



**HOW TO USE  
ESCAPE ROOMS  
FOR CULTURAL AND  
CREATIVE INDUSTRIES:  
ASPECTS TO CONSIDER  
FOR TRAINERS WANTING  
TO CREATE THEIR GAMES**

Whitepaper



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# HOW TO USE ESCAPE ROOMS FOR CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: ASPECTS TO CONSIDER FOR TRAINERS WANTING TO CREATE THEIR GAMES

Whitepaper



This guidebook has been produced by the Escape Rooms for the Cultural and Creative Industries project consortium, which consists of:



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Further information about the project and partners is available at: <https://er4cci.eu/>



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## The project

More and more young Europeans are choosing to work in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) and are facing problems such as the ubiquity of project-based employment, the lack of permanent contracts, and part-time employment. In addition, these individuals need to have – due to the specificities of the cultural and creative sector - a wide range of traditional, general, digital and specialised skills. This makes it all the more important to make young people aware of the importance of developing their entrepreneurial skills and offering them guidance on their creative ideas. To achieve this, it is crucial to prioritise attractive, innovative, and inclusive training methods known to appeal to this target group, such as gamification.

Gamification is applying game mechanics to non-gaming environments to create gaming experiences. It is recognised as a good method for increasing engagement and motivation. Escape Rooms (ERs) can be considered an ideal form of gamification in training, allowing for endless possibilities of topics and domains that can be treated through the puzzles offered in the games.

Through the various outcomes developed within the framework of the project, the partnership has sought to raise awareness of the use of Escape Rooms as a tool to acquire entrepreneurship competencies and improve synergies between agents of the cultural field. These resources aim to propose gamification as an alternative to develop further competencies related to the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs).

In the first place, the partners wrote the guidebook “Using Escape Rooms for Supporting Entrepreneurship” which explores the benefits of gamification for developing entrepreneurship skills in the CCIs.

As a second result, the consortium created nine ER scenarios on entrepreneurship in the cultural and creative sectors and tested them with a variety of participants.

Finally, this white paper is the last publication of the project. This document aims to provide concrete recommendations on how to use the material created during the development of this project, and on the aspects to consider for trainers wanting to create their Escape Rooms for the Cultural and Creative Industries. These suggestions will ensure that the materials created will be used in the best way possible. The aim is to provide this group of professionals with practical information on how the project material should be used to optimally reach the objectives (promote and train young people in CCI entrepreneurship).

**The publication is structured as follows:**

- 1) Introduction and methodology
- 2) Escape Rooms and Learning Objectives
- 3) Field tests observation and feedback
- 4) Practical guidance for trainers
- 5) Conclusion

**The objectives are to:**

- Encompass observations and feedback collected during the testing phase
- Provide testimonies related to the created material
- Offer guidance for the conception and animation of an ER activity
- Deliver highly qualitative training to CCI entrepreneurship with increased immersion

## 1. Introduction and methodology

To develop the present whitepaper, this methodology was followed: 1) Reflection on the partners' work developing the ERs; 2) Field testing the target groups; 3) Evaluation and analysis of the testing phase; 4) Testimonies collection and conclusion.

On a first basis, for the “Field tests observation and feedback,” two different target groups were established. In total, the project was responsible for testing the created material involving 100 youngsters, aged between 16 and 30, that could benefit from training in CCI entrepreneurship (group A), and at least 16 external professionals, youth workers, educators, and stakeholders of CCI entrepreneurship (group B). For evaluating the field test, the project created two different evaluation forms, one for the participants and one for the Game Masters, to collect mainly qualitative information on their experience while playing the different scenarios.

This information is aimed at ensuring the material provided is functional and compelling and that the learning objectives are accomplished. On a second basis, the “Practical guidance to trainers” draws on the partner's experience of creating the ERs (challenges, learnings, etc.) and reflects on the results obtained through the analysis of the field test evaluation. The practical guidance was mainly derived from this point. Here the partners listed advice on things to do or to avoid when using the materials of the project. A manifesto of “Do's and Don'ts” is presented as a summary of the latter.

