, the philosophy behind it. The lack of prior experience with the method, combined with the limited time available, was therefore both a limitation of this project and, at the same time, a valuable learning experience.

On a content level, the scope of the project, "the relationship between European society and immigration" is both rich and complex. It touches upon several domains, such as law and sociology, that go beyond a design background. Although the project is grounded in academic research across multiple fields, it remains primarily a piece of design research. Systematic collaboration with experts and scholars from these disciplines would add significant value.

Particularly relevant would be assessing and further developing the project in collaboration with European policymakers. For instance, the concept is grounded in my analysis of the current European legislative system. To bring it to life, further detailing and integration informed by domain expertise would be required.

Moreover, as discussed in the Unraveling the Future chapter, the value of this project lies in the completeness of the framework. To take a meaningful step forward in addressing the complex relationship between European society and immigration, it is important to develop all nine design ideas proposed. Due to time constraints, this project explored only one concept, illustrating a potential direction for designing the other eight future meanings.

When developing the design ideas within the framework, it would also be valuable to adopt scaling strategies. From a social innovation perspective, achieving large-scale change requires transformations in rules, resource flows, cultural beliefs, and relationships across multiple spatial and institutional scales. Scaling social innovations, therefore, is not a matter of simply diffusing a product or model, but a complex and multifaceted process that demands specific strategies. (Moore, Riddell, & Vocisano, 2015).
Further development of the project could therefore be informed by strategies for scaling up ("impacting laws and policy"), scaling out ("reaching greater numbers"), and scaling deep ("influencing cultural roots") (Moore, Riddell, & Vocisano, 2015).

To conclude, this project addresses the relationship between European society and immigration primarily by focusing on European citizens. However, I believe that achieving positive developments in this context also requires including and safeguarding immigrants' perspectives.

The Civic Trial draws on the European/Western legal model; however, it is not intended to reinforce the hegemony of these systems over the rest of the world. Rather, it aims to serve as a space of inclusion. For this reason, in order to inform the European Commission's policy practices more effectively, a critical perspective should be given prominence. Especially in relation to migration, it is essential to adopt a critical approach that takes into account non-European and non-Western points of view.

Contribution to Practice

This project contributes to practice by demonstrating how design can be applied to complex societal challenges, such as migration, offering a starting point for achieving positive developments in domains that extend beyond design itself.

In particular, the project may be relevant in the field of policy, where its focus lies. It illustrates how a design approach applied to policy can support citizens by providing meaningful instruments to navigate the uncertainties brought about by societal change. Grounded in a systemic contextual analysis, the project explores the broad domain of the relationship between European society and immigration, proposing areas of intervention that consider both political strategies and the social atmosphere shaping the context.

The Civic Trial outlines a new path within policymaking, one that empowers citizens by bringing them into the legislative process, contributing to the European Union's objective of strengthening citizen participation in the early stages of policymaking (Vanyskova et al., 2025). By fostering citizens' criticality and responsibility, a positive reinforcing loop can be activated in policymaking: policy can benefit from greater effectiveness through citizens' engagement, while citizens can benefit from more responsive governance.

Rather than offering a definitive solution to the relationship analyzed, the outcome of this thesis is intended as a call to dare, to take steps toward positive change, even if small. My invitation is directed not only to designers and policymakers, but also to citizens, especially European citizens. With this project, I encourage them to be critical and responsible, and to value and respect their citizenship not as a tool that distinguishes them from others, but as a symbol of the values of freedom, equality, and democracy that it represents.

Final Thoughts

At the beginning of this project, I came across a quote from Richard Rorty: "A talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change." I did not delve deeply into the philosophy of the author behind this quote, yet it remained vivid in my mind throughout these months.

What I have observed over the past five months (and before), and what I envision in the future with my framework, is that inconvenient themes are often treated with noise. I believe that when confronted with something they do not agree with or like, people, especially politicians, tend to raise their voices in the hope of drowning out the inconvenient matter.

But what does all this noise bring? It is not the product of genuine political passion; rather, it is the arrogant voice of those pursuing dominance over a different opinion, an opinion that must be silenced simply because it is different.

Here is my point: we will never create a meaningful relationship with immigration if we continue to use it as "the problem", a tool to ignite hate and to hide systemic issues that are poorly addressed by politics.

That is why I believe we need to stop arguing well and start speaking differently. And to speak differently, we must first learn to listen to other points of view and accept their existence.

This project has been, for me, a first attempt to move toward cultural change. I have the feeling that, too often, a lack of criticality surrounds "hot topics" such as migration. My contribution, both as a designer and as a person, is oriented toward encouraging people to be more critical and more responsible.

As I was discussing with my supervisors, after embarking on such a project it does not feel right to step back. That is why I believe, and I hope, that this thesis will guide my professional and personal path in the world, as I search for different words capable of fostering cultural change.

6 where

public inertia

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social detachment

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