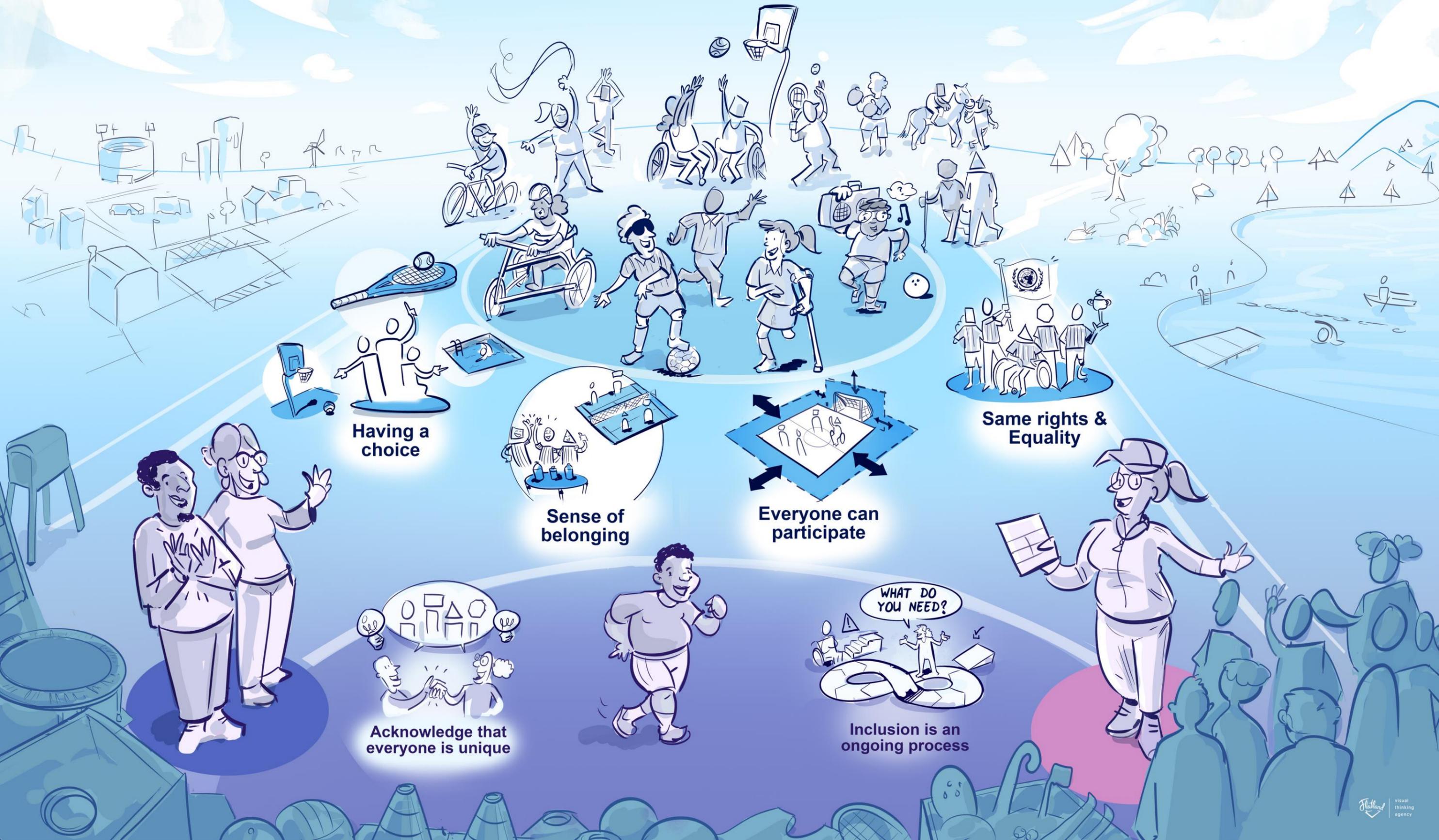


INCLUSION IN SPORT

Perspectives by youth with a disability, their parents and sport professionals



Having a choice

Sense of belonging

Everyone can participate

Same rights & Equality

Acknowledge that everyone is unique

Inclusion is an ongoing process

It was important to attain the authentic views, wishes and feelings of youth with a disability regarding inclusion in sport. Therefore, online focus groups were conducted with youth with a disability, their parents and sport professionals in Finland, Lithuania, Portugal and The Netherlands. Seven themes regarding inclusion in sport have been identified from these interviews, below these themes will be explained one by one.



Having a choice

Statement: Having a choice means that we want to have a choice what and where to play. We want options and the chance to explore what suits us best.

Youth with a disability share the same desire to have a choice regarding sport/hobby as other children. One of the children said: "I've been able to choose my hobby myself and I love it so much!" Parents underline the importance of having a choice and state that their child should be able to choose a sport that fits their skills and passion. For professionals, it is important to give children the opportunity to try out different sports and make their own choice.



Sense of belonging

Statement: Sense of belonging means that we feel like we belong to a group or a team. Sport helps us work together and be together on and off the pitch. Things like a club BBQ or an open club activity can really mean a lot.

For youth, it is important to feel welcome and have the sense of belonging to a group: "...for me that's just, that I don't feel excluded or anything. I belong there, I do feel like I belong, because I'm in a group..." Parents underline the sense of belonging in games and practices and the friendship sport provides. For professionals, inclusion is about feeling welcome and being part of a group or team.



Everyone can participate

Statement: Everyone can participate means: it is easier to change activities than to change people. Coaches can be creative and help us to take part in our own way. Everyone can do sports!

Almost all of the children participating in the focus groups stated that everyone can participate in sport: "I think that everyone can participate in sports. Not necessarily in the same ways, but in their own way..." Parents and professionals also underline that everyone counts. The environment should adapt to the personal circumstances, individual wishes and needs of children with a disability to make it possible for them to participate in sport. It is really not that hard: "You can always adapt it to make it possible."



Same rights and equality

Statement: Same rights and equality means: we all have the right to do sports and have hobbies. "We're all equal and we're all different."

Statement: Parents see that their child with a disability doesn't have the same rights and possibilities as able-bodied children and feel that this needs to change. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities states that all people have the right to leisure activities. But this equal access has proven elusive for youth with a disability. One of the children said it very nicely: "We're all equal and we're all different". As a person, we are all unique and this makes us equal.



Acknowledge that everyone is unique

In line with that, our parents and coaches think that it is important to acknowledge that everyone is unique. This means acknowledging differences as a first step to a more open society.

Statement: Parents and professionals state that everyone, with or without a disability, is unique. The environment of children with a disability has to acknowledge these differences and uniqueness. This will be a first step towards "a different and more open mentality in society in general" and a change in the culture within the sport.



Inclusion is an ongoing process

Statement: Inclusion is an ongoing process. This means that small steps make big differences. We must keep working together. It's everyone's responsibility!

Both parents and professionals experience inclusion in sports as a multi-stage and ongoing process. Small steps forward make a big difference: "...it was a process that took place, a transition". This is about the shared responsibility that we keep on working on inclusive sport opportunities together.



Terminology (language) is challenging

Statement: It's not about language, inclusion in sport is about choices, opportunities and belonging. Please ask us what we need, what we can do and what we like. Because only together we can make sport more inclusive!

Sport professionals struggle with the terminology regarding inclusion: "...we shouldn't create that fear in the field with this jungle of terms." They experience that it is hard to use the right words. But inclusion is not about language. Ask children themselves what they need, what they can and what they like.