Finally, the conclusion wraps all the results of the project's ERs creation and field-tests analysis. Plus, the white paper gathers statements from people involved in the testing phase and/or people outside the testing phase with experience with training ERs as a source for inspiration.

## 2. Escape Rooms and Learning Objectives

For the development of the Escape Rooms, the partnership created a list of general topics related to the Cultural and Creative Industries. Then, each organisation identified the most significant issues to approach considering their expertise. Once topics were chosen, a blueprint development and toolbox creation planning served as guidelines for the ERs' production. This document included research on CCI education opportunities in each of the partners' countries to determine the future learning objectives of the ERs to be developed. The team then conducted a thorough analysis of unexplored issues at the gaming level for a diverse age group. A key focus was to determine the different game types after selecting the main theme to ensure inclusivity and cater to the varied skills of players within different teams. Once the learning objectives were identified, learning outcomes were agreed upon. With the latter information, the partnership discussed what type of ER each organisation wanted to make (digital or physical).

This led to planning the practical aspects (venue, budget, duration of the games, etc.) for later developing the scenarios, defining their concept, and starting working on the storytelling. The game flow design, puzzle structure (making them as different from each other as possible), and preparation of the necessary equipment and props followed. After the ERs' creation, the next step was the toolbox and material preparation. The next step consisted of conducting field tests before adjusting the ERs and translating them into each language of the partnership.

All the ERs' developing process was peer-reviewed by the partners, and finally, 9 Escape Rooms were created:

### 1. **Artist Residency**

Learning how to prepare an application for an artist residency; getting to know the components of the application, and acquiring the ability to write it.

### 2. **Trip to the Opera House**

Learning about the elements of a marketing plan; the activities related to the promotion of an artistic event, and familiarisation with the general principles of an opera house.

**3. Where is the Director of the Local Theatre?**

Learning about production budgets; specifics on how budgeting works in the theatre field, and discovering tools for budget making (Excel and pre-made templates).

**4. World Changers**

Learning about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the key elements of Social Impact Assessment, and how to implement knowledge and skills to design a project responding to SDGs Goals and with social impact.

**5. Cultural Agitators: Hacking the Contemporary Art World**

Defining the key elements of Sustainable Development; discovering the SDGs and their interdependence, and approaching Sustainable Development from a cultural perspective.

**6. Dreaming Europe – The Final Submit**

Learning the key elements of a cultural, artistic, and creative fields project; and how to implement knowledge and skills to obtain funding throughout the Erasmus+ program.

**7. United in the Creative Process**

Learning about the benefits of collaboration; promotion of a project, and strengths of people with Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs)

**8. Weaving Networks at the Book Fair**

Learning about the networking importance for the Cultural and Creative Industries and how to build an entrepreneurial network.

**9. The ER4CCI Digital Arts Experience**

Using certain digital tools; discovering new innovative artistic practices and learning tools, and digitally-made artworks.

### 3. Field test observation and feedback

As mentioned in the introduction, for the field test, two different target groups were established, and an estimated 116 people were aimed to test the games. Two evaluation forms were provided: one for players, and one for Game Masters.

During the field tests developed by the partner in Spain, most of the participants were familiar with the Cultural and Creative Industries. However, almost all of them were not familiar with Escape Rooms, and had never played. Since it was their first experience, their first reaction was confusion. The Game Master accompaniment was fundamental to keeping the rhythm and being able to advance in the development of the game. Additionally, the ER mechanism was quite complex. The first session ruled slowly. However, in the second session, everything was more organic. Any-ways, the participants became very curious and engaged in both sessions, making it a highly enjoyable experience. They were very happy to participate and also very surprised by the gamified experience that was offered to them. After the game, participants expressed good reviews of the experience and we were able to gather their feedback and input.

Based on the feedback from the players who filled the questionnaire, it was possible to conclude that:

- The themes selected were possible to identify during the experience. Participants were able to have a gamified experience to approach “The importance of culture in society;” “Learn more about the relationship between culture and the SDGs;” “(...) break the ice and get to know other colleagues. Networking on a cultural theme;” “Making connections in the publishing industry;” “Creating partnership dynamics with other participants;” “Weaving networks and connections for a better realization of projects.”
- Game Master’s instructions were evaluated at 4/5 relating clarity and significance.
- The language used in the game material was evaluated at 4/5 relating clarity and significance.



