



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

## Deliverable 4.2

# Updated Action Plans for the co-creation process

*Looking back and looking forward*

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# 1 Introduction

This deliverable is titled 'Updated Action Plans for the co-creation process' and it consists of a common methodological approach, the state of the art of the Local Action Plans of the four WP4 implementation sites, and a reflection on the co-creation process.

This deliverable is the formal update of D4.1, which is taken as the starting point to further explain the evolution of the co-creation activities in the four locations. In particular, compared to D4.1 the theoretical section has been updated with some new perspectives on the Capability Approach, and the methodological section has been updated to reflect changed practices, and clearer guidelines on diversity and gender approaches. The four sections on the state of the art of the four Local Action Plans are totally new, and they explain the progress that occurred in each location in terms of stakeholders, participation of young people, process and outputs. Finally, a new section has been added in which we reflect on the nature of the co-creation process as we have experienced it in all the WP4 implementation sites. The deliverable ends with an outline of the future steps that will be taken in WP4.

It is important to note that the four locations are at a different stage of the co-creation process. Indeed, different contexts, different relations with stakeholders and young people, as well as different focus for the policy agenda heavily affect the speed of the process and its path, as it clearly emerges from the four Action Plans. Nonetheless, all locations are working according to the same methodological and ethical principles, and the different experiences provide food for reflection on co-creation as a method and as a process.

## 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 safe-guard 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).

#### *Applying the capability approach to participatory research, social innovation and public service provision*

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).

In the last few years, the CA has gained traction for these very reasons, and it has been used in several fields of both research and policymaking. Mainly it is used in social and health policy for youth and children, very often coupled with participatory processes and action research (Hart and Brando, 2018; Shearn et al., 2021), and in social innovation and management work (Batista and Correia, 2021; Howaldt and Schwartz, 2017).

In this regard, the CA has proven quite valuable in measuring the impact of social interventions and of social purpose organizations (White, 2018). In their work on social innovation, Von Jacobi et al. (2017) explain that social innovation truly capable of tackling marginalization depends on the participation of marginalized groups in policy design and implementation, in order to incorporate also their value sets in the policymaking process. In this way, social innovation is grounded in the doings and beings that all individuals, including marginalized ones, have reason to value, in the true spirit of the CA.

With regard to youth and children, involving them in participatory projects based on the CA has several advantages, both moral and methodological. From a moral point of view, participation in such processes may broaden their capabilities and opportunities, as well as upholding their right to be fully involved in the design and implementation of measures and services that affect them directly (Shearn et al., 2021).

From a methodological point of view, participation of specific, and often neglected, groups of users results in more effective solutions that better reflect their particular needs. Moreover, young people can provide original ideas, which, combined with the expertise and knowledge of other stakeholders, can produce interesting outcomes (Shearn et al., 2021).

Of course, this kind of processes require a considerable investment in terms of time, qualified personnel, and money, which are not always available to public administrations. Moreover, the involvement of young people and children requires substantial effort also on the part of households and citizens, and trust and commitment need to be nurtured by the institutional actors, which also requires time and skill (Hart and Brando, 2018; Shearn et al., 2021).

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

In WP4, 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 WP4 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 (Kimbell, 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 WP4 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. This is risky, as it requires a change in actors' relations and behaviors, as well as in the organizational settings (Campomori & Casula, 2021). Such a change can only be obtained by instilling value in the collaborative practice that needs to become durable, so that it becomes intrinsically worth it for all actors involved (Scott, 1987 - see Section 8.5 for a more articulated reflection).

In order to achieve an institutional setting for policy co-creation that has an added value for both young people and policy-makers, 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)
- Towards an inclusive and gender sensitive co-creation process (Section 3.4)
- Using focus groups for co-creation (Section 3.5).

- Reflexivity through constant monitoring and policy evaluation (Section 3.6)
- Ethical aspects of the methodology (Section 3.7).

## 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.

Although it took different forms, in all locations a sort of steering group or committee has been identified that oversees the research and the choice of methods. This steering group safeguards 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 is 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. 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 is 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 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 Towards an inclusive and gender-sensitive co-creation process**

The co-creation process as it is outlined in the action plans has two main goals. First, we aim to come to a Reflexive Policy Agenda. This agenda should contain policies that are made with the young people (based on a deep understanding of their needs and strategies) and not for the young people. Thus, young people will act as agents of change. Second, we hope that the co-creation process will empower the young people involved. 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).

The ambition of UPLIFT is to achieve the above goals in a fully inclusive way. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to be sensitive to differences within the target group of young people, for example with regard to gender and ethnic background, and to assess how such differences could influence both the process and the outcomes of the co-creation project. Youngsters with various backgrounds should have equal opportunities to participate and have their voice heard. Moreover, the policy initiatives that will result from the co-creation process, need to take into account that youngsters with different genders and/or ethnic backgrounds may experience different problems, and may therefore also need different solutions.

The principles of Gender mainstreaming and the Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) are helpful when putting the above ambition into practice. In our view, the application of these principles not only enhances gender equality but also improves the scientific quality and societal relevance of the produced knowledge.

Gender Mainstreaming refers to the ambition of the European Union to implement gender democracy for all fields of policy and activity. It implies that the gender equality perspective is incorporated in the organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, at all levels and at all stages, by the actors involved in policy making. A Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) is a method that assesses the effects that a program, policy or action

may have on people from different genders, and therefore on gender (in)equality. For new programs, policies or actions, GIA's analyse the purpose of the initiative, the gender-relevance and gender-sensitivity of the issue and the stakeholders concerned, and the expected gender impacts of the changes that are proposed. Based on this assessment, a GIA formulates recommendations that should lead to the enhancement and optimization of gender mainstreaming.

#### *Putting the principles into practice*

Following the principles of Gender Mainstreaming and the Gender Impact Assessment, the local action plans need to reflect gender and ethnical diversity issues in their objectives, in the composition of the stakeholders involved, in the day-to-day interaction between these stakeholders, in the policy co-creation process and outcomes (conceptualisation of gender specific solutions) and, last but not least, in the language that is used throughout the process. Below, these requirements are further specified.

#### Purposes

The ambition of the local actions plan from a gender perspective is twofold: 1) to secure gender equality throughout the co-creation process and work out a co-creation methodology that takes gender differences into account – process related gender aspects - and 2) to contribute to the elaboration/fine-tuning of programmes and policies that contribute to gender equality – outcome related gender aspects.

#### Diversity within the group of stakeholders involved

As far as the target group of young people (Youth Board) is concerned, we strive for a gender balance and sufficient diversity in terms of ethnic background. If necessary, specific recruitment measures (e.g. quota) or support facilities (e.g. child care for single mothers) will be considered in order to make sure that this ambition is met. We have the assumption that gender imbalance may strongly be linked to the vulnerability level and the ethnic composition of the Youth Board members: in more vulnerable youngster groups, and in case of certain cultural backgrounds, male dominance may be more prevalent and/or young mothers may be prevented from taking part in meetings due to their child care responsibilities. Also the other extreme may be possible: in certain cultures female family members engage in community activities while males are dealing with more the 'material' issues of life. Thus special efforts may be needed to reach and engage those participants who may be less likely to participate in co-creation processes due to their gender.

With regard to the composition of the local research and implementation teams, we also strive for gender mainstreaming and diversity in terms of ethnic background. When recruiting new staff members for these teams, diversity considerations will be taken into account.

As regards the gender profile of the expert/decision maker/civil servant stakeholders of the co-creation process, this is something that can hardly be influenced directly. However, in their coordination and facilitation role, the researchers and implementers will make an effort to 'translate' the issues of the co-creation process in a gender sensitive manner to this group.

### Gender sensitivity in the day-to-day interaction between stakeholders (process)

We believe that a balanced gender (and ethnic) composition of the Youth Board does not automatically lead to gender equal processes and solutions. Additional efforts may be needed from the process planning and facilitation side. In the day-to-day interaction between stakeholders (youth board meetings, meetings of institutional stakeholders, meetings in which youth and institutional stakeholders meet), we will be sensitive to differences between people of different genders and ethnic backgrounds in terms of attitude, tone of voice, and participation in discussions. We will strive for a setting and atmosphere in which everyone feels safe and free to express its opinion. In the reporting on the outcomes of the co-creation sessions, we will ensure that all contributions are taken into account.

### Gender-sensitive problem analysis (outcomes)

The policy co-creation phase starts with a problem analysis from the perspective of the life world of the young people. It is important to realize that different genders may experience different problems, or may perceive the same problem in a different way. For example, females tend to have a rather different perception of safety than males.

The different domains (education, employment and housing) may also have different gender aspects and vulnerable situations related to gender attributes. For example, while females are often overrepresented among the students in higher education, males are still overrepresented in the higher managerial positions. Also in term of income, gender gaps are still visible. In case of employment, motherhood is a very relevant issue, while in case of housing security, family needs and material deprivation are among the factors that must be evaluated.

### Gender sensitive recommendations (outcomes)

It is important that gender differences are not only observed, but also taken into account when solutions are formulated. Only then will the proposed reflexive policy really reflect the diverse needs within the target group. Therefore, the moderators of the co-creation sessions will be very sensitive to the prevalence of gender-specific problems and/or solutions.

### Language

In all our written and verbal communication regarding WP4, we will prevent the use of gender-biased language and stereotypes.

## **3.5 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.

### **3.6 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.

### **3.7 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 develops 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 State of the art of the local action plans: Amsterdam

In this chapter we describe the state of the art of the Amsterdam co-creation process. Section 4.1 describes what has been done so far, whereas Section 4.2 outlines our plans for the final phase of the co-creation process. Section 4.3 presents the time planning whereas Section 4.4 contains our reflection.

### **Goal and target group of the Amsterdam co-creation process**

The goal of the Amsterdam action plan is to co-create innovative and tailor-made solutions for the housing accessibility and affordability problems for youngsters in the city. The target group consists of youngsters (18-29) in a vulnerable housing situation.

### 4.1 Progress of the co-creation process

This Section gives an overview of the progress of the Amsterdam co-creation process. Subsequently, we deal with the following topics:

- Institutional context and institutional stakeholders (Section 4.1.1);
- Involvement of young people (Section 4.1.2);
- Methods and topics in the co-creation process (Section 4.1.3);
- Output of the co-creation process and follow-up (Sections 4.1.4 and 4.1.5).

#### 4.1.1 Institutional context and institutional stakeholders

The original UPLIFT partners for the co-creation process in Amsterdam were housing association De Key, Delft University of Technology and Cesis. In the course of time, the municipality of Amsterdam, residents organization !Woon and the architectural firm INBO have joined the process as well.

The municipality of Amsterdam, which was not an original UPLIFT partner, already decided to join the local co-creation process before this process actually started. As a matter of fact, this municipality also had the ambition to set up a youth board in order to give the youth more voice in the formulation of housing policies. By joining forces with the municipality of Amsterdam, the impact of the UPLIFT co-creation process could be substantially enhanced. !Woon (an association that protects and advises on the rights of tenants and home owners in and around Amsterdam) leads the day-to-day management of the co-creation process and warrants the fair participation of the youth board members. Their involvement enlarges the potential to defend the right to housing for young people in Amsterdam, also after the end of the UPLIFT project. The involvement of the architectural firm INBO is more incidental; they will provide support in the second 'sprint' of the co-creation process. In this sprint, the youth board

develops a new communal housing concept. Table 4.1 gives an overview of all the partners involved and their role in the co-creation process.

Table 4.1 Stakeholders in the Amsterdam co-creation process and their roles

Partner	Role	Role description
Delft University of Technology	Task leader and academic/knowledge partner	Provides scientific and methodological guidance for the co-creation process and its outcomes. Acts as a mediator between the different WP4 locations, ensuring comparable processes. Filters the results of other work packages and translates them into useful input to inform the co-creation process.
Housing association De Key	Implementation partner	Sets up the stakeholder structure for the co-creation process. Acts as a gatekeeper to reach vulnerable youngsters through its channels. As a housing association, De Key is one of the recipients of the policy input that results from the co-creation process. De Key is committed to the implementation of the co-creation results.
Cesis	International academic / knowledge partner	External advisors to the co-creation process.
Municipality of Amsterdam	Implementation partner	The Municipality of Amsterdam is one of the recipients of the policy input that comes from the co-creation process. Together with housing association De Key, TU Delft and !WOON, the municipality is part of the steering group that guides the co-creation process
!WOON	Facilitator of the co-creation process	!WOON is the main contact point for the Youth Board and the main gatekeeper and recruiter of youth board members. They also take care of the practical organization and supervision of the co-creation meetings and warrant the engagement of the youth board members
INBO	Facilitator of the co-creation process	INBO provides specific support to the youth board in Sprint 2, in which a new communal housing concept is developed.

### **4.1.2 Involvement of young people**

In September and October 2020, young people (between 18 and 29) in a vulnerable housing situation were recruited for the co-creation process through gatekeeper organizations (NGO's that work with vulnerable youth) and a social media strategy. This resulted in the set-up of a youth board with around 8 active members (most of these people have indicated that they want to be structurally involved in the co-creation process), and a youth pool of 30 to 40 members (youth pool members are more incidentally involved in co-creation activities). The background of the youth board and youth pool members is diverse in terms of age, gender, ethnic background, and housing situation. However, despite efforts, it turned out to be difficult to reach the same rate of participation for the lower educated young people as for the higher educated young people. In November 2020, a big live cast marked the official start of the co-creation process.

