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## Action plans on the co-creation process A theoretical and methodological framework

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UPLIFT – Urban PoLicy Innovation to address  
inequality with and for Future generaTions

## Deliverable 4.1

# Action plans on the co-creation process

*A theoretical and methodological framework*

June 2020



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# 1 Introduction

This deliverable is titled ‘Draft Action plans on the co-creation process’. Indeed, the main body of this document consists of draft local action plans for the co-creation process in the four implementation sites of UPLIFT. All of these action plans are presented in the Appendix, however with different level of specificity reflecting on the different level of preparation for the implementation of the co-creation process. (E.g. while the cooperation between the local research partner and the local implementer partner is smooth in Amsterdam, Sfantu Gheorge and Tallinn, it has some deficiencies in Barakaldo due to administrative issues, that is why the Barakaldo draft action plan can be regarded as very preliminary one that needs further development.)

All draft local action plans have their own context and focus, and the various plans can be understood and consulted independently from each other.

Nevertheless, in order to ensure maximum comparability and increase the chances of mutual learning and policy transfer between sites, all draft local action plans follow a common template. Moreover, they are based on similar theoretical and methodological principles. In the first part of this deliverable (chapters 2 and 3) these principles, which revolve around what we call reflexive policy-making, are outlined in more detail. After that, a brief synthesis of the local action plans as they are now (chapter 4) is provided. We finish this part of the deliverable with a brief conclusion, as well as with a peek into the future of the work package (chapter 5). It is important to realize that both the local action plans and the theoretical and methodological framework are work in progress. We see reflexive policy making as a dynamic and iterative process that requires constant stakeholder consultation, outcome monitoring and outcome evaluation. At the moment of writing, we are only at the very beginning of this process. Therefore, we see this deliverable as a living document that will be regularly updated, adapted and extended in the course of time. A formal update of the document will be submitted as deliverable D4.2, which is due in month 19 of the project.

## 2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of UPLIFT's work package 4 connects four different approaches: the capability approach (Section 2.1), participatory action research (Section 2.2), policy-co-creation (Section 2.3) and reflexivity (Section 2.4). While they might seem conceptually separate, these approaches come together in the work of WP4, as the co-creation process relies on the active participation of young people in order to enhance their capabilities and co-create a shared reflexive policy agenda. In Section 2.5 we outline how we intend to combine and integrate the aforementioned approaches in what we call reflexive policy-making.

### 2.1 Capability approach

The Capability Approach (CA) is a comprehensive, multi-dimensional and normative approach for interpreting and measuring human development, poverty, inequality and well-being. It takes into account the complex relationships between resources, social context, individual conditions, individual preferences and actual choice behaviour. As such, it is one of the preferred theoretical lenses through which the UPLIFT project conceptualizes well-being and inequality and it has a particularly important role to play in WP3 and WP4.

The CA emerged in the 1980s as a new comprehensive multidimensional approach in reaction to the strong dominance of welfare economics and utilitarian approaches in poverty and inequality research. The CA argues that these traditional approaches towards poverty and inequality have focused too much on resources (income, wealth) and utility (desire-fulfilment, satisfaction) as indicators of human well-being. According to the CA, such a perspective is incomplete and potentially misleading (Kimhur, 2020). CA scholars argue that individual well-being is dependent on a complex interplay between various factors: objective and subjective, societal and individual, economic and non-economic. According to the CA, social policies should primarily have an empowering role. They should try to safeguard and strengthen the capability set of people so that these people can make their own choices and live a meaningful and fulfilled life (Alkire, 2002).

Of key importance in the CA are the so-called capabilities that a person has. These capabilities are defined as the "real freedoms to lead the kind of life people have reason to value" (Sen, 1999). The so-called capability set of a person refers to the alternative combinations of so-called functionings that are feasible for this person to achieve. In this respect, functionings can be defined as the "various things a person may value being or doing" (Kimhur, 2020, p.4). Examples of functionings are: being nourished, being employed, having children, being healthy, being happy, being well-housed, having self-respect and being able to take part in the life of the community (Sen, 1999, p. 75). Capabilities and functionings are closely linked. The functionings show what people actually are (beings) or do (doings), whereas the capabilities refer to the ability to achieve these beings or doings.

Having capabilities implies that a person has the freedom to achieve valuable functionings as an active agent, and not because he/she is coerced to do so (Kimhur, 2020, p.4). Therefore, capabilities should be seen as real rights, real freedoms and real opportunities. Which functionings people eventually choose from their capability set depends on their individual preferences. In the CA framework, these preferences constitute the link between the capabilities and the chosen functionings.

#### *What determines people's capabilities?*

The capabilities that people enjoy are strongly dependent on both individual and contextual (structural) factors. First of all, and on an individual level, the so-called resources are of importance. Resources refer to the material aids (income, goods, services) that a person can mobilize in order to

live the life that he/she wants to live. Together with the formal legal rights (e.g. the rights enshrined in the constitution) that people enjoy, resources constitute the formal freedoms that people have.

Before they feed into the capability set, the formal freedoms are moderated by so-called conversion factors. Conversion factors refer to the fact that different individuals have different abilities to convert material aids and formal rights into valuable opportunities (Kimhur, 2020, p.4). Personal and group specific characteristics may result in remarkable interpersonal and intergroup variations in the conversion of resources into the freedom to achieve alternative lives. Individuals do neither have the same need for resources, nor have the same abilities to convert resources into real freedoms (Volkert and Schneider, 2012, p. 398).

Conversion factors refer to personal characteristics as well as to social circumstances. On a personal level, individual features such as sex, intelligence, social skills and level of (financial) literacy determine to what extent people are able to transform their resources and formal rights into valuable opportunities. For instance, with the same level of resources, one may expect that a healthy person has more capabilities than a sick or disabled person who is constrained by its health situation (Volkert and Schneider, 2012, p. 398). On a social level, social norms and social practices (real rights as opposed to the formal rights that are seen as part of the resources) are relevant conversion factors. Examples of social conversion factors are social norms, discriminating practices, gender roles, societal hierarchies and power relations (Volkert and Schneider, 2012, p. 398). Just as the personal conversion factors, social conversion factors work out differently for different (groups of) people. For example, gender inequality may be a limiting conversion factor for women, whereas discrimination may limit the conversion possibilities for ethnic minorities. On top of the individual and social conversion factors, Robeyns (2005) considers environmental/geographical factors such as climate or geographic location as a third type of conversion factors. In the CA, socio-economic vulnerability tends to be seen as the result of a specific combination of lack of resources, constraining conversion factors and (a resulting) lack of free choice (Hearne and Murphy, 2019).