- Most participants did know little or were slightly informed on the topics of the games. However, except for one of them who remained neutral, the others reported learning something from the game experience.
- Regarding whether they had been able to contribute their ideas to the team and put their skills and knowledge into practice, the average response was 4/5.
- Regarding the competencies or skills put into practice during the game, the following were mentioned: invention, creativity, problem-solving, deduction capacity, mental ability, reading comprehension, teamwork, active listening, generating connections in a relaxed manner.
- Overall, the puzzles and games were evaluated at 4/5. Among the elements that the players preferred, they mentioned the numerical codes to decipher; the blank letters to fill in with an alphanumeric code; the puzzles that incorporated objects to decipher them, and the ones that needed the involvement of other teammates.
- The setting of the escape room (the graphic identity, the elements, the material, the digital/offline interaction) and the atmosphere were evaluated at 4.4/5
- The structure of the game was evaluated at 4,25/5; the storytelling and the escape room mission at 4.4/5; the GM feedback (the debriefing) at the end of the game at 4.1/5; and the general dynamics of the game at 4.4/5.

Based on the feedback from the Game Masters who filled out the questionnaire, it was possible to conclude that:

- The instructions provided in the toolbox were sufficient to guide the Game Master throughout the ER (100% positive answers). However, regarding their delivery of the instructions to the participants, for the progression of the game, the average evaluation was 3.5/5. Game Masters were newcomers, which made it difficult for them to create a role and effectively transmit the instructions since they were nervous and did not know well how to proceed. Also, hints were not sufficiently developed in the document and the GMs missed information in this respect.
- From the GMs perspective, participants were able to share their ideas on the playground and evaluated at 4/5.
- They also noticed that the players, although already knowledgeable on the topics, learned something from the game experience. They highlighted the importance of collaboration among the players to progress in the game.
- The complexity of the puzzles was overall evaluated at 4/5 by the GMs.
- The setting was very engaging for the players. Graphic identity, elements, materials, digital/offline interaction, and atmosphere, were evaluated 5/5.

The level of difficulty of the games might be evaluated differently. It might be a bit more complex than expected. They suggested developing the GM instructions document a bit further, giving more hints to the players so they can continue their path.

In **Belgium**, the feedback collected was also very interesting. Based on the feedback from the players who filled out the questionnaire, it was possible to conclude that:

- Participants, although already knowledgeable on the topics of the games, reported learning something from the game experience.
- The puzzles were rated interesting, with answers ranging from 3 to 5 out of 5. Among the elements that the players preferred, they mentioned the diversity of puzzles, the subtle links to the topics, the use of colours in the puzzles, and the cooperative aspect.
- The structure, the scenarios, and the dynamics of the games were also highly rated, with scores going from 3 to 5 out of 5. The players stated that they particularly enjoyed the non-linear paths.

Based on the feedback from the Game Masters who filled out the questionnaire, it was concluded that:

- The instructions provided in the toolbox are sufficient to guide the Game Master throughout the ER (100% positive answers).
- They also noticed that the players, although already knowledgeable on the topics, learned something from the game experience.
- In the case of the physical ERs, the players reacted well to the environment and the atmosphere of the game. However, the players of the hybrid physical and digital game were not impressed by the design of the game, which, as professionals of the CCLs, they found too simple and scholarly.
- The scenarios had the players engaged in the mission, with scores rating from 3 to 5 out of 5 on this question.

In **Italy**, from the evaluation of the data collected through the form, different positive feedback and ideas for improving the game were gathered:

- More than 70% of participants found the instruction given clear and sufficient, and almost all the players found the language used clear.
- Just a small percentage of participants were aware of the topic covered during the game (30%) and after the end of the game, more than 75% of participants had learned about the subjects.
- The majority of participants felt involved during the game experience and they could contribute with their ideas and put their skills and knowledge into practice.
- Participants admitted to having used communication skills, team-building skills, critical thinking, and cooperation. Half of the participants rated the riddles and the preferred ones were the ones related to discovered codes and opening the boxes.
- The narrative of the ER, the structure of the game, and the escape room setting were reviewed positively as well.