Due to COVID-19, the youth board members could not meet in person in the first phase of the co-creation process. However, they successfully collaborated in the many online activities that were organized. Although the lack of face-to-face interaction slowed down the trust-building process, the youth board members gradually started to form a community. They communicated through various informal (online) channels with each other, deepening their connection. During the start-up phase of the co-creation process, the youth board members themselves have made a plan on how to communicate, share, and store their ideas, which makes them the 'process owner'.

In June 2021, the first phase of the co-creation process ended. New youth board members were recruited for the second phase of this process that would start in September 2021. Recruitment took place through social media, networking and participation in introductory events at schools for vocational and higher education. Fortunately, several of the original youth board members decided to participate in the second phase as well, thus guaranteeing some degree of continuity within the youth board.

### **4.1.3 Methods, topics and outputs in the co-creation process**

Three different co-creation cycles (so-called sprints) were planned. In these sprints, the following three topics were dealt with.

1. Temporality on the housing market;
2. Community oriented housing concepts;
3. A youth housing policy agenda.

The sprints start with a problem inventory phase, followed by a solution oriented phase. In the final phase, the solutions that the Youth Board proposes are discussed with relevant policy makers and options for policy implementation are being explored.

#### 4.1.4 Co-creation sprint 1: temporality on the housing market

This sprint started in October 2020. By then, all the youth board members had been recruited and the participants of the youth board had made agreements about the planning of the project and their own mode of collaboration. This sprint focused on temporality on the housing market, as temporary rental contracts (either 2 or 5 years) have become the norm for young people in Amsterdam. In the sprint, the pros and cons of this development, for the young people themselves but also for the housing market in general, have been extensively discussed. As indicated before, three phases can be distinguished in this process.

##### *Inventory phase*

During this phase, the youth board members have participated in a range of educational activities that were organized by professionals from De Key, TU Delft, !WOON, and the municipality of Amsterdam. These activities made the youth board members familiar with the housing situation in Amsterdam, and the topic of temporary housing in particular. For this purpose, a menu with various educational activities (excursions, webinars, documentaries, mini internships) was developed by the local UPLIFT. From this menu, the youth board members could choose the activities that they liked most.

In the inventory phase, the youth board members also reached out to other young people in precarious housing situations. This allowed them to get a good insight into the various experiences with regard to temporality. Finally, the youth board members participated in the youth housing summit that was organized by the alderman of housing of the municipality of Amsterdam. Below, the main findings of the inventory phase are briefly summarized.

- Temporary contracts, in combination with the current tight housing market, increase the chances of unfair behaviour of landlords. After all, tenants are very much dependent on these landlords.
- Temporary rental contracts create a feeling of insecurity among young people. As a result of these contracts, young people cannot really settle down and are constantly worried about what happens when the rental contract ends.
- The information provision about housing opportunities for young people is scattered and incomplete.

##### *Solution-oriented phase*

During this phase, the youth board has developed policy solutions that aim to improve the position of vulnerable young people on the Amsterdam housing market. Several online group discussions were dedicated to this topic. The solutions that were proposed referred to the national and the local level.

For the purpose of influencing national policies, the youth board members recorded a number of video's in which they showed what they would do if they would become the new minister of housing (the Netherlands has had national elections in March 2021 and a new government is currently being formed). In these video's, they proposed the following national policy changes:

- Better information provision (rights and opportunities) for youngsters that are looking for another dwelling;
- Introduction of a national housing fund that allows civilians to invest in new house building;
- Priority should be given to youngsters that want to move to another house/ a new house within their community;
- Better regulation of the middle segment of the rental market.

Whereas the policy suggestions for the national level remained rather general, the solutions that were developed for the local level contained more detail. These solutions were prepared in smaller groups. They were developed from the conviction that a structural reform of the local housing system is not realistic in the short run. However, also within the framework of the current system, small changes may make a considerable difference. From this perspective, three local policy solutions were proposed (see table 7.2)

Table 4.2 Proposed policy solutions in sprint 1 and their follow-up

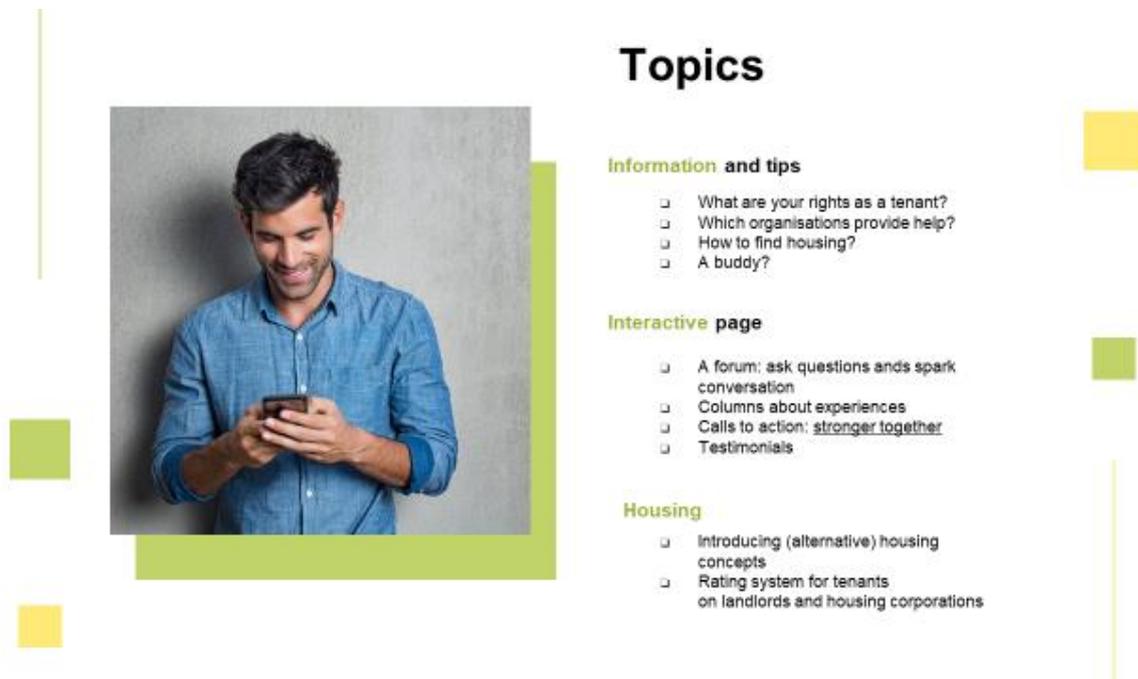
Solution	Rationale	Follow-up
Floating tiny houses in the social rental sector	Tiny housing provides an affordable and flexible housing solution, there is a lot of water in Amsterdam	Youth board members are connected to people already working on this topic
Extend the geographical scope of the housing allocation system for social rental housing	The proposed extension makes it easier to find a social rental dwelling in smaller municipalities outside Amsterdam	Youth board members are connected to people already working on this topic
Develop a virtual platform for young people that look for another dwelling	Objective information on housing rights and housing opportunities is scarcely available, youngsters can learn from each other's experiences on the housing market	Idea was embraced by institutional partners. We are currently looking for implementation and financing possibilities

### Implementation phase

In May 2021, the youth board presented its policy solutions to representatives from housing association De Key, the municipality of Amsterdam, !WOON and TU Delft. For this purpose, two separate meetings (1 with professionals and 1 with executives) were organized. In both meetings, there was a large appreciation for the creativity of the youth board and the soundness of their ideas. It turned out that two of the three proposed policy solutions were already considered in another context. The youth board members that developed these ideas were put into contact with the relevant policy-makers and professionals so that they could exchange ideas and possibly join forces. The third idea, that of establishing a virtual platform to support young house seekers (see also Figure 4.1), received full support of the professionals and the executives. In order to enhance the implementation of this idea, the youth board was

put into contact with relevant professionals (such as website developers), and initiatives for collecting the necessary funding were explored.

Figure 4.1: Slide with information on the proposed virtual platform



The slide features a central photograph of a man in a blue shirt looking at his smartphone. To the right, under the heading 'Topics', there are three sections: 'Information and tips', 'Interactive page', and 'Housing'. Each section contains a list of bullet points. The slide is decorated with green and yellow geometric shapes.

## Topics

- Information and tips**
  - What are your rights as a tenant?
  - Which organisations provide help?
  - How to find housing?
  - A buddy?
- Interactive page**
  - A forum: ask questions and spark conversation
  - Columns about experiences
  - Calls to action: stronger together
  - Testimonials
- Housing**
  - Introducing (alternative) housing concepts
  - Rating system for tenants on landlords and housing corporations

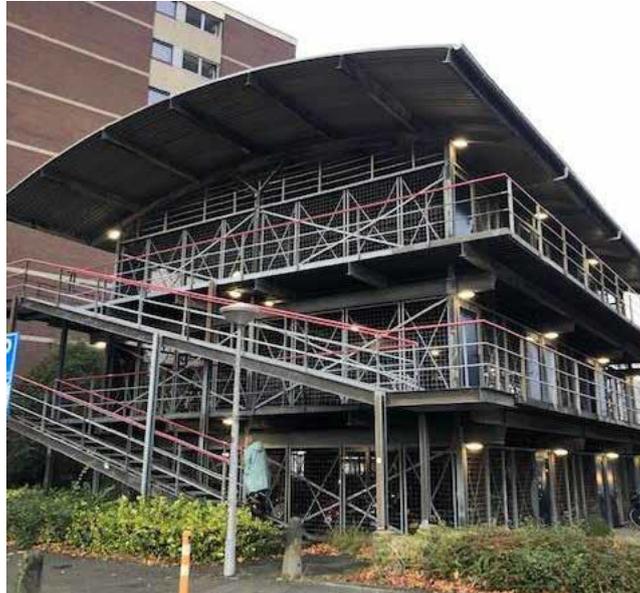
Source: UPLIFT youth board Amsterdam

### 4.1.5 Co-creation sprint 2: developing a new communal housing concept

This co-creation sprint started in September 2021 with a large kick-off event. Around 20 young people, as well as several people from the local UPLIFT team (representing housing association De Key, the municipality of Amsterdam, !WOON, Inbo and TU Delft), were present at this evening event. The evening started with pizza and drinks, followed by some ice-breaking activities, which created an open and enthusiastic atmosphere. Subsequently, we had a lively discussion on the different dimensions of vulnerability. It was concluded that everyone is vulnerable at some point in its life. Housing is often a crucial factor when it comes to vulnerability. Problems in someone's personal life (e.g. illness, divorce, unemployment) may lead to loss of housing, thereby further enhancing one's vulnerability. Indeed, having adequate housing seems to be a necessary precondition for getting out of a vulnerable situation.

In the second part of the evening, the second co-creation sprint was explained in more detail. The idea for this sprint is that the young people develop a new inclusive communal youth housing concept for housing association De Key. Representatives from De Key elaborated on the potential location for this new housing concept (it will replace a bike garage in Amsterdam West, next to an existing apartment block), whereas the architectural firm Inbo explained how they will support the young people in this co-design process.

Figure 4.2 The bicycle shed that will potentially be replaced by the new communal housing concept



Source: INBO

The second session was a so-called inspirational session. In this session, around 15 members of the youth board visited two already existing communal housing concepts of housing association De Key: startblok Riekerhaven and Lieven. They looked at the architecture and talked with the community manager about the process of community building.

In the third session, a so-called inventarisation session, the youth board members reflected on the pros and cons of the existing communal housing concepts of housing association De Key. They discussed what they find important in a communal housing complex for young people. As far as this is concerned, they provided input on the following five dimensions:

1. The building (architecture and identity, communal facilities and meeting spaces, sport facilities, lightning)
2. The dwelling / living unit (size, distribution, facilities, type of windows, comfort level)
3. The environment of the building (connection to public transport, facilities in neighbourhood, green spaces)
4. The social cohesion / community within the building (meeting spaces, freedom versus compulsory activities)
5. The contractual conditions (eligibility criteria, term of the contract, rent levels, 'house rules')

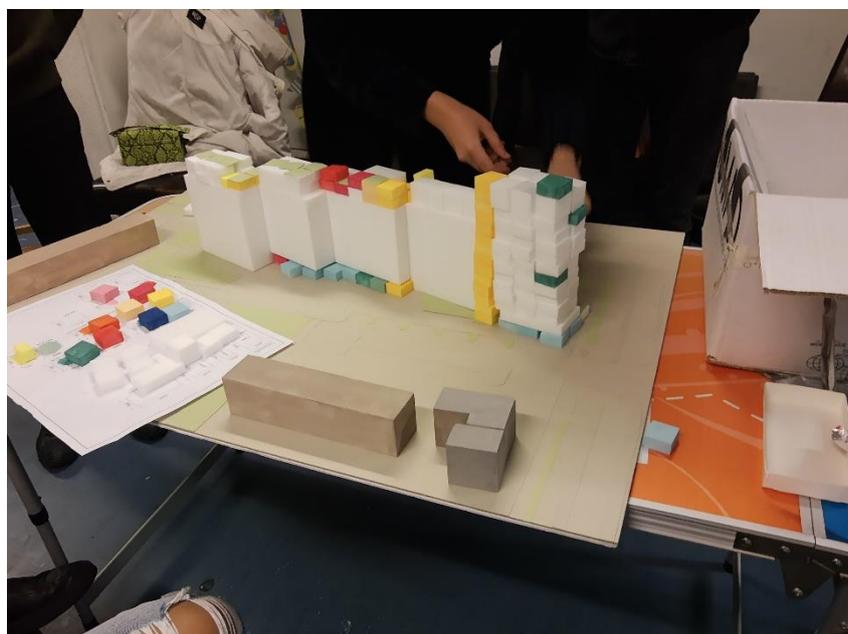
The youth board members largely agreed on what they find important. Consequently, a draft functional and strategic brief for the new housing concept could be defined at the end of the inventarisation session.