It is important to note that the CA can serve very well as an evaluation instrument for policy makers, but it can also offer a valuable research framework for academic researchers. After all, by investigating how resources are converted into capabilities, thereby unravelling relevant conversion factors, structural causes of inequity and injustice may come to light (Kimhur, 2020).

#### *Policy implications of the capability approach*

In work package 4, new policy initiatives that intend to diminish urban inequality are co-created together with young people through participatory action research (see also Sections 2.2 to 2.5). Because of the strong focus that it puts on agency, the CA very well supports such a research approach (see also Hearne and Murphy, 2019). The main objective of WP4 is to give young people a real voice in local policy making. Through co-creation techniques, young people will be involved in the various phases of the policy-making process: problem definition, policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. In this process the young people:

- Will be taken seriously by the policy-makers. This will empower them and raise their self-esteem;
- Will have the opportunity to express their needs and desires with regard to a given policy domain. This is expected to result in policies that better fit their needs;
- Will gain valuable insights into the policy making process. This may have an added value for both their personal life and their professional career.

All the above objectives refer to enhancing the capabilities and/or functionings that young people have. Therefore, framed in terms of the CA, the co-creation process that is the core of WP 4 aims to increase the capabilities and real freedoms (life chances) of young people. Indeed, according to the CA framework, social policies could enhance capabilities in various ways:

- By providing resources or formal rights (e.g. providing subsidies)
- By enhancing personal conversion factors (e.g. investing in education, social skills, literacy)
- By enhancing social conversion factors (e.g. emancipatory policies, anti-discrimination policies)
- By providing new potential functionings (e.g. by developing new innovative housing or labour market concepts that are attractive for young people).

The research in WP4 intends to assess together with the young people themselves which of the above policy options has most potential in terms of capability enhancement. It also aims to give insight into how such policies should be designed and implemented in practice in order to achieve that objective.

## 2.2 Participatory action research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) was founded in the work of Kurt Lewin (1946 and 1952), who coined the term “action research,” and is a form of qualitative research that seeks to understand human experiences. However, it goes beyond understanding; it also attempts to take constructive action in order to ameliorate difficult, often oppressive, situations (Olshansky, 2005). In PAR, the participants (who would normally be considered the “objects of the research”) act as co-researchers so that they might come “to a critical form of thinking about their world” (Freire, 1970). Thus, PAR refers to a social process where people engage in, examine and interpret their own social world, shaping their sense of identity.

McTaggart (1997) highlights the distinction between ‘involvement’ and ‘participation’. He states that authentic participation means that the participants share “in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world” (p. 28). This is in contrast to being merely “involved” in research, where one does not have ownership in the project.

Instead, PAR aims to be an empowering process that requires collaborative reflection and that helps people understand and challenge the social structures which “limit their self-development and self-determination” (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998: 24). The approach can be summarised in seven key features:

- PAR investigates the relationship between the individual and the social;
- PAR is participatory in the sense that people engage in, examine and interpret their own social world, shaping their own sense of identity;
- PAR is practical and collaborative; it engages and connects with others in social interactions;
- PAR is emancipatory and empowering;
- PAR entails a process of critical reflection on the participants’ own situation;
- PAR is recursive (reflexive, dialectical), as it requires ongoing reflection on the contradictions of the social world that shapes the condition of the participants.

- PAR is expected to result in constructive action that improves the situation of the research participants

The value and usefulness of the PAR approach lies not just in the knowledge it creates but also in its more inclusive way of generating such knowledge. This form of new knowledge (co)creation aims to challenge embedded, and often implicit, (biased) knowledges or assumptions employed in social policy. As such, it offers the possibility to reposition ‘the researched’ from being a ‘social problem’ to become ‘a community of valorised and normatively legitimate subjectivities’ (Farragua and Gerrard 2016).

### *Youth Participatory Action Research*

A particular form of PAR is Youth Participatory Action Research (see Desai, 2019), an approach that promotes the engagement of young people in social policy research, giving voice to youth’s concerns, and promoting activities that meet the needs of local youth within a community. It has mostly been applied in disadvantaged communities, thus teaching young people from marginalized backgrounds how to inquire about complex power relations, socio-economic struggle, and the consequences that larger structures of oppression can have on their lives (Cammarota and Fine, 2010; Rodriguez and Brown, 2009). In the most advanced versions of YPAR youth are involved in all aspects of the research cycle: from formulating research questions to collecting and analyzing data to presenting findings and offering key recommendations that lead to social action and meaningful change (Mirra et al., 2016), but this can change depending on the project. Regardless of the proportion of participation, what is fundamental is the quality of the participation (McIntyre, 2007): YPAR aims to provide marginalized youth with an opportunity to exercise their agency by being civically engaged, developing their critical consciousness, and learning how to advocate for themselves and for oppressed communities (Dolan et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2017).

The methodology often used in PAR is recursive, and is often represented as a spiral of iterative steps, each of which is composed of planning, action, observation and the evaluation of the result of the action (McTaggart, 1997; McIntyre 2007). The work of WP4 is inspired by the principles of PAR, as it aims to empower young people and involve them in the process of policy co-creation, thus teaching them about complex interrelations and giving them the tools to have their voice heard in social policy making and enhancing their capabilities.

## **2.3 Policy co-creation**

Current societal problems such as economic and environmental crises, failing educational systems and housing affordability issues are regarded as wicked problems, as they are complex and ambiguous in both their resolution and in the understanding of their underlying causes. In order to overcome the weakness of many policy responses to such complex problems and to meaningfully engage with them, the last decades have seen a pluralization of policymaking, in which government decision makers are not alone, but sit at the centre of a web of policy advisors from several sectors, from business and for-profit, to no-profit and citizens groups (Craft and Howlett, 2013). The increased presence of diverse stakeholders in the policymaking world is based on the idea that interest organisations and think tanks can enrich policy capacity and promote innovation (Fraussen and Halpin, 2017).

Within this trend, a new emphasis has been placed on innovation labs, or policy labs, as a way to enhance the capacity for public problem solving (McGann et al., 2019). They can be defined as “new organizational arrangements” (Timeus and Gascó, 2018) for enabling more experimental and user-focused approaches to public policy and service design. According to several authors, innovation labs

draw on design inspired creative processes (e.g. human-centred design, ethnographic research) to generate and test policy solutions, in an iterative process that is carried out together with policy or service 'users' – or, more broadly, citizens (Nesti, 2018; Lewis et al., 2019; McGann et al., 2018).