For the Italian experience, it was interesting the description that many of them gave about their experience, such as the following testimony:

***“I was able to actively participate in the activity and to contribute to solving the riddles. Throughout the match, I was engaged, and the idea of the challenge effectively kept me focused on the game. I also learned a few new concepts such as the effect of stakeholders on projects and the relationship between power and interest. Overall, I found the experience entertaining as well as informative.”***

In **Poland**, the test field was held with young people involved in various artistic and creative activities. Some of the participants had previous experience in playing escape games, so it was easier to engage them to play the role of Game Masters in the Escape Rooms. This helped a lot with the testing. Summarising the evaluation questionnaires collected from the test participants, it is possible to conclude that:

- The players highly valued the possibility of cooperating in a group during the game.
- They described the language used in the game as understandable, rating it 3 or 4 on a 5-point scale.
- With an average prior knowledge of the topics included in the games, most testers specified that they had learned something new, and some that they had learned a great deal.
- The participants described the difficulty of the puzzles as intermediate. They found the challenges interesting and the story engaging.
- The dynamics of the game were also rated medium-high. Participants liked the graphics prepared by the game developers.
- In general, the participants were very interested in the games and involved in testing them. The atmosphere during the group games was very positive. However, difficulties were noticed when the participants were filling in the questionnaires. It was difficult to answer the questions. These young people appeared to have little skill in expressing their opinions and thoughts clearly.

The overall perception of all the participants in the different countries was that the experience was challenging and enjoyable, and most players found the games engaging and motivating.

*“This game stimulated my curiosity and my reflection in an entertaining and engaging setting.”*

## 4. Practical guidance to trainers

Each partner organisation had a different experience in creating the games. Half of the partnership, for instance, was a newcomer regarding Escape Rooms production. Overall, all the organisations found it very interesting to explore the possibilities of gamification to approach CCI topics and competencies. It was a great challenge and a knowledgeable opportunity, from which different learning areas emerged:

**Topic / Scenario / Storytelling.** There is a significant relationship between these three elements. Choosing a CCI topic of interest is important. However, wrapping the educational elements and competencies to be developed on a proper narrative, with a compelling scenario and storytelling, will be what leads to a concrete engagement of the young people. One interesting point about gamification is the possibility of connecting different ideas/topics that in appearance diverge, for example, to talk about CCI within a crime story.

*“The game was good, attractive. Good means were used to make a repulsive element such as an Excel spreadsheet approachable.”*

**Storytelling.** Developing a believable storyline works well with young adults. They enjoy the fact that they can recognise elements from their own life in the game. For example, during the field tests, employees of a local theatre enjoyed the plot in which the director of a theatre was missing. When creating an ER, it is significant to select a topic that is linked to the target group’s interests. Conducting previous research on what matters/affects/interests the participants will probably ensure a greater engagement with the ER experience. During the game, storytelling is fundamental. The narrative proposed has to be engaging. Setting, role play, and instructions have to be delivered properly and with enthusiasm, to involve participants.

**Challenging experiences / learning outcomes.** A game that is too easy is boring and one that is too difficult is discouraging. It is much easier to convey content knowledge to young people who have played escape room-type games before, even if the games were not very educational. They are used to solving puzzles. It is interesting to point out how interest can emerge from challenges. How to entangle CCI competencies within the game flow, to detonate interest on the topics throughout the puzzles.

**Setting and type of puzzles.** A non-linear puzzle progression allows the players to take their time to look around the room, collect elements, and figure out what to do with them. It also fosters cooperation and gives room for everyone to participate. Using all the space available gives the player more room to explore. If you only exploit one corner of the room, they risk losing interest in the game. But if you hide clues on the wall, behind objects, inside other objects, etc. they will keep exploring. For example, an effective element in the ER 4 “World Changers” was dividing the card deck into hidden sub-packs in locked boxes, engaging players who were eager to discover the contents of each box. The game was intuitive in this case, with clear directions provided by numbered cards to maintain the game’s coherence. Adding some background music or ambient noise also helps the players immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the game. In the case of a digital game, sound effects are also a very good way to bring more liveliness to the experience.

