Leveraging Empathy in Community-based Policymaking

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Problem Statement

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Align policymakers' decisions and citizens' expectations.

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How could we address such drawbacks?

Goal

Support the decision-making process by engaging citizens on **societal** and **political challenges**, devising a **long-term engagement cycle** by leveraging on the **empathy** and **feelings** of citizens, driving them to **empathise** between each other, finally leading to a **shared vision** on the impact of complex decisions.

Why Empathy?

"Empathy is the greatest contributor in strengthening social interaction through its ability to motivate individuals to cooperate, to share resources and to help others"

- It drives cooperative behaviours
- It strengthens the bonds between people
- It moves people to consider others' points of view
- It contributes to constructive discussions

Core Principles

Our methodology combines design principles and crowd-oriented techniques

- **Crowdsourcing**, collecting data about citizens' thoughts, feelings and stances on relevant decision-making topics

- **Gamification**, promoting the intrinsic motivation of citizens towards the usage of the final tool to achieve a long-lasting engagement

Empathy-based Engagement Cycle
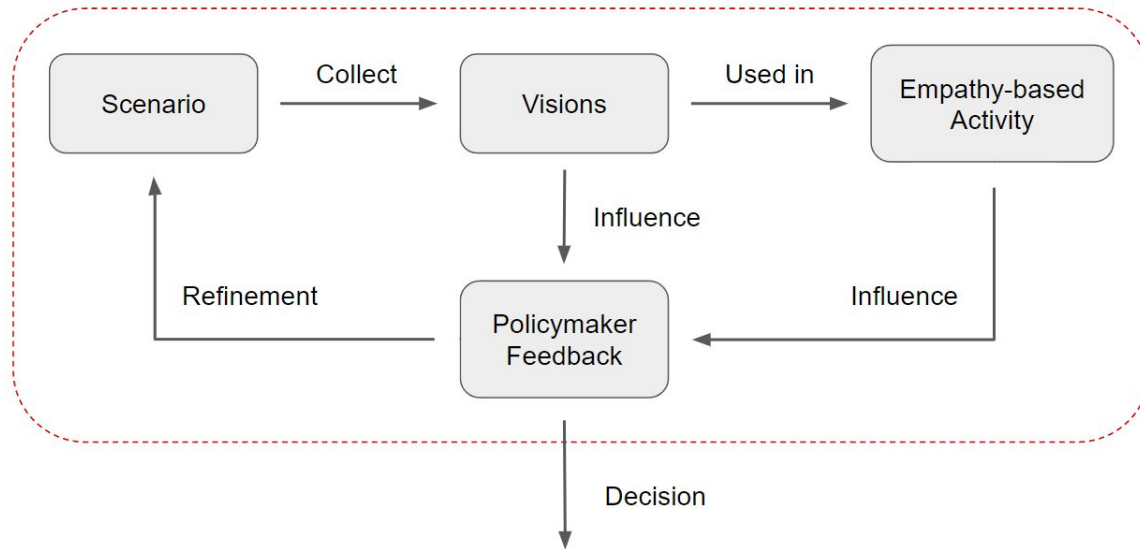
Scenario

A scenario is a textual description about an **actual** or **hypothesised** event on which the policymaker would like to collect citizens' thoughts and feelings to achieve a consensual decision.

"It's September 2022. A new contagious virus has spread across the world. Governments impose the use of smart bracelets to track the diffusion of the disease. Such devices held information about the wearer's health condition and whether the wearer has been recently tested for the disease. It is also mandatory to access public transportation and enter public spaces."

Vision

A vision is the concretisation of the thoughts and feelings of a citizen. It comprises four elements (with various *purposes*):

- a picture (*concretising*)
- a set of keywords (*summarising and expliciting*)
- a textual description (*detailing*)
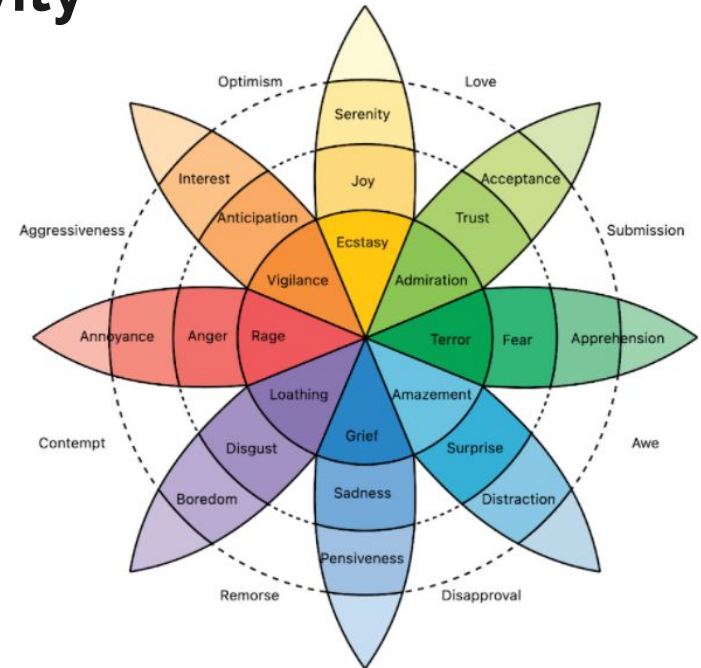- a sentiment (*empathy*)
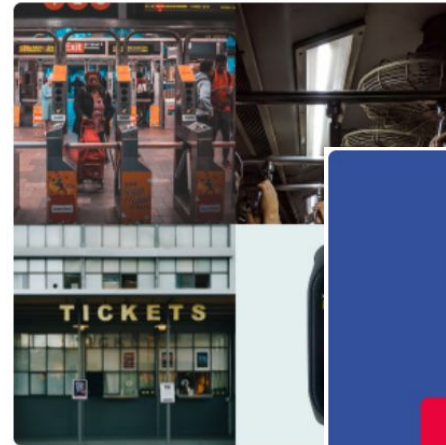
Empathy-based Gamified Activity

Citizens are engaged in a gamified activity, allowing the exchanging and confrontation of opinions and thoughts.

The playing citizen is shown another person's vision, and they are asked to empathise with it by stating the feelings they believe are conveyed and providing their thoughts about it.
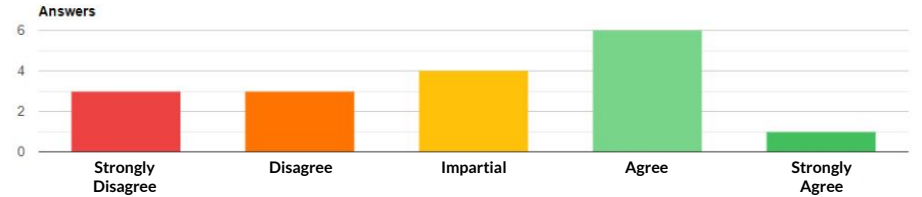
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Output to Policymaker

The content provided by the citizens is organised, analysed and structured as a set of visualisations that allow policymakers to enhance and drive their decisions.

Additionally, such content can be used to refine the proposed scenarios.

Conclusions

Our contributions can be summarized as follows

- We employ empathy-driven design and gamification to drive users to cooperate and debate on complex societal challenges
- We propose a structure to organize the thoughts of citizens
- We present an empathy-based engagement cycle that contributes reaching a shared vision on the topic of discussion