This strong focus on incorporating user-driven perspectives is what differentiates innovation or policy labs from other, more traditional, forms of stakeholders' involvement in policymaking. Indeed, these policy labs often aim to bring "into view the experiences and worlds of people affected" by different policies (Kimbrell, 2016, 316), in a shift from traditional models of public administration where citizens are mere passive policy consumers. According to McGann et al. (2019), despite being a top-down form of citizen involvement, the labs are emblematic of co-productive models of public problem-solving, and their proliferation indicates a shift towards co-productive governance models. This reflects longer-term trends in public management and administration. Indeed, public management and public service theory have been engaging with co-production and co-creation for decades (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; McGann et al., 2019).

Within the public management context these terms capture a wide variety of practices and activities that entail the voluntary and active involvement of end-users. In the literature, the main difference between co-production and co-creation is that the latter puts more emphasis on generating value by and for end-users (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), but they are empirically used as interchangeable concepts. In co-creation, citizens are involved as partners, and their knowledge and experience are mobilized to a varying degree and in various stages of the design, management, and delivery of public sector activities – from simple co-implementers all the way to co-designers (Voorberg et al., 2015). The public sector activity where co-creation is most used is service delivery (Fledderus et al., 2014), but increasingly also regulatory formulation and the co-creation of policy solutions to complex problems (Torfing et al., 2019). In this regard, Loeffler and Bovaird (2019) emphasize that it is important to engage the participating citizens with the most appropriate skills and knowledge. Specifically, it must be taken into account that citizens who are keen to use their voice are not always 'experts by experience', whereas the real 'experts by experience', in particular those from disadvantaged groups, do not always have the self-confidence to use their voice and are not always keen to have their activities scrutinised and debated.

The benefits of co-creation in public management and service delivery include building trust in institutions (Fledderus et al., 2014); enhancing democratic accountability in policymaking (Nabatchi et al., 2017; Durose and Richardson, 2016), and strengthening social cohesion by empowering marginalized groups (Torfing et al., 2019). Essentially, what emerges from the literature is that the involvement of citizens in co-creation is considered intrinsically valuable, a goal in itself, regardless of the quality or effectiveness of its outputs (McGann et al., 2019). Indeed, one of the key outstanding empirical questions concerning co-creation is whether this approach to public problem solving actually delivers solutions that 'address the needs of citizens in a robust way' (Voorberg et al., 2015).

But co-creation also has potential disadvantages and dark sides. Co-production processes can be co-opted by groups or organisations trying to legitimise their discourse. Moreover, also public institutions or officials themselves can use the co-creation process for this purpose. Indeed, the formal regulation mechanisms of "top-down" co-production in public service management affect power dynamics within the co-creation process. These can result in situations in which the very citizens that are supposed to be empowered are actually being co-opted and used for different purposes (Bovaird et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is a risk that the use of co-production in policymaking could incentivise a "piecemeal strategy" that focuses on narrow interventions, comfortably ignoring the causes of complex problems (Bovaird et al., 2019).

The co-creation process in UPLIFT is rather similar to that conceptualized in public management, but it seeks to offset some of its potential disadvantages by incorporating other approaches as well. In Section 2.5, we will further elaborate on this.

## 2.4 Reflexive policy-making

Many different definitions of the term reflexivity can be found in the literature on governance and policymaking, all slightly different, but all pertaining to the idea of self-critical reflection (Feindt and Weiland, 2018). Reflexivity has to do with the ability of consciously understanding concepts, assumptions and presuppositions and change them if necessary (Stirling, 2006; Malthouse et al., 2014), as well as with the ability to recognize our own influence on what kind of knowledge we create and how (Neil and Pascal, 2012). It is an expansive way of learning, leading to a change in perception and behaviour (Sol et al., 2018). Moreover, reflexivity can also be conceptualized as a strategy of dealing with complexity: *“the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action”* (Mezirow, 1991: 162). In this sense, being reflexive can be an effective strategy to successfully deal with situations where divergences and conflicts can rise (Sol et al., 2018). Reflexivity can occur at an individual level, but it is at the collective level – as social reflexivity – that it is most useful to define new concepts and courses of action (Perez, 2014). Indeed, a reflexive society should have the capacity to make existing norms and values more explicit and to consequently reframe and reorient beliefs and actions. (Wals et al., 2009). This can be defined as a social learning process (Reed et al., 2010).

Reflexive approaches to governance and policymaking systematically raise doubts about existing assumptions and practices and seek to find an enlightened alternative (Perez, 2014). They have the potential to unlock the implicit understandings and biases that different actors hold and use this to generate improved knowledge for future practice (Malthouse et al., 2014). Indeed, the term “reflexive governance” has come to define governance arrangements where institutions allow for a reflexive adaptation of regulations and procedures or where citizens have some capability to affect the design or implementation of governance procedures (Feindt and Weiland, 2018). Because of its focus on institutional change and innovation, the concept of reflexive governance has been significantly developed in scholarly discussions about environmental and sustainability policy, governance and transition (see Feindt and Weiland, 2018 for an overview of the specific fields of application and relevant literature). From these discussions, a number of key characteristics of reflexive governance emerge:

- It occurs where institutional and procedural arrangements involve actors from various levels of governance and/or various backgrounds and practical contexts;
- It implies an effort to reflect on and possibly adapt cognitive and normative beliefs;
- It strives to take into account and acknowledge alternative understandings of the problems;
- It strives to integrate multiple approaches to problem solution.

In this sense, co-productive models of governance can be considered a specific form of reflexive governance in which the transformation of existing information and assumptions into new interpretation and action happens by involving citizens in the reflection and evaluation process, as well as incorporating their role in the institutional arrangements (Sol et al., 2018).

## 2.5 Reflexive policy-making in UPLIFT

The approach taken by UPLIFT in WP4 brings together different aspects of all the theoretical and methodological concepts discussed so far. The more precise methods used in each implementation site are informed by the specific research questions and the policy domain involved. But the basic approach is the same across all sites and it aims to enable collective processes of co-creation of policy (with youth as the target group) that can then translate into potential action for social change.