*“As for space, I think it could work if there was a little more distance between the players. Being so close, it was hard for me to concentrate and I also think that solving other people’s riddles contaminated the rest. It’s an idea, maybe it’s not the solution. But I thought that being the participants a little more separated could allow when couples to have more physical and sound space to better solve the issues, even to talk about other things while -weaving networks-. I would add a chair to each space so that when one participant visits the other can sit down.”*

**Role play.** Assigning specific roles to the players increases their investment in the story. Preparing a short background story and mission for each player makes them feel like their participation in the game is very important. In ER 8 “Weaving Networks at the Book Fair,” invited each participant to personify a character from the editorial field. During the development of the game, they had to decode puzzles throughout the encounter with other participants, wondering how their character could be of help to the others. This enhanced collective work throughout the engagement with the storytelling. Conversely, in Escape Room 6 “Dreaming Europe – The Final Submit,” players had more freedom to navigate the game space and had to collaborate actively to uncover all elements necessary to solve the puzzles presented.

*“I think what they liked the most was getting into the role and taking the „challenge” of deciphering something very personally, they experienced it as something intense and exciting in my opinion.”*

**Game Masters** play a vital role. They have to study the guide and incorporate all the elements to be successful in their role. Patience is a must. The GM has to rely on the participants’ intuition and intelligence, to let them solve the puzzles, trying to not deliver hints - except if participants really struggle to go further. Game Masters should motivate participants to find solutions without helping right away. The introductory speech by the Game master is fundamental since it sets the mood for the rest of the game. This introduction has to intrigue the players and facilitate their connection with the role they are playing.

**Teams.** Small teams of 4-5 people working together can solve puzzles faster and better. In larger groups, it is not always possible for everyone to participate equally.

*“Teamwork, immersion, intrigue, logic, and culture are the watchwords of this experience.”*

*“It was a rather enriching experience for our team in terms of cohesion and sharing.”*



**Information and learning outcomes.** If the game is packed with too much knowledge, it stops being an educational game and becomes too scholarly. It is not recommended to deliver too much information and complexity. What is important is to include proper storytelling in the puzzles. The game has to be introductory to certain topics but it will not be extensive on deep knowledge about it. An interesting suggestion was to include QR codes throughout the games that, when scanned with a device, would lead to brief explanation videos or online summaries of key points covered in the game to reinforce understanding. Another critical factor to consider is the game's duration, challenging to define due to age-related differences impacting gameplay.

*“I liked it and I think that very interesting things can be done with the game. I think it can work very well as an „ice-breaker” that also allows you to do some networking from teamwork.”*

**Instructions.** When people are not used to Escape Rooms, it might be difficult to guide them through the game. Instructions and game flow have to be very clear. Introductory videos are not especially the best way to engage players in the scenario. Sometimes a well-prepared discourse by the Game Master is more efficient than a video shown on a computer or a tablet.

*“I liked it and I think it has a lot of potential, especially because it can be adapted to many formats. I think it's important to spend a lot of time on the introduction. Beyond communicating what the game is for (depending on what interests you) I think it can help if the introduction explains a bit about the dynamics that may occur in the game, the expected duration of the game, certain rules (things that are allowed and things that are not), etc.”*

**Language and inclusivity.** It is important to pay attention to the generational cultural codes to be able to communicate properly and efficiently with the target audience. It is important not to rely too much on players' prior knowledge of the subject matter. The game should allow solving puzzles from information only available during the game. Moreover, it is relevant to use specific tools that are known by the participants and that they know how they work. A minimum required knowledge to use certain mechanisms, or read the material, is essential.

**Hybrid settings.** When mixing physical and digital settings, you need to find the proper balance. The players prefer going from one to another regularly instead of spending a long time inspecting the room and then a long time behind a computer screen.

**Digital Escape Rooms.** In a digital game, players don't like when they cannot go back to a previous step. If they are not paying enough attention, they can skip important elements, and not being able to go back forces the Game Master to give them the clue that they missed. This spoils the game for them. In digital settings, being able to validate knowledge or codes before moving on makes the experience functional and more interesting.