In the first “solution oriented session”, the draft functional and strategic brief was discussed in more detail and the potential location for the new housing concept was further explored. Examples of community oriented housing concepts for young people from both the Netherlands and abroad were presented by INBO as a frame of reference and a source of inspiration. Furthermore, there were discussions about the ‘house rules’ within the complex and the possibilities for including vulnerable groups. Based on the discussions, the strategic and functional brief for the new communal housing concept was further refined.

In the second solution oriented session, the youth board attempted to translate the functional and strategic brief into a scale model. Doing so, they worked with small blocks that represent different functions within the building (see Figure 4.3). Three different scenarios were explored:

1. The apartment block and the bicycle garage stay as they are now (see also Figure 4.2). New functions are possible in the plinth of the apartment block (which is now storage) and two new building layers may be added on top of the apartment block
2. The bicycle garage will be (re)moved and new building is possible on the current location of this garage.
3. New building is possible everywhere, for example also on the parking lot in front of the apartment block.

*Figure 4.3 The youth board members working on scale models*



Source: INBO

After some discussion among the youth board members, models were developed for each of the three scenario's. In scenario 1, it was decided to add 2 layers (containing both dwellings and communal functions) to the apartment block. Furthermore, new functions for both the residents and the surrounding neighbourhood were located in the plinth of the apartment

block, separated from the entrance of this block. A number of dwellings suitable for housing disabled people is also realized in this plinth.

In scenario 2, a new high rise complex is planned at the location of the bike garage. This scenario generated a lot of discussion regarding the height of this complex. Many youth board members saw a trade-off between realizing as much dwellings as possible, and preventing an anonymous living environment. In the end, it was decided to build 15 storeys, about the same height as the adjacent building. A new staircase is supposed to form the link between the new and the existing building. Furthermore, new communal functions are planned for both housing complexes: every 4 or 5 floors there will be meeting spaces. The bike garage is kept as a monument and moved to another location where it will be transformed into a greenhouse for the neighbourhood.

In scenario 3, the discussion focused on what to do with the parking space. It was decided that removing the parking space would not be fair. There is a need for parking space in the neighbourhood and removing this space could undermine the support for the plans. However, the parking space could be made more attractive by adding planters and play facilities for children.

For December 6, 2021, the idea was to organize a session in which the youth board would present the models and the different scenario's to a group of relevant stakeholders (municipality, housing association De Key, !WOON, NGO's working in the field of vulnerable youth). Unfortunately, due to new strict COVID-measures in the Netherlands, it was decided to postpone this session to January 10, 2022. After this session, it will become more clear what the potential for implementation of the various scenarios and models is.

## **4.2 Next steps in the co-creation process**

The third and last sprint of the co-creation process will be led by the municipality of Amsterdam.

### **4.2.1 Institutional context and institutional stakeholders**

For this sprint, the institutional context, the stakeholders and their roles are the same as for the previous sprints (see table 4.1), with the exception that INBO does not participate.

### **4.2.2 Involvement of young people**

Also in this sprint, we will work with a youth board that should be representative for the young people that live in Amsterdam. Youth board members from the two earlier sprints will be invited to continue with the co-creation process. Moreover, new youth board members will be recruited by network activities and the posting of an advertisement on websites and social media. Special attention will be paid to the recruitment of youngsters that are working or unemployed, or that follow vocational education. This is due to the fact that, compared to higher education students who tend to be very organized, the voices of these groups are less heard on the Amsterdam housing market.

### 4.2.3 Methods and topics in the co-creation process

A co-creation process is being planned that consists of six sessions. Below, the content and perceived output of these sessions is described in more detail.

#### *Kick-off session*

The process will start with a kick-off session. In this session, the youth board members get acquainted with each other and with the goal of the co-creation process. The alderman of housing from the municipality of Amsterdam will be present at this kick-off session.

#### *Inspirational/inventarisation sessions*

In two inspirational/inventarisation sessions, the youth board members will explore several housing topics that fall (partly) under the competence of the municipality of Amsterdam. In this respect, four main topics serve as input for the discussion:

1. Housing availability;
2. Housing affordability;
3. Housing forms and types;
4. Residential environments and community building

The youth board members will be requested to define their own priorities within these 4 topics. The idea is that, based on their own life world and experiences, the youth board will make an agenda of the most pressing housing issues for young people in Amsterdam. Some tentative solutions for these problems may be explored and formulated as well. Thus, the inventarisation/inspiration phase is likely to result in a rather broad youth housing policy agenda. This youth policy agenda will serve as input for the political parties that will form the new local government after the local elections that take place in March 2022.

#### *Solution oriented sessions*

In two solution oriented sessions, some elements of the youth housing policy agenda (to be chosen by the youth board members themselves) are further explored and translated into more detailed policy proposals. These policy suggestions will be shared with the new local government that will hopefully put them into practice.

#### *Support by the municipality*

As a preparation for both the inventarisation/inspirational sessions and the solution oriented sessions, the municipality will provide the youth board members with information about the Amsterdam housing market and municipal housing policies. Furthermore, during the sessions, there will be a live help line to civil servants of the municipality. Questions that cannot be answered by this help line right away, will be answered as soon as possible after the sessions.

#### *Reality check of the policy proposals*

In a so-called confrontational session (*schuursessie*), the policy suggestions of the youth board will be discussed with the different directions of Amsterdam municipality, representatives of the different city districts (*stadsdelen*) and representatives of the Amsterdam housing associations. This reality check will give insight into the feasibility of the proposed policy

proposals and may lead to some further refinement of these proposals. Ultimately, the goal is to come to policy proposals that can be integrated in the housing policy program of the new city government.

#### *Towards durable collaborative structures?*

The third sprint not only serves to generate new innovative ideas for Amsterdam's housing policies but it should also give insight into the potential of the reflexive policy making approach as it is used in UPLIFT. Based on the results of the first two sprints, the civil servants of the municipality are very positive about this form of youth participation. If the third sprints also yields positive results, it is likely that the civil servants will advise the new municipal government to continue with the youth board. However, it will be up to the new local government to decide on this.

#### *Activities after the third sprint*

After the third Sprint has ended (April 2022), UPLIFT will still be running for more than a year (until June 2023). The local UPLIFT team will use this time for the following activities:

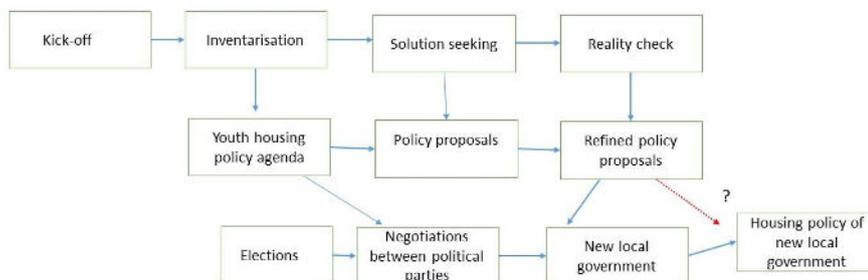
1. The organization of local and national policy conferences at which we will present both the output and the methodology of our co-creation process
2. Together with the youth board, we will work on the implementation of the policy proposals that result from the co-creation process.
3. The possibilities for making the youth board a permanent structure will be explored.

More specific plans for these three activities will be developed in due course.

### **4.3 Time planning**

The third co-creation sprint will be running from January 2022 to April 2022. It is fine-tuned with the local elections that will take place on March 16, 2022. The idea is that the inventarisation sessions take place before the local elections. As a result of this, the policy agenda that results from these sessions can serve as input for the negotiations among the parties that will constitute the new local government. The more detailed policy proposals will be ready when the new local government is constituted. These proposals will serve as input for the housing policy programme that will be developed by this government. It is expected that this housing policy programme will be ready in the beginning of 2023 (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Connections between the co-creation process and the formation of a new local government



Source: own work

## 4.4 Reflection

In general terms, we think we have largely managed to stick to the action plan as it was outlined in deliverable D4.1. The Corona-pandemic has clearly put a substantial burden on the process, but this was already foreseen when the first version of the action plan was formulated. Nevertheless, there are number of points on which we would like to reflect.

### *How to recruit youth board members?*

We have experienced that the recruitment of youth board members and the moderation of co-creation sessions is most easily done by people with a good network among the local youth. These people speak the language of the young people and connect relatively easily to this target group. In the Amsterdam co-creation process, this gatekeeping and moderating role is taken up by !WOON.

### *Youth board and youth pool*

When we developed the local action plan, we made a distinction between a youth board (structurally involved in the co-creation process) and a youth pool (more incidentally involved in the co-creation process). In practice, this difference turned out to be a useful one. There was a very active core group of youth board members that participated in almost all the co-creation sessions. On top of that, there was a larger group of youngsters that participated in a more limited number of co-creation sessions.

### *Education and capacity building*

We have realized that for a fruitful co-creation process, capacity building at the side of the youth board is very desirable. Before they can come up with good solutions, the youth board members need to have a good insight into the problem at hand. Webinars, excursions and mini internships can play an important role in this respect.

### *Sense of community and ownership*

The co-creation process works best if a sense of community and ownership emerges within the youth board. Although this is not something that can be planned, facilitating incentives (availability of food and drinks at the group sessions, volunteer fees for active youth board members) can positively contribute to this process.

### *Coordination between stakeholders*

In order to come to a good coordination between the different implementer partners, structural interaction between the parties involved is fruitful. In Amsterdam, the local UPLIFT team meets every week in order to discuss the running affairs.

### *Vulnerability of the youth board members*

Despite efforts, recruiting the most vulnerable youngsters for the co-creation process turned out to be difficult. However, we do not see this as an insurmountable problem. After all, as far as the topic of the co-creation process is concerned (housing), virtually all youth board members are in a vulnerable position. Moreover, several youth board members have experienced, or still do experience, vulnerabilities in other domains. In our view, the most important prerequisite for a successful co-creation process is the presence of a target group that is similar to the target group of the implementer partners. In Amsterdam this clearly is the case.

### *Receptiveness of the implementer partners*

A successful co-creation process requires receptiveness from the side of the implementer organizations. It is important that all relevant stakeholders and layers within the implementer organization know about the youth board and its goals, and are committed to take the input of the youngsters seriously. Furthermore, differences in time horizon between the youth board on the one hand (short time horizon), and the implementer organization on the other hand (long time horizon), need to be acknowledged and accounted for. Last but not least, the distribution of tasks should be clear. The youth board comes up with ideas and initiatives, but it is the responsibility of the implementer organizations to translate these ideas into full-fledged and detailed policy plans (of course in close consultation with the youth board) that are ready for implementation.

### *Gender equality and ethnic diversity*

When setting up the youth board, we explicitly strived for a good balance (similar to the population of young people in Amsterdam) in terms of gender and ethnic background. Furthermore, we are aware of the fact that many of the problems that young people experience have a gender and or ethnic dimension. In the remainder of the co-creation process we will

explicitly look at the gender and ethnic dimension of both the experienced problems (do youngsters with different genders and ethnic backgrounds experience different problems?) and the proposed solutions (do youngsters with different genders and ethnic backgrounds need different solutions?). By working this way, we hope to come to a co-creation process that is fully inclusive.

#### *Implementation of policy proposals*

The implementation of the policy proposals from the youth board turns out to be a long winding issue that follows its own dynamic and timeframe, also related to political cycles. For example, the idea of an information platform was strongly supported by the municipality of Amsterdam. However, because it was presented just 9 months for the elections, no substantial budget could be allocated to it at that moment. In the near future, the platform idea will serve as input for the program of the new municipal government, just as the policy proposals that will result from sprint 3. According to the local civil servants, it is very likely that some of these ideas will ultimately be included in the policy program of the new local government.

For the output of sprint 2, the perspective also looks rather promising. The municipality of Amsterdam and housing association De Key have the ambition to integrate this output into a new urban masterplan for the area that will be developed in 2022.

## 5 State of the art of the local action plans: Barakaldo

The objective of this chapter is to disclose, on the one hand, the progress of Barakaldo in the co-generation process of a reflexive policy agenda oriented to people at risk of or at social exclusion, particularly young people, in the realm of local social housing policies; and, on the other hand, to shed light on the next steps of the process.

In order to achieve this aim, the chapter is structured as follows: a first part, in which the progress of the co-generation process aforementioned will be assessed considering aspects such as institutional context and institutional stakeholders, involvement of local young people, co-creation process, output of co-creation process and follow-up (Section 5.1). The second part (Section 5.2) will encapsulate the next steps, being explained in terms of institutional context and institutional stakeholders, involvement of local young people, co-creation process, output and follow-up, dissemination, and time planning. Finally, Section 5.3 present the time planning whereas Section 5.4 contains some reflection.

### **Goal and target group of the Barakaldo co-creation process**

The goal of the Barakaldo action plan is to co-create innovative and tailor-made solutions that enhance the housing and emancipation opportunities for young people. The target group consists of youngsters (18-30) in a relatively vulnerable position.