Inspired by concepts of reflexivity and reflexive governance, the work in WP4 aims to achieve a dialectical process between research practitioners, young people and institutional stakeholders in order to critically reframe the understanding of issues in several policy areas and co-create alternative options for policy approaches. In this sense, the process of co-creation is in many ways similar to that conceptualised in public management, but also different in some respects. By combining principles of participatory action research and policy co-creation we attempt to come to an approach that is less top-down than traditional co-creation. This warrants a greater level of protection against co-optation of young people into other discourses not pertaining to their empowerment. The reflexive and iterative methodologies that are used in WP4 strive to empower young participants, to give them agency and a sense of ownership of the project. In this sense, we choose for a more bottom-up form of co-creation.

In many participatory action and co-creation research, the action stops once a policy agenda is formulated. In UPLIFT we attempt to go a step further. On the one hand, the project is clearly interested in the process of co-creation itself; How can we engage young people? Which methods have the best potential for stimulating creativity? What institutional structures are most adequate for facilitating the co-creation process? But on the other hand, we are also deeply concerned with the outcome of the co-creation process. To what extent does the process really result in innovative and effective policies that address the concerns of the young vulnerable citizens in a satisfactory way? To what extent are the policy-makers really prepared to take the outcome of the co-creation process seriously and implement the policies that are proposed? And if so, how should the new policies be monitored and evaluated in order to safeguard true reflexivity?

Last but not least, we would like to stress the empowering and capability enhancing nature of the WP 4 research. This research aims to empower young people so that they can potentially improve the policies that are relevant for them. However, the empowerment of young people is not only a means. It is also a goal in its own right and it can provide a direct contribution to young people's well-being. Indeed, when collective and individual agency is enabled through participation, vulnerable young people become involved in decisions that affect their lives, something which in turn enhances their capabilities (Walker, 2018; Walker and Loots, 2018).

## 3 Methodological framework

### 3.1 Introduction

In methodological terms, WP4 has two large challenges. The first challenge involves the creation of a durable institutional framework that structurally involves young people in the policy making process at the implementation sites. The establishment of this framework is a necessary condition for the second challenge: the organization of a series of successful events in which academic partners, NGO's

and the local government collaborate with the target group of young people in the co-creation process.

A main objective of the WP4 research is to create a durable institutional framework that will be maintained after the end of the project. In order for this objective to be accomplished, it is important to create an institutional setting for policy co-creation that has an added value for both young people and policy-makers. In order to achieve this, several actions are necessary. This chapter describes these actions in more detail. Subsequently, we deal with the following topics:

- Stakeholder involvement (Section 3.2)
- The setting up of a youth board (Section 3.3)
- Using focus groups for co-creation (Section 3.4).
- Reflexivity through constant monitoring and policy evaluation (Section 3.5)
- Ethical aspects of the methodology (Section 3.6).

## 3.2 Stakeholder involvement

In the early months of UPLIFT, the cooperation between research and implementer partners needed to be tightened, and collaboration with potential additional institutional partners needed to be sought. For this purpose, honest discussions among stakeholders about objectives, resources and capacity were necessary. The aim of these discussions was to ensure increased trust and the full understanding of the project, as well as to agree on ambitions, objectives and respective roles.

Partnership among stakeholders – institutional partners as well as youth board – means that planning and decision-making responsibilities for the research and co-creation process are shared. In this regard, it is important that the roles of each stakeholder – research partner(s), implementer partners, the youth board (or the young people in any other capacity) and any other third party - are clear from the beginning: written agreements can help allocate responsibilities and can provide guidelines for the future. For the scientific and institutional partners and stakeholders involved, this means identifying roles and responsibilities with regard to the following aspects: recruitment of young people, organisation of focus groups, workshops and other activities, data analysis and reporting of research findings, drafting of policy proposals and dissemination of the action. For the youth board, this means clearly outlining their responsibilities and what they can expect.

An explicit view on the institutional collaboration process should be developed and written down for the period of the project. Potentially, a steering group or committee could be identified that oversees the research and the choice of methods. This steering group should safeguard that the research maximises the role of young participants to express their voice, and that their input is acted upon by the institutional partners.

### *Managing expectations, making commitments, giving back*

It is important to agree with stakeholders on the policy focus area that will be addressed with co-creation – a specific policy measure to be evaluated, a potential new policy approach, the development of a new policy tool. Whatever the focus of the co-creation process, it is crucial to secure commitment from institutional stakeholders for the duration of the project. In this respect, written agreements detailing responsibilities and commitments from all institutional parties might prove useful to clarify any potential future disagreement.

Holding institutional parties accountable is key for the success of WP4. After all, the possibility to influence decision-making, or at least to have their voice heard, is the most relevant thing we can offer vulnerable young people in return for their participation in UPLIFT. It often happens that vulnerable groups or communities are involved in participatory research and then ‘abandoned’ with no tangible results of their effort. In such cases, participants may feel exploited and their trust researchers in researcher may be eroded. In order to avoid this, we should be careful not to overpromise, as this might compromise trust at a later stage. Thus, it is crucial that the participatory work in WP4 operates on the grounds of clarity and trust. It is important to be clear and explicit about the reasons why we are involving young people – we need to hear their voice if we want changes in social policy to be effective; what is expected of them – engagement and reflection; and what they will get in return – being heard, being taken seriously, empowered in their condition of policy co-makers and not simply policy subjects. Moreover, getting involved in the co-creation process might provide a valuable learning experience – of research, of policy making, of cooperation among different groups – that could be useful for future education, training or job purposes. In the spirit of participatory research, we should always be seeking the input of participants on this issue: “What would you like to take home from this project?” is a question to be asked at the very beginning of the relationship. Feedback after meetings and activities is essential in order to evaluate whether the approach and course of action need to be shifted.

Participation in UPLIFT is rewarding in itself for local institutional and implementer partners, as they can benefit from the results of the policy evaluation and co-creation, as well as increasing their knowledge on local inequality patterns, specific policy areas and specific populations. Nonetheless, it is equally important to give back to the institutional partners that provided time and expertise. This can happen through specific events aimed at increasing the benefits for NGOs, local governments and other organisations, such as policy workshops, conferences and peer-to-peer sessions. To some extent, such sessions are already integrated in the UPLIFT project as milestones.

### **3.3 Youth board; recruitment and engagement**

In the co-creation process, the voice of the young people will mainly be articulated by a so-called youth board. The main goal of the youth board is to reflect on the current problems in the chosen policy domain and to actively contribute to the development of policy agendas and proposals aimed at improving young people’s position.