**Testing.** During the development of the game, it was difficult to assess the complexity of the game/mechanisms. Testing is fundamental to evaluating the proper level of the games.

The following are the 5 dos and 5 don'ts that the partnership proposes as an inspirational guideline when creating and animating ER for CCIS:

### **Do's**

1. Storytelling is everything. No matters what educational elements and competencies you're aiming to approach, a compelling scenario and narrative will be the hook for participants to be engaged.
2. Do test your puzzles before presenting them to the players. This way, if something does not work the way you planned, you can adjust the puzzle accordingly.
3. Instructions have to go straight to the point and be very clear.
4. The Game Masters have to train beforehand, and understand very well the game. Instructions for them have to be very clear so that they can give explanations to the players if some are required.
5. As a Game Master, show the players that you are invested in what they are doing. Do not wait for them to ask for clues. React to what they are doing. If they are on the right path, encourage them. If they are on the wrong path, invite them to reconsider their choices.

## Don'ts

1. Don't discourage unconventional and creative approaches to problem-solving. Escape rooms aimed at people in the CCLs should encourage creativity.
2. Don't rush your explanations. Take your time to explain the rules and the objectives of the game during your pre-game discussion with the players. Rushing your explanations may cause confusion and misunderstanding later in
3. Don't act as an observer of the game. The Game Master should be fully immersed in the universe of the game experience to fully engage the players.
4. Allow the players time to discuss and explore the game. The Game Master should have good time management skills and intervene only when players are stuck in the game
5. When designing an Escape Room, don't overly emphasise the theoretical aspects. While information and learning are valuable, it's best to avoid excessive text and too much educational content. The learning process is more effective when players enjoy the game activity.

## 5. Conclusion

For the elaboration of this document, the project was responsible for testing the created material involving 100 youngsters, aged between 16 and 30 (group A), that could benefit from training in CCI entrepreneurship and at least 16 external professionals (Group B), youth workers, educators, and stakeholders of CCI entrepreneurship. Being able to evaluate the Escape Rooms with a bigger group might serve to incorporate new insights and make adjustments. Moreover, each Escape Room is a non-close structure, that can be adjusted following the needs of the trainers and participants, as well as the context where they are playing.

Since the target groups and their fields of interest in one of the main points to take into account, specific adjustments on the storytelling, material design or instructions provided will be a major change that can be adapted in each case.

Overall, during this project, we were able to state that the methodologies related to Gamification and Game-Based Learning used in the core of the Escape Room development have a lot of potential for non-formal learning. The use of this kind of approach for education can make more engaging and interactive the learning. Moreover, through this methodology, in the field of Cultural and Creative Industries is possible to create training sessions that aim to support the development of various skills, particularly entrepreneurial skills, for youth workers in the sector.

We have seen that by incorporating game elements into the learning process, it is possible to create an engaging and immersive environment that fosters soft skills: teamwork, critical and creative thinking, computational thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills. In the context of teaching entrepreneurship in the Cultural Creative Industries, gamification can simulate real-world scenarios and challenges that entrepreneurs face, allowing players to apply their knowledge practically and dynamically.

Furthermore, gamification encourages collaboration and competition: through multiplayer games or team-based challenges, people can work together to solve problems, brainstorm ideas, and develop innovative solutions. This collaborative environment mirrors the collaborative nature of the Cultural Creative Industries, where entrepreneurs often collaborate with artists, designers, and other creative professionals to bring their ideas to life. Moreover, the gamification approach enhances engagement, fosters collaboration, provides immediate feedback and rewards, and ultimately prepares players for the dynamic and competitive nature of the industry. By leveraging gamification techniques, it is possible to create a stimulating learning environment that equips aspiring entrepreneurs with the skills and mindset necessary for success in the Cultural Creative Industries.

In conclusion, Escape Rooms can be a powerful tool for learning, motivating, and growing both individually and collectively. Incorporating these methodologies of non-formal learning can improve the quality of learning, engagement and collaboration in multiple contexts. We expect to have provided some useful recommendations on how to use the material created during the development of this project, and on the aspects to consider for trainers wanting to create their Escape Rooms for the Cultural and Creative Industries.

Enjoy the games!