### 5.1 Progress of the co-creation process

This section gives an overview of the progress of the Barakaldo co-creation process. Subsequently, we deal with the following topics:

- Institutional context and institutional stakeholders (Section 5.1.1)
- Involvement of young people (Section 5.1.2)
- Methods and topics in the co-creation process (Section 5.1.3)
- Output of the co-creation process and follow-up (Section 5.1.4)

#### 5.1.1 Institutional context and institutional stakeholders

The stakeholders involved in the process at this stage are the following:

**Eretza, Urban Management Society:** Eretza is a single-member public company of the Barakaldo City council that since 1997 has the objective to promote urban rehabilitation, protected housing and urbanization in the city. On the one hand, its expertise and knowledge will be key to provide a comprehensive perspective of the local housing policies oriented to the youngsters. On the other hand, their involvement in the dialogue process is essential, as they have room for manoeuvre in modifying programs and strategies at the local level.

**Gazte Bulegoa:** Based on the interviews that were carried out for Work Package 3, Gazte Bulegoa was identified as a key collaborator for Work Package 4. Although the political and technical staff of Gazte Bulegoa do not have any competence regarding housing policies, they are in charge of the programs that aim to foster youth participation. In this context their collaboration will be key for establishing close ties with the youngsters and for making changes that enable a greater participation of the youngsters in the affairs of the Barakaldo City council.

**Goiztiri Elkartea:** Goiztiri is a non-profit organization that operates in Barakaldo and conducts initiatives to eradicate social exclusion in the municipality. Although they have different lines of work, the line of housing inclusion is especially relevant for this project. Representatives of this working line will have the opportunity to share their perspectives but also to receive inputs from the youngsters in order to improve their performance.

**Municipality of Barakaldo:** as the primary implementer partner of the project, the Municipality of Barakaldo has a triple objective. Firstly, it will be a nexus between the Orkestra, research partner, and the organizations mentioned above. Secondly, it will be in charge of the organization of the dialogue sessions between youngsters, policy makers and implementers. Finally, the municipality will be the main recipient of the policy ideas that are developed by the local youth board.

**Orkestra (DF):** As local research partner, Orkestra will be responsible for facilitating the dialogue and the co-creation process between the stakeholders. For the facilitation process to be successful, it is essential to establish close relations with both the youngsters and the decision-makers. In order to do so, Orkestra will keep continuous contact with local youngsters, through social media channels, and with the decision makers, through periodic bilateral meetings. Similarly, it is indispensable to translate the current state of affairs regarding local housing policies to the youngsters in a comprehensive and familiar language, and to empower the young people so that they are willing to share their experiences and have an active role in the process. Orkestra will play a fundamental role in this facilitation process.

**The Young Foundation:** The Young Foundation has a large experience in working with young people. They will serve as external advisors to the co-creation project.

Table 5.1 gives a comprehensive overview of the stakeholders in the Barakaldo co-creation process and their roles

Table 5.1 Stakeholders in the Barakaldo co-creation process and their roles

Partner	Role	Role description
Orkestra (DF)	Task leader, academic/knowledge partner, facilitator of the co-creation process (Youth Board+Social Lab)	Responsible for conducting the scientific guidance of the co-creation process, as well as for analysing and reporting the results. Filters the results of other work packages and translates them into useful input to inform the co-creation process.
Municipality of Barakaldo and Eretza	Primary implementation partners	The Municipality is the main gatekeeper and organizes the interaction between the youth board and the key stakeholders. Provides data and knowledge on the target group and on matters related to social exclusion and inequality.  Eretza provides knowledge about housing inequality and housing regulations. It assesses the viability of the proposals and the way in which the different co-created inputs can be combined to develop effective policy proposals.
Young foundation	International academic / knowledge partner	External advisors to the co-creation process.
Gazte Bulegao	Additional implementation partner	Provides connections to the young generation, develops initiatives for increasing youth participation
Goiztiri Elkartea	Additional implementation partner	Shares perspectives on housing inclusion and will receive input on this topic from the youth board

### 5.1.2 Involvement of young people

The group of youngsters that comprises the Youth Board has been recruited by the partners of the UPLIFT project (Orkestra, Municipality, Eretza) and other local institutions such as Gazte Bulegoa and Goiztiri. Due to the proximity of these organizations to the reality of the vulnerable youngsters in Barakaldo, their collaboration has been fundamental in the recruitment process. Thanks to their collaboration, Orkestra and the Barakaldo City Council have had the opportunity to contact youngsters who benefit from the programs managed by these institutions and recruit them to be part of the co-creation process. Moreover, the open

call launched for the Youth Townhall Meeting allowed the research and implementing partners to reach out to those young people in Barakaldo that were interested in participating in the transformation processes of the city.

The group of youngsters formed through the recruitment process described above is an enthusiastic and proactive group of about 10 to 15 people. Also, it is very heterogeneous as it is formed by people with different age, gender, origin etc. Regarding the age of the participants, it has been limited to 18 to 30 years old. The Youth Law of the Basque Government, which bill was passed November 2021, considers as youngsters people whose age is between 16 and 30. Nevertheless, the local housing programs that promote the emancipation of the youngsters are oriented to people over 18 years old. Since the Barakaldo co-creation process may potentially contribute to these programs, we also use 18 years as the lower age limit for participation.

The Youth Board is expected to make a crucial contribution to the project. They will share their experiences, opinions and concerns regarding local housing policies in Barakaldo; identifying new fields for a reflexive policy agenda; communicating their findings to the policy makers and, in the interaction with policy makers and implementers, hopefully generate improvements in the local housing policies.

### 5.1.3 Methods, topics and outputs in the co-creation process

The youngsters, whose voice will be crucial for the co-generation of a reflexive policy agenda, will be present in so-called two soft spaces. These two spaces, the Youth Board and the Social Lab, are the spaces where the co-generation process will happen.

The theme that will guide the discussions in both spaces is: “local housing policies in Barakaldo”. This issue will be addressed in both spaces in sixteen meetings, eight per group (see Table 5.2). Please note that the planning is tentative and may change depending on the maturity of the reflexions of the Youth Board and the availability of the members of the Social Lab. Even if both spaces will focus on local housing policies, the composition and dynamics will differ between the two groups.

*Table 5.2 Planning for the Youth Board and Social Lab meetings*

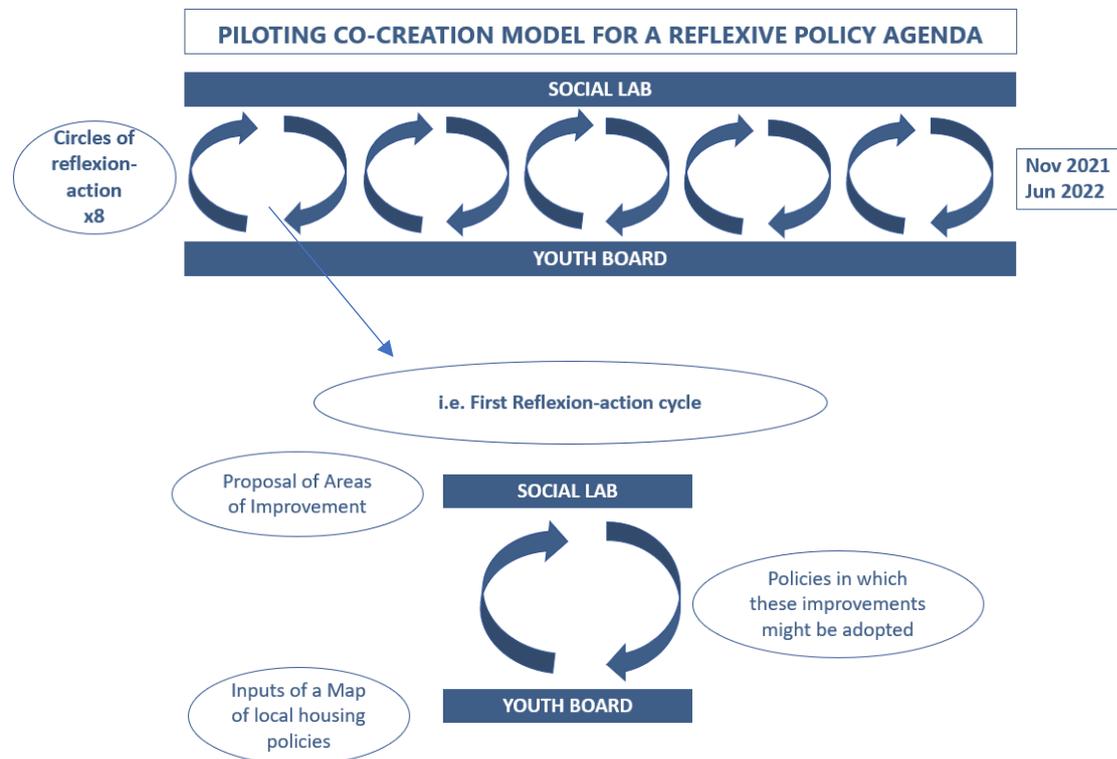
<b>Youth Board Sessions</b>	<b>Social Lab Sessions</b>
<b>Session 1:</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2021	<b>Session 1:</b> 16 <sup>th</sup> December 2021
<b>Session 2:</b> 13 <sup>th</sup> January 2022	<b>Session 2:</b> 27 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
<b>Session 3:</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2022	<b>Session 3:</b> 17 <sup>th</sup> February 2022
<b>Session 4:</b> 24 <sup>th</sup> February 2022	<b>Session 4:</b> 10 <sup>th</sup> March 2022
<b>Session 5:</b> 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2022	<b>Session 5:</b> 7 <sup>th</sup> April 2022
<b>Session 6:</b> 28 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	<b>Session 6:</b> 13 <sup>th</sup> May 2022
<b>Session 7:</b> 26 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	<b>Session 7:</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> June 2022
<b>Session 8:</b> 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2022	<b>Session 8:</b> 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2022

The Youth Board will be a space in which 10-15 youngsters from Barakaldo will have the opportunity to share their own stories, regarding housing and other issues that have influenced their emancipation experiences. Based on their own experiences, the Youth Board members will collectively think of innovative and creative solutions for their housing problems. In this process, they will gain knowledge in terms of policy making, they will learn about different forms of participation and community activism, and they will develop specific skills in order to interact and dialogue with the decision makers.

The Social Lab is a complementary space to the Youth Board. This space will allow the youngsters to generate change through information sharing, dialogue and debate with policy makers and implementers. In the Peer to Peer session that took place in November 2021, one of the central concerns raised by the youngsters was that the policy makers need to go a step further in fostering youth participation. The Social Lab might be an answer to this concern since it has the potential to implicate the decision makers in a direct dialogue with the youngsters. The stakeholders that participate in the social lab will be: Eretza, Goiztiri, Gazte Bulegoa and the Barakaldo City council. Orkestra will be a facilitator of the process. A group of around five youngsters will participate in every meeting of the Social Lab.

The interaction between the two spaces will be constant and cyclic (see Figure 5.1). The starting point of these cycles will be a first meeting of the youth board in which a map of local housing policies will be discussed. Based on the experiences of the youngsters with these policies, a proposal of areas of improvement will be developed and later debated in the Social Lab meetings. Depending on the maturity of the proposal, the cycles might change and more than one Youth Board meeting might be needed before discussion in the Social Lab takes place. The social Lab will suggest in what way these improvements could be developed and/or integrated into existing policies. The conclusions of the Social Lab meeting will be discussed in the Youth Board and a new circle of reflexive action will start. At the end of the process, these cycles of reflexive action are supposed to lead to a comprehensive reflexive policy agenda in the field of youth housing.

Figure 6.1 Interaction between the Youth Board and the Social Lab in Barakaldo



Source: Own work

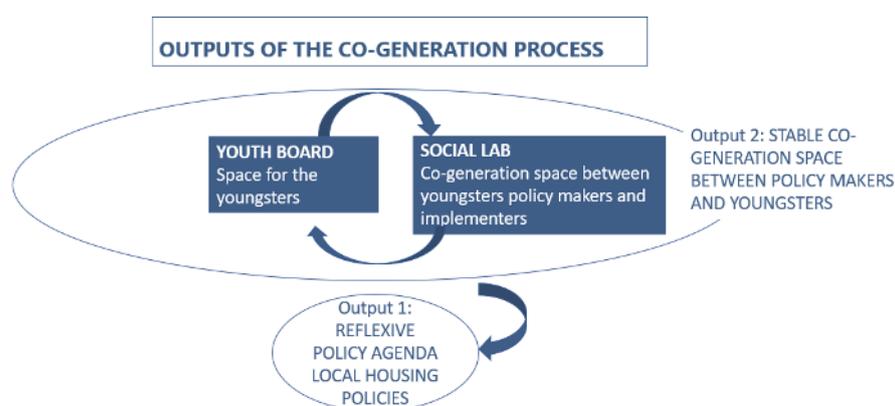
### Outputs and follow-up

The expected outputs (see also Figure 5.2) from the co-generation process are the following: on the one hand, the first outcome that is generated will be a reflexive policy agenda that will propose changes in the current local housing policies. On the other hand, we hope that the Social Lab will result in a stable channel of interaction between youngsters, local authorities and NGOs in Barakaldo that will prevail after the UPLIFT project has ended.

The extent to which the reflexive policy agenda can actually be implemented depends on the proposals in which the interaction between Youth Board and Social Lab will result. Furthermore, it should be realized that in the case of the Basque Country, legislation adopted at the regional level plays a key role in the development of the local housing policies. Against this backdrop, in order to be implemented successfully, the reflexive policy agenda may need the implication of regional authorities. Moreover, the implication of Eretza will be fundamental, as it is the public authority in charge of advising the decision-making concerning housing in Barakaldo.

In terms of process, the local UPLIFT team firmly believes that the proposed way of working has the potential to make local policy-making more inclusive, participatory and effective. We think that the channels of interaction between the youngsters and policy makers - the Youth Board and Social Lab- can be particularly pertinent for the Barakaldo City council. In the last years, an Open Government Initiative was launched by the local authorities in order to foster the participation and transparency in the city. In the future, the local UPLIFT model could perhaps be integrated as part of this initiative.