Decisions on the composition, size, specific role and prerogatives of the youth board should be defined in consultation with all the relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure a shared understanding of objectives and expectations. Nevertheless, it is important that principles of representativity are respected in the composition of the youth board (e.g. gender balance, ethnic representation). Decisions on how often they will meet and on the inner workings of the youth board should be left as much as possible to the participants, in order to maximise their engagement and ownership of the project.

It is important that the relevant stakeholders agree on a clear recruitment and replacement strategy for the youth board. For recruitment, additional gatekeeper organisations can be used, as well as the existing networks of the implementer partners. Local advertising campaigns and social media activities are also a potential recruitment strategy. The hope is that interested young people are active in the youth board for a longer period of time, ideally until the end of 2022, when UPLIFT ends. Nevertheless, youth board members may drop out before that. If this happens, substitute youth board members

need to be recruited, taking into account the aforementioned principles concerning representativeness.

In order to promote engagement, we recognize the need to make the meetings and the general circumstances of the research attractive for the target group. This could be achieved by providing refreshments and occasions for social engagement during the youth board meetings and focus groups („pizza nights” or similar concepts), or by reaching out to local personalities (music, arts, web) and organizing additional events or activities that could be interesting or attractive for the target group (training sessions, workshops, interviews, performances). These strategies should be discussed with the partners and might involve collaboration with organisations and groups already active in the community; Making use of their expertise in working with young people might be beneficial for the success of the interaction.

### **3.4 Using focus groups for co-creation**

The primary research activity in WP4 involves focus group discussions in which new policies are co-created, monitored and evaluated. In principle, these discussions take place with the youth board members. However, depending on the size of the youth board and the specific context and arrangements, young people that are not part of the youth board may be invited as well. In any case, it is important to agree with all stakeholders, including the youth board, on the specifics of the focus group discussions. What will be the topic of the discussion? How many focus group discussions will be carried out? Who is responsible for the practical organization of the meetings? It is relevant to note that the focus group discussions should not only be about co-creating new initiatives, but also about monitoring the implementation of such new initiatives, as well as about evaluating their effects.

In order to have a good atmosphere and a fruitful co-creation process, it is crucial to reflect and act on a number of things. First and foremost, how to raise young people’s creativity and keep them engaged. Several methods can be used for this purpose, (e.g. Open Fishbowl, World café). In all these methods, the key for high levels of engagement is to incorporate physical engagement in the conversation and make discussions interactive and visual. This can be done by changing the seating arrangements, pairing people up in small groups or tandems, or using live polling platforms (such as Mentimeter or Slido). All these techniques are aimed at unearthing creativity, innovation and transformation.

How to give an equal voice to all participants is another important issue if fruitful co-creation is the objective. Good moderation of the discussion is crucial; it is important to observe the dynamics during the meetings and make sure that very vocal participants, or participants in a position of power do not take over the conversation. Particularly, sessions in which young people are mixed with institutional stakeholders may be threatening for the former (although such sessions may also result in very interesting interactions). Youth only focus groups, group shuffling and smaller teams are a good solution in this sense, as is the concept of Open Fishbowl, in which people constantly change roles from listener to participant. Another way to address this issue, especially in potentially conflictual situations (it can be expected that some heated discussion might occur when discussing policy failures with institutional stakeholders) is to use an adjusted version of the Lewis Deep Democracy method. This is a set of tools based on the principle that conflict is a learning opportunity. By focusing on the needs of the minority group, it helps engage with different views, thereby giving voice to all participants. As a general suggestion, it is recommended to make use of the expertise of local organisations and groups already operating with youth in order to increase the effectiveness of interaction.

Finally, it is important that, prior to or during the focus group meetings, participants are provided with enough information on the policies that will be discussed. This can be done via fact sheets or introductory videos or presentations, always providing real life examples of what the policy entails.

Further input on how to design a good interview guide for the focus group discussions and how to enhance the co-creation process will be provided at a later stage (development of a toolbox, see also Section 5), with a particular focus on online interactions.

### **3.5 Reflexivity through constant monitoring and policy evaluation**

As a participatory research process and reflexive policy making process, the policy co-creation of WP4 is constantly evaluated on multiple fronts. On one hand, the content of the policy co-creation is assessed. Does it really represent a change in social policy? Is it really more effective in addressing youth's problems? Does it really reflect young people's input? As already mentioned, accountability for institutional parties is crucial to the success of WP4. In this regard, evaluation and feedback sessions with participation from both the youth board and the institutional partners need to be integrated in the WP4 planning.

But evaluation and feedback should also be an integral part of the co-creation sessions themselves. Within each of the sessions organized, participants should be given the possibility to give their opinion on the participatory process; whether it respects the voice of the young people, whether it is inclusive, whether the practices and strategies are working as intended.

Further input on how to use focus group research for monitoring and evaluation of new policy initiatives will be provided by the TU Delft team at a later stage.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

There are many ethical issues and inherent risks embedded in any participatory project. For instance, addressing power, authority, the interrelationship of race, gender, social class, level of education, and ability, as well as a whole host of other issues, require a deep commitment by researchers and participants. They should work together to provide equity, safety, and parity within the co-creation process.

In this respect, each WP4 implementation site will develop context-dependent ethics procedures in order to respond to the specific needs of young participants and institutional partners. Nonetheless, some shared basic ethics principles need to be followed throughout WP4:

- The participants are explicitly and fully informed about the way in which their data and the information they provide (including images) will be used, stored and protected. Their consent is always obtained, through the use of information sheets, oral explanations and informed consent forms. In case of virtual online meetings, informed consent can be obtained via email or via oral recording.
- Anonymization or pseudonymization of recordings and transcripts of focus groups and youth board meetings is provided at the earliest possible stage and data should be kept in a protected storage.
- Participants are treated as equal partners and collaborators, valuing their time and contribution. Their feedback is constantly asked to identify and address any discriminatory or stigmatizing effects experienced by the participants.

- Special attention is paid to ensure that all group members can equally participate in the open discussions, mitigating issues of power and authority that might get in the way of full engagement.
- Research findings have to be shared with communities in an accessible format whilst abiding by the agreed rules on anonymity.
- Prior to publication, all materials have to be tested with community members to ensure that local nuance and concerns are responded to.

## 4 Synthesis of the four local action plans

### 4.1 Introduction

This Section provides a brief synthesis of the four local action plans. For the complete plans, we refer to the appendices of this deliverable. It is important to realize that the all local plans are draft documents that are in different stages of development. Some are quite comprehensive already, whereas other still needs much elaboration. Establishing contacts between stakeholders and agreeing on a common ground for the research often turned out to be a complex and time-consuming process, with the Corona-crisis serving as an extra complication.