Figure 5.2 Expected outputs from the co-creation process



Source: own work

## 5.2 Next steps in the co-creation process

### 5.2.1 Institutional context and institutional stakeholders

Currently, Eretza, Gazte Bulegoa, Goiztiri, the Barakaldo City council and Orkestra are the stakeholders involved in the process (see also table 5.1). Each of these stakeholders brings in its own perspectives and competences. However, the local UPLIFT team does not exclude the possibility of seeking additional support from other stakeholders. This support might be especially pertinent in two contexts: firstly, in the sessions of the youth board, in which experts of the discussed fields can help the facilitators to introduce the debate and guide the discussion; and, secondly, in the implementation of reflexive policy agenda. As stated above, the involvement of regional government bodies might be needed in order to introduce the changes included in the agenda.

### 5.2.2 Involvement of young people

At this stage of the process, the beneficiaries of the local public programs and the participants of the Youth Townhall Meeting comprise the group of youngsters in the co-creation process (the so-called Youth Board). Although the participants of this group can offer a heterogeneous

and comprehensive perspective regarding housing problems and policies in Barakaldo, it is true that there are segments of the society that are not represented.

According to Ranci and Migliavacca (2010), the exclusion of a person from the main mechanisms of resource distribution places her or him in a situation of uncertainty and ultimately in a position of vulnerability (see also Moro, Maiztegui-Oñate, Solabarria 2021). With this in mind, an extra effort is needed to try to contact the youngsters that do not have the opportunity to access the aforementioned programs or calls.

Due to the close relation of this project with the Department of Social Action of the Barakaldo City Council, to try to reach out to this collective through the social workers of this department might be an effective strategy.

In order to keep the group of youngsters committed, Orkestra has established a communication channel with the youngsters: A WhatsApp group. All the members of the Youth Board have the APP in their phones. This group will allow Orkestra to keep a continuous communication with the Youth Board. Orkestra will use WhatsApp to send reminders of the sessions, to share relevant content-related information and to propose different activities and quizzes.

### **5.2.3 Methods, topics and outputs in the co-creation process**

The next steps of the co-generation process have been specified in Section 5.1.3, where the dates, spaces and activities have been defined.

#### *Outputs and follow-up*

As stated above, the two main outputs of the co-creation process will be the generation of a reflexive policy agenda and the formation of a space for interaction between youngsters and policy makers.

In order to guarantee the implementation of these two outputs, it is important that both the youngsters and the policy-makers agree on the policy proposals that are formulated in the reflexive policy agenda. In this sense, the policy makers and implementers will guide the process towards changes that they may consider feasible, increasing the opportunities of the reflexive policy agenda to be implemented. Nevertheless, it is of fundamental importance that the Youth Board expresses full support for the final reflexive policy agenda. Similarly, to integrate the model of co-generation proposed by UPLIFT -two soft spaces: the Youth Board and the Social Lab- as a working mechanism of the Open Government Initiative of Barakaldo, could be key in order to guarantee its durability. The possibilities for achieving this integration will be explored in the coming period.

## **5.3 Time planning**

See table 5.2 (Section 5.1.3) for the time planning.

## 5.4 Reflection

Finally, concerning the lessons learned from the process, it is possible to highlight the following conclusions:

### *Commitment of local stakeholders and Youth Board*

The engagement of the organizations involved in the course of actions has increased considerably. This has largely been because, on the one hand, Orkestra has included them in important events of the project, such as the Youth Townhall Meeting and the Peer-to-Peer Meeting, thereby awakening their interest for the project. On the other hand, the Barakaldo City council has adopted an active role in the project, which has intensified the direct contact with the stakeholders in the territory. Nevertheless, the partners of the project should continue to strengthen the relationships with the youngsters. In this respect, activities such as quizzes and questionnaires' should be shared through the UPLIFT WhatsApp group with more frequency.

### *Changes compared to the original action plan*

With regard to the main changes experienced in the co-generation process since the elaboration of the original WP4 Action Plan, it is possible to highlight two main shifts:

On the one side, due to time and feasibility considerations, the local UPLIFT team has decided to narrow down the scope of the co-creation process and the reflexive policy agenda. Whereas a broad scope (covering housing, education and employment and both the regional and local level) was envisaged in the original action plan, we now explicitly focus on local housing policies as the main object of analysis.

On the other side, the objective of the Social Lab has slightly changed. Initially, it was conceived as an advisory board to guide the performance of the Youth Board. At this stage of the process, it is understood as a central space, where the youngsters and decision makers can co-generate in a collaborative manner and where young people can engage in policy-making processes.

## 6 State of the art of the local action plans: Sfântu Gheorghe

In this chapter we describe the state of the art of the Sfântu Gheorge co-creation process. Section 6.1 describes what has been done so far, whereas Section 6.2 outlines the plans for the coming period. The time planning is presented in Section 6.3, whereas Section 6.4 contains a brief reflection.

### **Goals and target group of the Sfântu Gheorge co-creation process**

The goal of the Sfântu Gheorge co-creation process is to co-create new policies that improve the local education system. The target group consist of youngsters between 15 and 24 years in a vulnerable position.

## **6.1 Progress of the co-creation process**

This section gives an overview of the progress of the Sfântu Gheorge co-creation process. Subsequently, we deal with the following topics:

- Institutional context and institutional stakeholders (Section 6.1.1);
- Involvement of young people (Section 6.1.2);
- Methods and topics in the co-creation process (Section 6.1.3);
- Output of the co-creation process and follow-up (Section 6.1.4);

### **6.1.1 Institutional context and institutional stakeholders**

The Sfântu Gheorge co-creation process is coordinated by Suppedito, with GAL SEPSI (an NGO that works on the prevention of poverty and social exclusion in the municipality) being the main implementer partner. MRI provides external advice to the process.

In Sfântu Gheorge, many local stakeholders have committed themselves to the co-creation project. There are 12 institutional participants that play a role in this process (Municipality, Social Directorate Department from the Municipality, General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection Covasna County, Employment Office Covasna County, School Inspectorate Covasna County, Educational Resource Center Covasna County, 2 schools from Sfântu Gheorghe, Caritas Association, Malta Association, Red Cross Association, Diakonia Foundation).

The institutional local stakeholders have met at a so-called inception workshop. In this workshop, a joint protocol that outlines the principles of collaboration was discussed. After some elaborations and discussion, this document was finally adopted by all participants. All local stakeholders showed a great interest for getting involved in the co-creation process.

The role of the local stakeholders is to outline a policy agenda for enhancing access to quality education for youth with a vulnerable background, thereby incorporating the voice of the youth who are involved in the policy development process. Table 6.1 gives an overview of all the partners involved and their role in the co-creation process.

Table 6.1 Stakeholders in the Sfântu Gheorghe co-creation process and their roles

Partner	Role	Role description
Suppedito	Task leader and academic/knowledge partner	Sets up the stakeholder structure and a methodology for the co-creation process. Identifies potential members of the youth and institutional group and facilitates their participation in the process. Assures the moderators for the Youth group and moderates the meetings of the institutional group. Analyses both process and results of the co-creation project.
GAL SEPSI	Implementation partner	Facilitates the enrollment of the institutional stakeholders in the WP4 process and organizes the meetings and workshops held with the institutions. Keeps regular contact with the institutional group. Will work on the final version of the Reflexive Policy Agenda based upon the information and data collected from the two stakeholders groups. Facilitates the adoption of the collaboration protocol by the members of this group. Represents the Reflexive Policy Agenda in front of the local decision makers, facilitates its adoption by the City Council.
MRI	International academic / knowledge partner	External advisors to the co-creation process.
Municipality, Social Directorate Department from the Municipality, General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection Covasna County, Employment Office Covasna County, School Inspectorate Covasna County, Educational Resource Center Covasna County, 2 schools from Sfântu Gheorghe, Caritas Association, Malta Association, Red Cross Association, Diakonia Foundation	Additional implementation partners	Take part in the co-creation process as members of the institutional group, act a potential receivers and implementers of the policy ideas that result from the co-creation process.

Source: own work

### **6.1.2 Involvement of young people**

Currently, the youth group in Sfântu Gheorge consists of 7 to 20 members, depending on occasional presence. The youngsters in this group are between 17-24 years old. They are coming mostly from vocational schools and the older ones are working for different types of employers such as a bakery or a post office. There are also some youngsters that are looking for a job.

Of the current youth group, about 5 to 7 participants are motivated to become part of the structural Youth Board. These participants have the support of the whole group. Thus, the Youth Board is formed organically by those youth group members who are the most active, but without having a special position in the group. In the past months, we have continued the recruitment of young people and potential new participants are received constantly. Some of them become stable members, other are joining the group occasionally.

According to the feedback of the youth group participants, their motivation for participation is twofold. On the one hand they like the possibility to be together with peers and friends. On the other hand, they really appreciate it that professionals pay attention to them, their problems and their ideas.

Among the youth involved, there were three participants who are in the care of the child protection service. We have organized a special meeting with only with their participation and they remain reluctant to join the bigger group. In our view, working with this highly vulnerable population requires a tailor-made and trauma sensitive approach. Unfortunately, the resources of the project do not allow for this at this moment. Nevertheless, we are seeking means to also involve this very vulnerable group because we think it is important that their views and needs are represented in the reflexive policy agenda that we intend to create.

### **6.1.3 Methods, topics and outputs in the co-creation process**

In terms of content, the main objective of the co-creation process in Sfântu Gheorge is to come to a more inclusive local education policy. In terms of process, the main specificity in our approach is that we open a space and create a framework for reciprocity between the public policy agents and the targeted youth community. Therefore, our focus is equally divided between institutional facilitation and youth community facilitation. The two processes are running in parallel, with the aim of developing communication channels between the two societal actors.

#### *Preparatory phase*

In accordance with our action plan, we completed the preparatory phase. The aim of this preparatory phase was twofold. As far as the institutional stakeholders are concerned, the aim was to prepare them for collaboration and for receiving the voices of the marginalised youth. For the youth group, the aim was to prepare the youngsters for expressing their voices, formulating their needs and mobilising energy for in search for solutions. In order to achieve these goals, the following five steps were taken:

- **Step 1.** Potential stakeholders were mapped through consultations with the implementation partner, GAL SEPSI
- **Step 2.** Stakeholder and youth target groups were defined through individual interviews with relevant institutional actors, assessing the interest and motivation of local administration, public and private institutions and youth groups in participating in the development and implementation of a Reflexive Policy Agenda
- **Step 3.** Recruitment of participants for the Youth Group and Institutional Group: through classroom/school presentations and peer-to-peer word of mouth
- **Step 4.** Forming the two stakeholder groups (Youth Group and Institutional Group) through direct meetings: one inception workshop for the Institutional Group was organised (in January 2021) and a forming meeting for the Youth Group (in December 2020) was held.
- **Step 5.** Identifying problems and solutions in parallel for the two groups. Between December 2020 - November 2021 we have had 13 meetings with the youth group, holding approximately two meetings per month except for the summer period. In parallel, there were 3 workshops for the institutional group (May, August and September) and 5 online working groups were formed which worked on specific topics in order to comprehensively develop the problem map.

#### *Preparatory phase: topics and outcomes in the youth group*

In the preparatory phase, we worked with the youth group on the development of personal skills, group forming and preparation for the co-creation process and problem orientation. As far as the development of personal and soft skills is concerned, we focused on topics related to internal and external resources, negative and positive life experiences and how to cope with this, and dreams/desires about the future. Furthermore we prepared the youngsters for the collective co-creation process by doing group work on: connection - building trust, creating a safe place, engagement; reflection on visions, values, personal motivation; defining own roles and voice in the process; discussing leadership topics in the group.

In the problem orientation sessions, barriers and solutions with regard to the following topics were explored:

- common values, own resources and how to this use in the group work;
- core problems in the field of housing, education and work;
- basic rules of how an ideal city should work (city building exercise);
- sharing experiences that participants have had with institutions: how should institutions represent the interests of young people?
- Representation: what are the characteristics of good leadership? what is needed for a good cooperation process?

Based on the above exploration, a so-called problem map was incrementally constructed. In the last youth group meeting of the preparatory phase this problem map was summarised. In order of importance, the following problems figure on this map:

1. Racism in the schools (of teachers and students);
2. Bullying and lack of adequate response from the school;
3. Lack of proper professional orientation for pupils;
4. Lack of adequate support in case of child abuse and neglect;
5. Lack of good relationship with teachers (teachers are not approaching them as valuable human beings just as "good" or "bad" pupils);
6. Lack of mechanisms for taking into account pupils' opinion
  - a. Teachers are not paying enough attention to those who need more support in learning
  - b. Lack of appropriate financial incentives (scholarships do not cover many vulnerability situations);
7. Lack of proper teaching methods (lack of interactivity and creativity in the classroom);
8. Inappropriate school environment (bad infrastructure).

#### *Preparatory phase: topics and outcomes for the institutional group*

During the two workshops (in August and September) the main task of the institutional group was to create a problem map which can be matched later on with the problem map that is created by the youth group.

We started the group work (first workshop) by creating the conditions for reflection through: building trust, creating a safe place, sharing experiences, formulating motivations and common goals, becoming open for receiving the visions, expectations and energy of the youth group. After an engaging debate, the main outcome of the first workshop was the identification of common values and a common vision among the group members.

1. The next step (second workshop) was analysing resources and setbacks in the areas that impact the most on access to education of the vulnerable youth: housing, employment, free time, school system, family background. In order to deepen the analysis and come to a comprehensive problem map, five subgroups on the following topics were created:
  2. education of children with special educational needs;
  3. identifying risk factors for school dropout, prevention, recovery and monitoring;
  4. preparing teachers for working with children with disadvantaged background;
  5. working with families for preventing school dropout;
  6. institutional cooperation in enhancing access to quality education for youth with disadvantaged backgrounds.

The goal of the subgroups is to analyse challenges, existing resources, new solutions, and levels of responsibility with regard to the topic concerned.

During the period of November-December 2021, the subgroups meetings had the following schedule: Initially Group 1, Group 2 and Group 3 had separate meetings, Group 4 didn't have participants and Group 5 couldn't find a suitable date for the meeting. In the next round Group 1 and 3 had two joint meetings and Group 2 had one meeting. Altogether, there were 6 subgroup meetings, during which the stakeholders identified very concrete problems regarding the Group's topic and proposed solutions and/or actions, applicable to the local level, in order to diminish these problems.

### *Start of the co-creation phase*

As a kick-off for the co-creation phase, a joint workshop, with the participation of both the youth group and the institutional stakeholders, was held in November 2021. The aim of the workshop was to present the problem map that was developed by the youth group to the institutional group. The problems presented by the youth group were rated by the whole group. The setup of the meeting was particularly designed to create space for the voices of the youth. The youth group received feedback from the institutional group and a follow-up meeting will be organized.

## **6.2 Next steps in the co-creation process**

### **6.2.1 Institutional context and institutional stakeholders**

It is possible to involve one more school - which is a segregated school in the area of the segregated Roma community in Sf. Gheorghe – in the co-creation process. Recently, there have been changes in the leadership of this school and the new director seems to be more open for collaboration.

The participation of the institutional stakeholders in the group meetings is not constant. For example, there are vocational high-schools that participate in the 5 subgroups that have been set up but not in the big workshops. At this stage of the project, we think it is more important to actively engage the 12 committed institutions into the co-creation process rather than to add new stakeholders. Moreover, most of the stakeholders that are directly or indirectly involved in work with vulnerable youth in Sfântu Gheorge have already been included in the project.

### **6.2.2 Involvement of young people**

In order to ensure sufficient diversity within the youth group, peer interviews are planned in order to reach out to different vulnerable groups of youngsters. The goal of these interviews is to consult a larger group than the Youth Group alone. The commitment of the youth group is planned to be kept alive through organizing youth group meetings, as well as workshops together with the institutional group. A youth camp will take place in the first semester of the year 2022. In this youth camp, issues around the implementation of the reflexive policy agenda will be discussed.

The relationship between the UPLIFT youth group and other formal or informal youth groups will be enhanced through the involvement of the vice-mayor who is in charge of the youth policies in the city. Possibly, the Youth Board will be connected to the youth parliament that the municipality is intending to create.

### **6.2.3 Methods, topics and outputs in the co-creation process**

#### *Phase II: co-creation of the reflexive policy agenda*

The co-creation process, which has started in November 2021, will continue based on further joint workshops for the youth and the institutional partners. The aim of this co-creation phase is to elaborate a common and realistic policy solution document. In order to achieve this, the two groups (youth and institutional representatives) will work closely together. In the first co-creation session (November 2021), the youth group has presented its report and got feedback on it.

In close collaboration between youth group and institutional group, common and realistic policy solutions will be developed. As the common ground for discussion and co-decision has already been set up, a creation and negotiation phase between youth communities and institutions will follow.

The youth stakeholders group presented to the institutional group the results of its work on the 25th of November, 2021. The next step is to totalize the results of the institutional subgroups' meetings and to present them back to the institutional stakeholders' group in order to change or to validate them. Subsequently, we plan to organize a 2-3 days long workshop with the two stakeholders group, where all the collected and presented data will be processed and a draft of the RPA - a local educational action plan in order to enhance the access to education of the vulnerable youngsters - will be elaborated.

#### *Phase III: promotion of the Reflexive Policy Agenda*

In Phase III. the Reflexive Policy Agenda will be promoted on a local political level, with the aim of having it adopted by the local Municipal Council. For this purpose, the following steps will be taken:

- The draft policy document will be presented to the Municipality;
- Organising larger consultations for finalising and refining the policy document among all local educational institutions, Youth Councils from schools, the Youth Bureau of the city, the mayor and two vice mayors, the Child Protection Service and, of course, the members of the stakeholder groups;
- Organising actions to promote the final policy document and its adoption by the Local Government (such as presenting it in the local media, organizing events).

As a result, a Final policy agenda and action plan will be developed and promoted.

#### *Phase IV: implementation of the Reflexive Policy Agenda*

The main goal of the joint co-creation process between the two stakeholders' groups is to create a sense of shared ownership for the resulting Reflexive Policy Agenda (RPA). This sense of shared ownership can provide a sound basis for a successful implementation of this RPA. In order to maximize the implementation chances, we propose to have an intensive 2-3-day long intensive workshop with the two stakeholders' groups in phase II of the co-creation process (see also the text above). In this workshop, the main ideas of the RPA are translated into a realistic, achievable, specific, measurable action plan with named responsables for each action. This way we can enhance the feeling of ownership towards a plan that contains local educational policies that will serve both youngsters and educational professionals.

The very concrete RPA, as an action plan, also means that this document will represent a shared set of values and beliefs regarding what should be and can be done on a local level. All those participating in elaborating the document will have ownership of it and will be responsible for implementing certain aspects of the action plan.

The creation of a RPA runs parallel to some other important initiatives in the field of youth policy. The Youth Development Strategy of the municipality is currently being created, a local Youth Office was launched in November 2021 and the new Local Development Strategy of the city is also under construction. The GAL Sepsi team is involved in all these processes, either as consultants or participants. This will allow them to bring the problem map, the RPA and the action plan of the UPLIFT co-creation process under the attention of the local decision makers so that connections with other youth policy initiatives can be established.

The vice mayor of the municipality is a member of the institutional stakeholders' group and - due to her young age - also participated in several meetings of the youth stakeholders' group. As a consequence, she has a clearly expressed engagement towards the UPLIFT youngsters and she also promised to integrate the RPA's main findings into the municipality's strategies.

Within the framework of UPLIFT, GAL SEPSI will coordinate the implementation of one or two actions from the final action plan. More specific plans for this will be developed in due course

### **6.3 Time planning**

Table 6.2 shows the time planning for the different phases in the co-creation process.

*Table 6.2 Time planning of the Sfântu Gheorge co-creation process*

Phase II: Co-creation of the Reflexive Policy Agenda	M23-M26 (November 2021 – February 2022)
Phase III: Promotion of policy agenda on local political level	M27-M28 (March/April 2022)
Phase IV: Implementation of Reflexive Policy Agenda	M29-M34 (April-October 2022)

## 6.4 Reflection

### *Functioning of the youth group*

The youth group worked with great energy, creativity and engagement. New members were received easily without affecting the cohesion of the group. The group is very supportive and sensitive to vulnerability and power relations, it regulates itself very efficiently. The problem map was created step by step, but without any influence from the moderators.

### *Functioning of the institutional group*

As expected, the creation of trust is harder in the institutional group. Hidden topics such as rivalry, hardship to assume responsibility as well as parallel processes (many links and relationships outside of the group) have impacted the group work. Ideally, more time should have been allocated to the institutional group. However, constraints regarding the project resources as well as the limited availability of the professionals participating in the group made this impossible.

### *Challenges in the preparatory stage*

Although the original idea was to have a synchronous process, with the youth group and the institutional group working in parallel, in practice the two processes were somehow desynchronised, due to the lagging progress in the institutional group. The main challenges for this group were the following:

- Lack of trust/hope in institutional changes - characteristic of both groups but more intense in the institutional group;
- Work overload/Resource scarcity on behalf of institutions;
- Institutions lacking experience in open-ended, participatory processes;
- Resistance towards collaboration;
- The COVID- pandemic.

The above problems have been gradually formed during the past years. Fortunately, the UPLIFT co-creation project seems to have resulted in more trust between the institutional stakeholders. For example, most of the stakeholders were willing to participate in the subgroup sessions, and to share relevant and feasible solutions for the identified problems. In spite of the resistance we tacitly felt towards participatory processes in the beginning of the process, we were persistent in pursuing our plans and by the time we arrived at the work of the subgroups and the first co-creation event (with the youngsters presenting their results), there was a change of attitude towards openness on behalf of the institutional stakeholders.

### *Changes compared to the initial action plan*

Apart from the desynchronisation between the youth group and the institutional group, there were no major content-related changes compared to the initial action plan. However, as a result of the COVID situation, the whole process suffered from some delay. For example, the co-creation process (joining the two groups) started in November 2021 instead of June 2021. In a similar vein, the youth camp that was planned for summer/autumn 2021, but needed to be postponed.

## 7 State of the art of the local action plans: Tallinn

In this chapter we describe the state of the art of the Tallinn co-creation process. Section 7.1 describes what has been done so far, whereas Section 7.2 outlines the plans for the coming period. Section 7.3 presents the time planning and Section 7.4 contains a brief reflection.

### Goal and target group of the Tallinn co-creation process

The process in Tallinn focuses on co-creating tailor made services to unemployed young people. The target group for the co-creation project consists of NEETs: young people aged between 15 and 29 who are not in education, employment, or training.

### 7.1 Progress of the co-creation process

This section gives an overview of the progress of the Tallinn co-creation process. Subsequently, we deal with the following topics:

- Institutional context and institutional stakeholders (Section 7.1.1);
- Involvement of young people (Section 7.1.2);
- Methods and topics in the co-creation process (Section 7.1.3);
- Output of the co-creation process (Section 7.1.4).

#### 7.1.1 Institutional context and institutional stakeholders

The co-creation process in Tallinn so far has been mainly carried out by the Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AEYC). University of Tartu (UT) has provided the scientific guidance for the process and was responsible for the scientific dissemination of its methodology and results (see also Table 7.1).

The co-creation process has brought together young people and different stakeholders. AEYC has reached out to and mobilized NEET youth (NEETs: young people aged between 15 and 29 who are not in education, employment, or training), and involved them in the policy co-creation process in a participatory and empowering manner. Furthermore, AEYC has committed a wide range of other institutional stakeholders to the co-creation project:

- The Tallinn City Government is in charge of the creation and implementation of local policies related to NEETs, at the local level. This city government is the main institutional partner involved in the co-creation process. It acts as receiver and potential implementer of the policy ideas that result from this process;
- The Education and Youth Board is the main national level partner involved in the project. This board works on the re-design of services related to NEETs, virtual platform development, and the development of a guidebook for organizations that provide services to NEETs;

- Tallinn Adults' Gymnasium has been the main educational institution involved in the project. This school has served as one of the central contact points for recruiting young people with a vulnerable background (including NEETs) for the project (mainly for WP3);
- Finally, several other stakeholders have been involved during the process, providing input for the redesign of services to NEETs and/or or the co-creation of new policies regarding NEETs. In this respect, we would like to mention youth organizations that represent young people (e.g. the Tallinn region group of the Estonian National Youth Council), service providers, educational institutions, youth work institutions, the Social Insurance Board, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Table 7.1 Stakeholders in the Tallinn co-creation process and their roles

Partner	Role	Role description
University of Tartu (UT)	Task leader and academic/knowledge partner	Responsible for conducting the scientific guidance of the co-creation process, as well as for analysing and reporting the results.  Recruits youngsters for interviews. Collects data and conducts analysis.
Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres (AEYC)	Implementation partner	Sets up the stakeholder structure for the WP4 co-creation process.  Recruits youngsters for co-creation activities.  Collects data on the process and translates it into input for local and national authorities.  Organizes activities for, and provides direct support to NEET youth.
University of Uppsala (UU)	External advisors to the co-creation project.	External advisors to the co-creation project.
Tallinn City Government (TCG)	Main partner in the Tallinn co-creation process	In charge of the creation and implementation of local policies related to NEETs.  The main local level institutional partner involved in the co-creation process.  Receiver and potential implementer of the policy ideas that result from this process.

<p>The Education and Youth Board, youth organizations (the Tallinn region group of the Estonian National Youth Council), service providers, educational institutions, youth work institutions, the Social Insurance Board, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Social Affairs, Tallinn Adults' Gymnasium</p>	<p>Additional implementation partners</p>	<p>Take part in the co-creation process.</p> <p>Involvement in the re-design of services related to NEETs</p> <p>Act as potential receivers and implementers of the policy ideas that result from the co-creation process.</p> <p>Recruit young people with a vulnerable background for the project.</p> <p>Responsible for the Chat development process at the state level.</p>
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### 7.1.2 Involvement of young people

The development of new services and the support measures for NEETs has taken place in close collaboration with the target group of young people. Young people have become involved in the project through various ways:

#### *Recruitment of youngsters*

Vulnerable young people were recruited to participate in the project through Tallinn Adults' Gymnasium. Young people with a vulnerable background (those whose education has been interrupted previously and/or who are having difficulties participating in the labour market due to lack of education) often study in this educational institution. The students there predominantly have a Russian background (the main ethnic minority group in Estonia) and a lower socio-economic status. The project was introduced to the young people participating in the 'career day' of the Tallinn Adults' Gymnasium. More than 30 participants aged 14-30 participated in individual interviews. Reflections were gathered from the youngsters on their current situation, including possible solutions for improvement of this situation. These ideas have been used as input for the design of services for NEETs. We were also planning to have follow-up focus groups discussions with the same group of youngsters but we did not succeed in pursuing this plan yet.