Apart from being in different stages of development, the draft local action plans also clearly differ from each other in term of focus, content and process. This reflects the large differences between the four implementation sites, and the implementation partners that are active in these sites. In this chapter, we give a brief overview of the content of the four draft local action plans. But first, we briefly describe the process that has led to the creation of these plans.

### 4.2 Process of creation of the local action plans

In order to ensure sufficient comparability of the different local actions, a template was developed by WP4 leader TU Delft. A rough version of this template was presented at the Kick-off meeting of UPLIFT in Budapest, whereas a full-fledged version of the template was sent around by the end of April.

All draft local action plans have been created in close collaboration between a scientific partner and a local implementer partner. First versions of the local action plans were submitted in the course of June. Subsequently, feedback has been provided by TU Delft and the relevant contributing partners (see table 1). After incorporation of this feedback, adapted versions of the draft local action plans were submitted by the end of June.

During the creation phase of the local action plans, three joint WP4 meetings were organized in order to discuss the development of the planned action among the WP4 partners: in January (as part of the UPLIFT kick-off meeting, in May (as part of the UPLIFT virtual consortium meeting), and in June (separate virtual WP4 meeting). Furthermore, there have been several bilateral meetings between the various WP4 partners.

Table 1. UPLIFT partners responsible for the local action plans

| Site            | Task leader | Local implementer partner | Contributing research partner |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Sfântu Gheorghe | Suppedito   | Gal Sepsi                 | MRI                           |
| Tallinn         | UT          | AEYC                      | UU                            |
| Barakaldo       | Orkestra    | Barakaldo municipality    | YF                            |
| Amsterdam       | TU Delft    | De Key                    | Cesis                         |

### 4.3 Short synthesis of the four local action plans

This Section provides a short synthesis of the four draft local action plans. For each plan, we briefly describe problem statement and target group, institutional context and outline of the co-creation process. More details can be found in the appendices, where the complete draft versions of the local action plans are included.

#### 4.3.1 Local action plan Sfântu Gheorghe

##### *Problem statement and target group*

Drop-out from school is a serious problem in Romania, particularly among vulnerable and deprived groups such as the Roma population. Sfântu Gheorge, a town with a bit more than 50,000 inhabitants in the centre of Romania, is no exception to this. Due to lack of coherent policies and insufficient coordination between the responsible partners, Sfântu Gheorge is in need for better solutions for the school drop-out problem. UPLIFT offers the opportunity to create such solutions in close collaboration with their target group: vulnerable young people in the school age. The objective is to carry out a participatory process of development of local education policies in Sfântu Gheorghe. This policy development should result in solutions that enable disadvantaged youth to enter, and stay in, mainstream education, that improve educational outcomes, including in remedial education (Second Chance), and that integrate youth support services with educational services.

##### *Institutional context*

Sfântu Gheorge currently does not have coherent youth and educational policies; The institutional context can best be described as fragmented. That is the reason why the UPLIFT research starts with a comprehensive preparatory phase (with interviews and consultation meetings), in which relevant stakeholders are identified and suitable collaborating partners are sought for. These preparatory activities will result in a stakeholder group (possibly split up into an inner and an outer circle) that will likely consist of several municipal services and NGOs in the field of education, child protection, social services and employment.

The disadvantaged young people will be represented by a youth reflection group (15 to 20 members) and a youth board (4 to 5 members). The youth reflection group will participate in consultations and will benefit from several capacity building activities that will prepare them to better articulate their needs and vision. The Youth Board will have approximately 4 to 5 members who will benefit from preparatory training and who will participate fully in the co-creation process. Members of the youth

board and the youth reflection group will be recruited through a range of activities: posters, school presentations, individual recruitment, peer to peer recruitment and the use of social media.

#### *Co-creation process*

The local action plan envisages a clearly structured co-creation process that consists of several stages.

In the first stage of the co-creation process, the institutional stakeholder group and the youth group (youth board and youth reflection group) will work in parallel to each other. In each group, the process starts with trust and capability building. After that, the focus is on an inventory of the problems encountered by the youth, as well as on possible solutions for these problems. Various focus group discussion techniques will be used to facilitate this process

In the second stage of the co-creation process, the institutional stakeholder group and the youth group will work together on the creation of joint reflexive policy agenda. In this stage, the focus is on building a common ground, negotiation and co-decision, following a specific methodology that will be developed in due course. The outcome of this stage is a draft local policy document (agenda and action plan) that targets the main interventions necessary to improve the situation of vulnerable youth in Sfântu Gheorghe.

In the third stage of the co-creation process, the draft local policy document is presented to the municipality (which is also part of the institutional group) and support of the local municipal council is sought for. In this stage, it is decided which elements of the plan will really be implemented in the last stage of the process (stage four).

### **4.3.2 Local action plan Tallinn**

#### *Problem statement and target group*

Just as many other European countries and cities, Tallinn accommodates an important group of young people that are not in 'education, training or employment' (NEET youth). NEET youth often faces both economic and social exclusion and their life chances tend to be limited. In the case of Tallinn, language issues may come on top of that since many Tallinn NEET youth are non-Estonian (Russian speakers). Although various policies to reach and help this group are already in place, there is still room for further improvement. Therefore, the goal of the Tallinn action plan is to improve the current policies for NEET youth. More in particular, the main societal objective of this local action plan is to re-design the service for NEET-youth, including the development of a virtual youth centre/platform to improve access to services for young people. This will be done with the help of a co-creation process in which various stakeholders, and of course also the young people themselves, play an important role. The target group for the Estonian action plan are NEET young people aged between 15 and 25.

#### *Institutional context*

In Estonia., policies for NEET youth are carried out by a range of institutions working in the field of youth, labour market and education policies, at both the national and the municipal (Tallinn) level. The main implementer partner will be the Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AEYC). This is a nationwide umbrella organisation of youth centres in Estonia with about 190 members. AEYC cooperates with state and local governments, youth organizations in Estonia and abroad, and other institutions involved in youth work. AEYC develops local and international projects and partnerships shaping youth policy at the national and local level.