#### *Co-creation meetings and activities*

- Local workshops and meetings with vulnerable young people in Tallinn have taken place;
- There have been two Zoom meetings with vulnerable youth groups from disadvantaged neighborhoods in Tallinn (These were the Youth Town Hall meetings in WP3). The first of these meetings involved a youth group from Mustamäe and the second meeting took place with a group from Lasnamäe. The participating youngsters

were recruited with the help of district government representatives. In the online workshops, we have first provided a safe space (using youth work/icebreaking tools and methods) for youngsters so that they felt free to express their reflections on their current situation. A problem map was created during the meetings. Second, after some discussion, possible solutions were discussed and mapped. The meetings provided valuable insights into the shortcomings of the youngsters' situation related to the labor and housing market, as well as to the educational system;

- The local (Tallinn region) representatives of the National Youth Council have been involved in the re-design of services for NEET youth (on the local as well as the national level);
- An analysis of young people's voices through an electronic tool (Logbook) was carried out in order to get a better insight into young people's current situation and challenges, including area differences in this respect.

### **7.1.3 Methods, topics and outputs in the co-creation process**

#### *Methods*

In order to collect input from the target group of young people, we have made use of online group meetings, physical group meetings, and in-depth interviews. In the physical group meetings, both youngsters and specialists were present and the world café method was applied. Apart from talking to the young people themselves, we have held interviews with the main stakeholders in the system since they have a good overview of the current critical issues/shortcomings in the system that affect NEET youth. Data from AEYC (Logbook) was used to map the current situation of NEET youth in Tallinn.

#### *Topics and aims*

The NEET youth policy is the focus of the policy co-creation process in Tallinn. The main objective is to re-design and improve the services for NEET youth (and other youth groups who are in risk of becoming NEET youth) in order to better meet their needs. More specifically, the aims are:

1. To increase awareness of existing measures among the NEET youth, while also opening up opportunities for young people to participate in the policy creation process;
2. To improve services for NEET youth in order to better match the needs of the target groups – especially to improve the cooperation between different stakeholders and sectors, and enhance the individualized approach (case management approach). To achieve this aim, new intervention measures have been co-created and a soft skills' development guide has been developed for the youth specialists;
3. To improve the track records on services provided (so called Logbook) for the purposes of improving and better targeting services for NEETs. The analysis of the collected data helps to improve knowledge about the situation of the youth, including locational differences and area-specific problems;

4. To improve access to virtual sources and online environments for vulnerable young people. An outreach tool (so called Chat) is being established to enhance mobile youth work.

Table 7.2 shows how these goals are connected to past and planned activities

Table 7.2 Past and planned activities in connection with the goals of the co-creation process

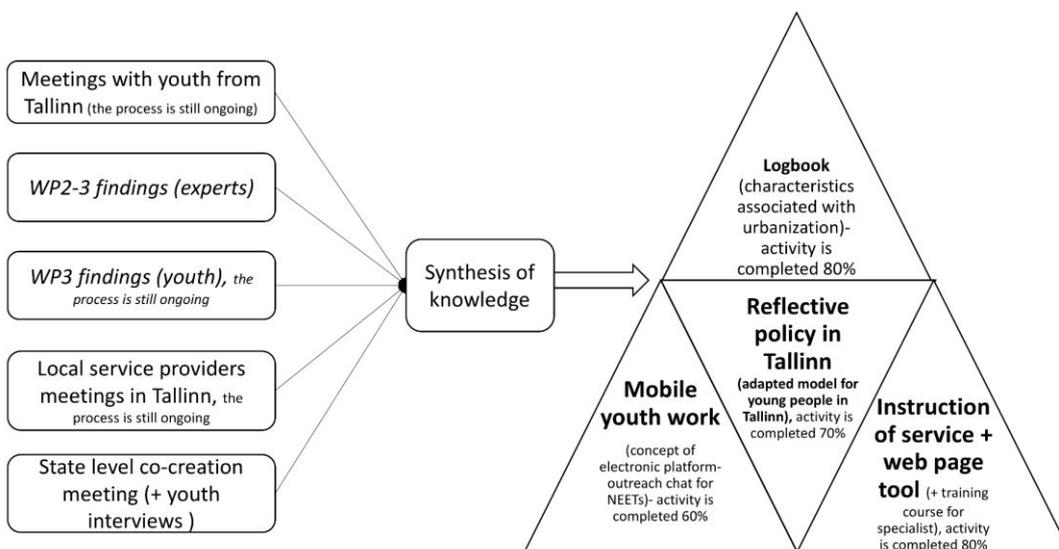
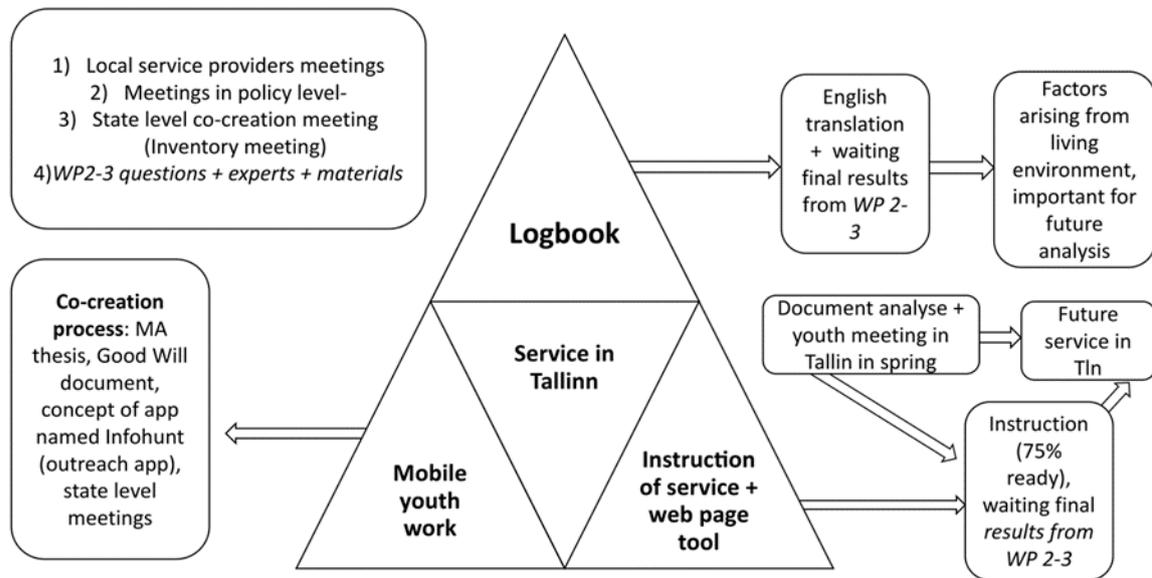
Goal	Past (co-creation) activities	Output so far	Co-creation activities planned	Expected output
<b>Aim 1 and 2: To increase awareness of existing measures among the NEET youth, while also opening up opportunities for young people to participate in a policy creation process that focuses on the improvement of service for NEET youth.</b>				
Collecting input from youth, based on their own experiences	Local workshops and interviews with young people in Tallinn (vulnerable background) from disadvantaged neighbourhoods Topic: NEET-related youth problems and possible solutions	Workshops have been organized and input was collected and used in the service design process	N.a.	N.a.
Collecting input from youth, based on their own experiences	Meetings with Mustamäe and Lasnamäe district youth groups	Meetings have been organized and input is collected and used in the service design process	N.a.	N.a.
Youth policy and service model are designed and validated by youth groups	Meetings with local representatives of the national youth council, meetings, meetings with a broader group of NEET youth on national and local level	Draft of service model	Design of the service model will be further validated in Tallinn context by involving the so-called Steering Group	A NEET service model that meets the needs of the target group
Support intervention is	Service manual for NEET-status	Manual is created.	Soft skills training session module	Guidebook of NEETs support

described and suggestions for policy development are highlighted.	youth support program, intervention to develop NEET-status youth social skills.		description has to be added.	system and virtual toolbox
<b>Aim 3: To improve the track records on services provided (so called Logbook) for the purposes of improving and better targeting services for NEETs. The analysis of the collected data helps to improve knowledge about the situation of the youth, including locational differences and area-specific problems.</b>				
Evidence based policy making based on current data.	Data collection on NEET-status from youth support program system	Logbook data is used and shared with Tallinn city government	Logbook development (adding the necessary features to the system) and collecting suggestions for future development	An analysis of young people's voices through an electronic tool (Logbook) in order to get a better insight into young people's current situation and challenges, including area differences in this respect.
<b>Aim 4: To improve access to virtual sources and online environments for vulnerable young people. An outreach tool (so called Chat) is being established to enhance mobile youth work.</b>				
Digital tool to support outreach to NEET-status youth.	E-youth centre design process with Tallinn youth workers and young people	Material is ready	n/a	Model/standard of e-youth centre
Electronic platform for personal support to NEET-status youth	E-chat solutions for NEET-status youth, E-counselling, discussions with ICT developer	Partnership discussions took place, youth input will be collected	Discussions are planned Jan-Feb 2022	Digital tool prototype solution

Source: own work

In order to achieve the formulated goals - a redesign of the existing services and the establishment, of new measures - a bottom-up method is used. This implies that we start from the needs of young people and their perception of the obstacles that prevent them from being fully integrated in the labour and housing market, as well as in the educational system. The activities undertaken during the co-creation process are highlighted in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2. Activities of the co-creation process within the framework of UPLIFT



Source: own work

### *Outputs in the co-creation process*

The following outputs have been created so far:

- **Guidance material** has been developed for the providers of services to NEETs. The aim of this material is to improve the provision of individualized services and to better coordinate the services (so that they are more in line with the needs and challenges of the NEETs). For this purpose, a so-called 'Guidebook' on the NEETs support system has been created (an electronic tool is created based on the guide);
- **A Logbook** has been further developed, including better analytical tools and visualization possibilities (to enable the application of a more individualized case management approach). The database includes opinions of young people from Tallinn about the shortcomings/ perceptions of the existing support mechanisms;
- **The first concept of an electronic platform for mobile youth work** has been established (Chat). This platform will be used to reach NEETs and other vulnerable youth. Inputs from the co-creation process (interviews and group sessions) have been very useful when building up this platform. Process continues in January 2022.

### *Re-design of national services for NEETs*

The policy co-creation within the UPLIFT project has also given important input to the reorganization of the national services for NEETs. A new service model - "Cross-sectoral NEET-status youth support and cooperation model of services for local governments. Description of the future model" – was tested (during the co-creation process in 2021) and will be validated by the youth. Validation continues in January 2022 with a group of young people from Tallinn. Facilitated by the engagement in the UPLIFT project, the municipality of Tallinn became a central partner in this national level service design process. Hence the results of local policy co-creation (voices of young people in the Tallinn region) will have a national impact on policy creation and implementation.

During the process the project team made an effort to make sure the young people's voices and ideas have been translated into the policy co-creation, and to secure their involvement in the process. The interviews and group discussions well pinpointed to the current bottlenecks of the system, as well as indicated the possible solutions.

## **7.2 Next steps in the co-creation process**

### **7.2.1 Institutional context and institutional stakeholders**

During the next steps of the co-creation process we plan to create a more intensive partnership with Tallinn City Government (particularly with specialists in youth programs) in order to facilitate a wider impact for the policy co-creation process. We are currently developing plans to engage the new Youth Council of the city of Tallinn in the co-creation process (in order to discuss the mid-term results of the project as well as to get input for the NEET- youth support services' re-design in Tallinn).

## 7.2.2 Involvement of young people

The involvement of young people will be further enhanced in the next months through the following initiatives:

- Setting up a Steering Group consisting of vulnerable youth from different neighborhoods in Tallinn. Compared to the youth groups with which we have worked so far, this Steering Group is expected to incorporate more youngsters from different backgrounds and different geographical areas. We are currently contacting different youth organizations in the Tallinn region to find the best ways to recruit young people (with vulnerable background) for the remainder of the co-creation process;
- More local group workshops and individual meetings with young people are currently planned. We are planning to involve new youth groups from different districts from Tallinn. We are particularly interested in involving young people who have been in a NEET-status and came to Tallinn from other regions of Estonia in search for a better life. We will be exploring how these young people can be involved in the policy making process and what their experiences and expectations are.

## 7.2.3 Methods, topics and outputs in the co-creation process

### *Methods and topics*

The co-creation process, which has already started in 2021, will continue based on further workshops for the youth and the institutional partners. Focus group and other activities are planned with youth in NEET-status and other vulnerable young groups in Tallinn (e.g. the Steering Group mentioned earlier). During these activities we will further work on the planned policy measures (focused on NEET-youth support) in Tallinn and outputs and design these according to the needs of youngsters.

The ultimate aim is to take the ideas of the youngsters and negotiate these with the main stakeholders in order to position them on the policy agenda at the local level as well as in the national level NEET-youth service design process (the latter can be especially influential and lead to the further impact of the project).

Finally, meetings with the representatives of the city governments will be organized to further discuss the concepts, developments, and service design issues (e.g. the virtual platform, the guidance/ training material, service design model, etc.) that featured in the first stage of the co-creation process.

### *Outputs and results of the co-creation process*

No new outputs are planned but the ones which are already in progress will continue their development (guidebook of NEETs support system and virtual toolbox, developing the logbook, local policy-redesign of services). As there already are new policy initiatives (state level support model for NEETs) currently being developed on local as well as state level, the co-creation within UPLIFT will not lead to a separate Reflexive Policy Agenda but rather provide important input for adapting and fine-tuning the already existing policy initiatives and

developments. Somewhat more profoundly than planned before we will bring the input of the co-creation process to the national level.