In the co-creation process, the young people will be represented by a so-called youth board. In the case of Tallinn, the youth board equals the Tallinn City Youth Council. This is a youth representative body of the Tallinn City Council. The aim of the Council is to represent the city youth and to stand for their rights and interests. Doing so, the council monitors the existing municipal policies. Moreover, it can lobby and submit suggestions for the possible improvements of these policies. The Council consists of 21 young persons aged 14-26, who are democratically elected and stay on for a year. Within the council, there are three electoral segments that each have 7 elected members: pupils, students and clients of youth NGO-s (among which NEET youth). The Tallinn Youth Council has several committees and working groups and is managed by a 3 member board. All youth council members are volunteers that are not paid for their activities.

#### *Co-creation process*

AEYC is currently working on several policies and instruments that reach out to, and try to improve the situation of, NEET youth. Examples are the set-up of digital means that will facilitate the access to the NEET, and that will give a better insight into their needs. Furthermore, training sessions are organized that aim to enhance the capabilities of the NEET youth target group. These initiatives will be further developed in close cooperation with the NEET youth themselves, as well as with the Tallinn youth council and other relevant stakeholders. Various research qualitative research approaches, including in-depth interviews and focus groups are applied for this purpose.

#### **4.3.3 Local action plan Barakaldo**

With regard to the draft local action plan for Barakaldo, it is important to highlight that the document only contains the perspective of the scientific partner Orkestra (DF). This is due to the fact that the implementation partner for this functional urban area, the Municipality of Barakaldo, is restructuring its internal project coordination team. Therefore, the municipality has not yet been able to contribute to the local action plan. In the near future, the collaboration between Orkestra and the municipality of Barakaldo will be intensified, which may give rise to some adaptations, and a further specification of the action plan.

#### *Problem statement and target group*

Quite some young people in Barakaldo are in a vulnerable situation. This is manifest in various life domains (education, employment), but particularly so in the field of housing. Due to unemployment, precarious jobs, low wages, family obligations (care for minors or elderly) and a tight housing market, finding a suitable and affordable dwelling is impossible for many Barakaldese youngsters between 18 and 29 years. Prices in the owner-occupancy and the private rented sector tend to be unaffordable, whereas social rental dwellings are short in supply and sometimes of insufficient quality. Consequently, there is a strong need for new innovative housing policies, that are better tailored to the needs and capabilities of the young generation.

Through participatory action research with young people and co-creation with institutional stakeholders, the action plan attempts to provide a bottom-up basis for such new policies. Its main objective is to create a “local soft space for discussion”, where the different stakeholders involved can share, discuss, compare and co-generate ideas and proposals that may serve as inputs for the design of policy and programmes focused at reducing housing inequality among youth.

#### *Institutional context*

The main institutional stakeholder is the municipality of Barakaldo, which is responsible for most of the housing policies concerning the younger generation. Another important local institutional partner is the municipal company Eretza S.A., who participates in new housing and housing rehabilitation projects for young people within Barakaldo. A third institutional partner is the Goiztiri Elkarte Association, an expert representative in the territory on issues related to groups at risk of social exclusion.

The voice of the young people in Barakaldo will mainly be articulated by the youth board. This is a diverse group of youngsters aged between 18 and 29 that is at risk of housing inequality. The youth board is a group of 12 to 15 young people that will participate in the co-creation process. Members for the youth board will be recruited through local youth associations. A range of ideas for keeping the young people engaged and making the youth board meetings fruitful and attractive have already been developed, for example offering child care for young people with children, organizing exhibitions and creating virtual discussion spaces.

#### *Co-creation process*

The co-creation process will primarily take place with the youth board. Nevertheless, in several meetings, other young people (from the so-called youth pool) and institutional stakeholders may join the discussion as well. The process will consist of various stages: problem analysis, policy evaluation and formulation of policy alternatives and presentation of the policy alternatives to the municipality. The precise topics for the co-creation process will be determined at a later stage, in consultation between the scientific partner, the institutional partners and of course the youth board itself. Finally, it is worth mentioning that during the research approach some other tools will be used to smooth the thematic familiarization of the participants in the sessions, such as snapshot diaries, idea sheets, narrative videos, etc.

#### 4.3.4 Local action plan Amsterdam

##### *Problem statement and target group*

Amsterdam is characterized by a very tight housing market. For more vulnerable young people – those with a lower socio-economic background, those without family support, migrants and refugees – it is especially challenging to find a suitable and affordable dwelling. This is due to an interplay of various factors such as soaring house prices and rents, the precarization of the labour market, the decline of the social housing sector and processes of gentrification. In this context of housing crisis for young adults, several actors in Amsterdam have shown an interest in improving housing affordability and security for this group. In this respect, the Municipality and several housing associations, including UPLIFT WP4 implementer partner De Key, recognize the value of seeking input for the development of more effective policies from those who experience housing problems first hand. The local action plan attempts to put these ideas into practice.

The main objective of the plan is to give young people (aged between 18 and 29) a real voice in local housing policy making. Through co-creation techniques, young people will be involved in the various phases of the policy-making process of the municipality of Amsterdam and housing association De Key: problem definition, policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. The idea is that this will have societal benefits for both the young people (empowerment, enhanced capabilities) and the policy-makers (more effective policies that are better tailored to the needs of the target group).

##### *Institutional context*

There are two main institutional partners in the co-creation process: housing association De Key and the municipality of Amsterdam. Housing association De Key is the WP4 implementer partner for the Amsterdam site. This housing association is aiming to use the co-creation process to evaluate and improve some of the specific policy measures and tools that are currently in place, namely temporary rental contracts and mixed housing concepts. Although not being a full UPLIFT partner (they signed a letter of support for the project but they are not a consortium member), the municipality of Amsterdam has decided to join the co-creation process as well. The municipality is determined to involve young people in housing policy to a greater extent than it currently does. Indeed, the City Council has approved a resolution that requires the Municipality to promote youth participation and to organize a so-called “housing summit” in order to seek the involvement and opinion of young people with regard to housing policy.

There is a strong overlap between the objectives of the Municipality and those of UPLIFT. Hence the decision of the municipality to contribute to the project, in order to achieve synergy and efficiency benefits. The current collaboration between housing association De Key, TU Delft and the Municipality highlighted the need to identify an additional independent and knowledgeable partner that could initiate the setting up of the youth board and coordinate and facilitate the co-creation process. In order to select this partner, a tender will be organized by the Municipality, De Key and TU Delft.

The partner that will be selected will be asked to recruit the young people for the co-creation process, with the help of its own network as well as with a social media strategy. As far as the representation of young people is concerned, a difference is made between a youth board and a youth pool. The main goal of the youth board, which will consist of 6 to 8 young people between the age of 18 and 29, is to reflect on the current housing problems and to actively contribute (for a period of a year or so) to the development of policy agendas and proposals aimed at improving young people’s position on the

housing market. Around the youth board is a bigger group of young people: the youth pool. The youth pool consists of young people that are interested in co-creation but that don't want to commit themselves for a long time.

### *Co-creation process*

The primary research activity in WP4 in Amsterdam involves thematic focus group discussions with around 8 participants (to be recruited from the youth board and the youth pool). In these discussions, housing problems are analysed, existing policies are evaluated and adapted, and new policies may be co-created. Although the municipality and housing association De Key already have some preliminary ideas for this, the final theme selection for the co-creation process will take place in close consultation between the youth board and the institutional stakeholders. At this moment, the ambition is to discuss 3 to 4 different themes. For each theme, three co-creation focus groups will be organized:

1. An inventory meeting: What is the problem? Why is it a problem? (young people only)
2. A solution oriented meeting: How can the problem be solved? What are the policy alternatives? What are their pros and cons? (young people only)
3. An implementation oriented session: young people present their ideas to policy-makers who reflect on the feasibility of these ideas. Subsequently, a process of negotiation and consensus-seeking starts (young people and institutional stakeholders). Ideally, this process leads to new policy proposals that are supported by all actors involved.

After the implementation oriented session, the municipality and housing association De Key will indicate how the results of the co-creation process will be taken into account, and what new policy or policy changes will be implemented. In follow-up joint sessions of the youth board, the municipality and housing association De Key, this implementation process will be monitored and evaluated.

## **5 Conclusion and synthesis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This deliverable should be seen as a starting point for an inspiring and intensive process at each of the four implementation sites. The seeds of the co-creation process have been planted and now it is the responsibility of all partners involved to make them grow. In this brief concluding chapter, WP4 leader TU Delft outlines how it wants to continue its management of the work package (Section 5.2). Furthermore, potential risks that may hamper (or have already hampered) a smooth progress of the work package are identified, and strategies to mitigate these risks are discussed (Section 5.3). Doing so, special attention is paid to impacts of the Corona crisis, which have been considerable all across the board.

### **5.2 How to proceed in WP4?**

At all implementation sites, the first half year of WP4 was mainly dedicated to establishing contacts with relevant stakeholders and developing a local action plan for the co-creation process. After the summer of 2020, the planned activities will really take off. Even though each implementation site has its own context and will follow its own path, it is very important that the sites stay in close contact

with each other. Only then, the various sites can really learn from each other's experiences and true synergy can be achieved. In order to accomplish this, TU Delft envisages the following:

- TU Delft will further develop the methodology for the co-creation process. In collaboration with the other UPLIFT partners, a toolbox of possible methods for stimulating co-creation and creativity, facilitating negotiation processes and reaching consensus will be created. Because the Corona crisis might inhibit face to face meetings, the toolbox will pay special attention to the facilitating online activities.
- In order to ensure comparability between the various sites, TU Delft will prepare a template for all formal UPLIFT WP4 deliverables such as the updated action plans and the individual reflexive policy agendas.
- Regular WP4 (virtual) meetings will be organized in order to discuss progress and evaluate the techniques and methods applied in the various implementation sites. WP4 meetings will also be used to give each other feedback on working plans, policy documents and deliverables that are produced within the framework of WP4.
- A very important meeting for WP4 is the peer-to-peer session in month 18. In this session, young people and institutional stakeholders from the various implementation sites actually meet and the progress of the co-creation process is evaluated. Taking into account the results of this mid-term evaluation, adapted versions of the local action plans will be submitted.
- All WP4 documents (toolbox, latest version of the action plans, work plans) will be stored in the common area of the UPLIFT website so that they are accessible for all UPLIFT partners.

### 5.3 Risk assessment and impact of the Corona crisis

In the various local action plans, potential risks that could hamper (or have already hampered) a smooth progress of the various local action plans were identified. *Table 2* summarizes these risks and also provides an overview of possible mitigation strategies.

*Table 2. Risks and possible mitigation strategies involving WP4 activities*

| Risk                                                                                                            | Mitigation strategy                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stigmatization of the target group                                                                              | Treating the young as equal partners, ask feedback on how they experience the process.                                                     |
| Institutional partners do not take the results of the co-creation process seriously due to change of leadership | Explicitly state and communicate the responsibilities of the institutional partners, organize bottom-up support for the policy proposals   |
| Young people drop out in the co-creation process                                                                | Make the co-creation process attractive, do not overburden participants, develop a clear replacement strategy                              |
| Difficult to recruit sufficient young people for the co-creation process                                        | Develop an extensive recruitment strategy, based on trust building. Provide a cosy research setting (with snacks and beverages)            |
| Only easy to reach youth will participate in the co-creation process                                            | Develop an extensive recruitment strategy that especially focuses on the difficult to reach youth (e.g. by using the contacts of teachers) |

|                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Parents may not allow their children to participate in the research (in case research participants are younger than 18) | Initiate meetings with parents in which the goal of the research is clearly explained                   |
| Different abilities of participants to express themselves                                                               | Make small groups, use ice-breaker activities, employ experienced moderators with strong social skills. |
| Misunderstanding between implementer partner and scientific partner                                                     | Mediation by the project coordinator                                                                    |

### *Impact of the Corona crisis*

An overarching risk factor that involves all implementation sites is the Corona crisis. This crisis has an impact in terms of both time planning and content, as social distancing measures may force us to move many – if not all – of our meetings with research participants to an online environment. We currently do not know how the situation will develop, and are thus preparing for different scenarios.

With regard to time planning, the main risk of moving all interactions to an online environment is that it may take longer to activate all the necessary networks, establish all the necessary connections, and properly engage the participants and gain their trust. However, once this is done, it should not take longer to carry out the focus groups and interviews online than it would take in person.

With regard to participants' engagement, the risk of young people dropping out of the youth board might be increased, as it will not be possible to make use of the incentives to participation coming from social interaction (e.g. pizza nights). On the other hand, online options might also prove to be an advantage, as it might well be possible that young people perceive participating in online discussions as less burdensome than participating in person. In any case, we are currently exploring options to migrate interviews and focus group discussions online, should the need arise, and keep them engaging and fruitful. Some of the suggested strategies for in-person focus groups can be quite directly translated to online activities, with minor adjustments. In the toolbox that we will develop, all these options will be elaborately discussed.

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