#### *Other outputs*

We will organize a series of seminars organized where the ideas on redesign of services will be presented and discussed with local authorities and stakeholders, as well as on the state level.

### **7.3 Time planning**

The co-creation activities planned for the coming months are presented in Table 7.3.

*Table 7.3 Time planning of the Tallinn co-creation process*

What (activity)	When	Responsible partners
Local policy workshop (local and regional policy makers, leaders of local/regional institutions, Local Youth Board, researchers)	M28	UT, AEYC, Tallinn City Government
Focus group and individual interviews	M25-30	UT, AEYC
Planning policy co-creation activities in Tallinn	M25-30	UT, AEYC
Developing and testing an electronic platform for contacting and collecting information about NEET-youth (as part of the co-creation process)	M25-M35	AEYC
Developing the Logbook (database), including better analytical tools and visualisation possibilities	M25-M35	AEYC
Developing the Guidebook of NEETs support system and virtual toolbox	M25-M35	AEYC
NEET-youth specialists and NEET-youth social skills training modules development and validation	M28-M36	AEYC
State model validation and local policy co-creation meetings with young people and Tallinn city government representatives	M28-M36	AEYC
National Policy conference (National level policy experts, decision makers and stakeholders, researchers, NGO representatives)	M33	UT, AEYC, Tallinn City Government

## 7.4 Reflection

### *Differences with the initial action plan*

The work within the co-creation process has been somewhat delayed for two main reasons. First of all, the youth group (the Youth Council of the City of Tallinn) which we planned to recruit as our main youth partner in the co-creation process has ceased to exist in 2021. Instead, with the support by the Tallinn city government two groups of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Tallinn were established with whom we held the first meetings. We are hoping to establish a longer term cooperation with these groups.

Second, the Covid-19 pandemic related restrictions made it more difficult to engage young people, and especially those with a more vulnerable background. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the related restrictions did not allow for so many face-to-face meetings. The online meetings had a lower number of participants than planned, and in different meetings there was an overrepresentation of more 'active' youth who may not be the ideal spokespersons for NEETs. We also postponed several meetings in the hope that it is possible to meet in person later during the project. The initial idea to set up a Youth Steering Group for the policy co-creation has yet not been realized.

### *Other reflections and modifications in the project*

- The analysis revealed that the NEET policy creation mostly takes place at the national level. Therefore, even though we mainly work at the local level, we transcend the result of our co-creation process to the national level in order to achieve a wider impact;
- The activity of creating a 'Chat' (the virtual tool) has not been completed as a result of legal restrictions. We are currently working on solutions;
- Motivating young people to participate in meetings and co-creation activities is complicated. We are working on in order to increase and maintain their interest;
- Although young people with a Russian background have often studied in an immersion class, their everyday communication has taken place in a predominantly Russian-speaking environment and their ability to speak the local language (Estonian) may be low. Consequently, the language barrier has had some effect on their input at meetings (we have learned from our experiences, and in the future meetings we plan to let Russian-speakers to express themselves in their own language).

## 8 Reflection and comparison

In this section all the main changes that occurred since D4.1 are addressed and reflected upon, topic by topic. The topics are partly overlapping with the risks identified in D4.1 (see Table 8.1) and partly new, emerging from what happened in the first stage of the co-creation process.

It is important to note that, as clarified by the state of the art of the Action Plans, the local context in which the co-creation happens is different for each location, as is the stage of progress. However, the reflections in this Section are, albeit to a different extent or in specific ways, relevant to all locations, as they highlight aspects that are integral to co-creation, thus common and comparable across all cases.

*Table 8.1 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

### 8.1 Monitoring of the process

After the first months of co-creation, it became clear that monitoring of the process needed to be enhanced because, while internal communication and records were accessible to the relevant stakeholders in each location, the monitoring of progress across the research groups in the different locations was not effective. For this reason, an online monitoring tool was developed to record what kind of actions and meetings were carried out and for what purpose.

More specifically, the monitoring tool requires information about the following aspects of each activity carried out by each partner:

- Organizing partner and WP location;
- Date, time, place and duration of the activity;
- Type of activity (whether it is a meeting of the Youth Board or of both Youth Board and institutional stakeholders, for example);
- Number and description of participants (gender composition, vulnerability level, other relevant observations);
- Description of the activity, objectives and methods used;
- Outcome of the activity (degree of "success", motivations, outputs) and other qualitative observations.

In order to comply with all the ethics, data protection and privacy regulations of UPLIFT, of the EU and of the different stakeholders, Microsoft Forms was chosen as the preferred platform to collect data from all locations. The collected information is used to keep track of the progress and ensure that all locations are working towards the agreed objectives.

This monitoring will also help the research team to compare the cases and draw overall conclusions about the efficiency of the methods, the successes and failures in order to be able to work out a guideline by the end of the project duration.

## **8.2 Vulnerability of the target group**

The starting point of UPLIFT is that socio-economic vulnerability and social exclusion hamper people's capabilities. It was therefore important that the vulnerable target group was sufficiently represented in the co-creation process. This has proven more difficult than expected. A lengthy and complex reflection on this emerged in several occasions, and is summarized here.

Clearly, not everyone is vulnerable to the same extent, and the degree of vulnerability depends on how the different factors causing vulnerability and social exclusion combine in the lived experience of individuals and households. Some factors can be more impactful than others, and they come in different shapes and levels. For example, housing as a domain of life has extremely far-reaching consequences on all other aspects, as a roof over one's head is a primary need fundamental for personal wellbeing. Insecurity with respect to housing can range from having a temporary rental contract to being homeless, which explains why the range of people that can be considered vulnerable with regard to housing is greater than those who can be considered vulnerable in other domains, such as education or income.

With regard to the level of involvement and contribution to the co-creation process, it has been noted that more vulnerable participants may experience more difficulties. On one hand, they may have lower involvement due to other more pressing commitments; on the other hand, they may feel uncomfortable sharing their experiences in a wide group, or not have the

skills to do so effectively. In this case, smaller groups and experienced moderators with strong social skills may make a difference.

Two cases are exemplary with regard to different vulnerability levels. In Sfantu Gheorghe a considerable effort has been made to reach the most disadvantaged young people in order to achieve a high level of inclusivity not only in the process, but also in the policy agenda. As a consequence, at least three of the young participants are quite high on the vulnerability scale, since they are in the care of child protection services (see Section 6 on Sfantu Gheorghe). However, despite having been reached, it was difficult for these youngsters to fully take part in the group discussion and to be empowered to the extent that the co-creation process aims to reach.

On a different note, in Amsterdam, efforts to reach very vulnerable youngsters have not been as effective, and the Youth Board has a comparatively higher level of education (also in consideration of a slightly older age group). Nonetheless, Youth Board members in Amsterdam also have experiences of socio-economic vulnerability and in the cases when they recognized that more vulnerable situations exist, they sought knowledge from other young people with different experiences (see Section 4 on Amsterdam).

Finally, it is important to address some of the factors that made it difficult to reach the most vulnerable young population. First of all, those who are vulnerable from a socio-economic point of view tend to have a lower social participation, from voting, to political engagement all the way to citizen involvement, due to both cultural reasons - participation is not considered important or useful - and practical ones - long working hours, other preoccupations, care duties. Their engagement is thus dependent on very specific and "aggressive" recruitment strategies, and on careful and continued monitoring to respond to their practical needs (in terms of timing, frequency and location of meetings, for example). Nonetheless, there is no guarantee that these strategies would work. In the UPLIFT case, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the related restrictions on mobility and social interactions, interfered heavily with the recruitment phase. Indeed, although the recruitment strategies were initially tailored to the most vulnerable groups - for example by going in person to schools, youth centres and sport centres in neighbourhoods with a high risk of social exclusion and by contacting social workers as gatekeepers - they had to be drastically downsized and changed, turning to mostly online contact, thereby almost by definition excluding those without internet access. After the first year of pandemic and of project, several additional efforts have been made to recruit more young people with low socioeconomic background and other types of vulnerability. The degree of success of this new round of recruitment depended on the local Covid-related restrictions, on the characteristics of the implementation partners and the policy co-creation domain. Indeed, the Youth Board should reflect the target group of the implementation partners' policies and the vulnerable group of the life and policy domain (housing has a much broader pool of vulnerability than other domains).

### 8.3 Implementation

One of the points that emerged more often in consortium discussions is the extent to which the policy proposals emerging from the co-creation process can actually be implemented, and to what extent the implementer partners are willing to take the co-creation results into account. This is an extremely important issue, as it impacts the level of trust of young people in the whole process. For example, in Barakaldo, young participants made it very clear that, although they are willing to engage and envision change together, they do not want to be “used” and expect a similar level of commitment from the institutional side. Therefore, a lot of effort needs to be placed in the management of expectations on both sides. Young people need to understand that policy change is difficult, incremental and depends on many factors, and policymakers need to understand that young people are eager to change the dynamics that affect them, and will push for that in spite of formal constraints. Moreover, it needs to be clear to implementers that a failure to keep their commitment will affect the success of the process.

This mediation and interaction have taken slightly different forms in the four implementation sites. In Barakaldo the Social Lab structure allows youngsters and policymakers to debate at multiple stages of the co-creation process, in a cyclic way, in order to come to a shared and manageable reflexive policy agenda. Similarly, the Schuursessie meetings in Amsterdam are aimed to engage youngsters and implementer partners in productive discussion over the policy proposals. In Sfantu Gheorghe instead, both the youngsters and the institutional actors work initially in separate parallel groups, in order to discuss issues and approaches internally and to learn what to expect from the process and from each other, and only at a later stage they come together to engage in debate. Finally in Tallin young people provide input to institutional stakeholders on existing measures and services aimed at NEET, helping them understand what should be changed.

While in all the locations we have the cooperation of local public actors, it is often the case that they do not have the formal power to change the things that young people are most concerned about. For example, if education or housing policy is decided at the regional or national level and the implementer partner is a municipality or a housing association, it becomes difficult for them to implement large policy changes, however willing they might be. This issue can be addressed in two ways. On one hand, proposals from Youth Boards can be focused on “small changes” that have an impact on the local level and can be implemented by the involved partners. On the other hand, the implementation partners (ideally together with youth representatives) can bring the more ambitious proposals to other, more appropriate and more powerful tables, and lobby for change based on the results of the co-creation process. Even this type of advocacy could lead to an improved trust of young people in institutions at the local level.

## 8.4 Durability and institutionalization

One of the main objectives of WP4 is to create a durable institutional framework that will be maintained after the end of the project. However, since the long-term integration of co-creation practices in the local institutional environment requires a deep change in actors' relations and behaviors, as well as in the organizational settings, there is a concrete risk that co-creation initiative could be short-lived after the end of the project.

According to research, the long-term institutionalization of co-creation and co-production practices depends on several factors, that can be grouped into two main categories: resources and relationships. In terms of resources, the persistence of co-creation practices largely depends on the economic resources allocated to them - either by public or private partners - on the knowledge and skills of the actors involved, and on the time that all the actors, including citizens, are willing to invest in the process (Jakobsen, 2013; Campomori and Casula, 2021). In terms of relationships, on one hand, the effectiveness of the communication and cooperation structures and processes among the involved actors - public and private, formal and informal, institutions, organizations and citizens - is an underlying condition for the institutionalization of co-production practices (Rutter, 2016). If the process works well, it has higher chances of being integrated in the inner workings of the administration. On the other hand, it is important to negotiate a degree of protection and promotion by strategic administrative and political allies (Pais et al., 2019). In other words, the co-creation practice needs to be recognized as valuable by relevant and powerful institutional actors.

Along a similar line, most studies highlight the enabling role of pro-active public actors as a crucial element to guarantee the institutionalization of co-creation practices (Sicilia et al., 2019). Indeed, if public actors at the relevant policymaking level show adequate support they can facilitate the continuity and integration of co-production practices (Campomori & Casula, 2021). Finally, a propensity for innovation in the organizational culture is an important factor in the advancement of social practices based on co-production (Bovaird et al., 2019; Pestoff, 2014).

Unfortunately, many of the factors that are necessary for the institutionalization of co-creation practices are out of the scope of the UPLIFT project and out of the control of the majority of the actors involved. Research partners do not have control over whether money or people are allocated by implementer partners for this type of activities in the future. Moreover, the relationships that actors develop among each other are delicate and can change over time. Particularly those between public and private actors can be influenced by changes in the political environment. Local elections determine the type of projects and policies that administrations pursue, and they represent a concrete risk for the long-term persistence of the initiative.

However, it is very important to note that, in all locations, we can count on the collaboration of at least one public actor, either local or national. This means that the co-creation process has raised the interest of the relevant public institutions that can guarantee it a life beyond

UPLIFT. Therefore, the most important thing we can do is try to instil value in the co-creation process, making it empowering for young people and relevant for policymakers, so that all the participating actors can perceive it as intrinsically worth the effort and be willing to pursue in the future.

## 8.5 Reflexivity and limitations

As researchers, we are all very well aware that our work has limitations, especially the very complex and delicate process of WP4. Indeed, in the course of the months, during the meetings we held regularly, we have asked ourselves several questions about the “quality” of our research and co-creation. To what extent is ours a true reflexive approach? To what extent is it possible for young people to take ownership of the process if not initiated by them? To what extent is the process steered by the implementation partners? How is it different from participatory action research?

We recognize that this research was initiated by the UPLIFT research team - all adults - and that we made practical choices about which group of young people we would ask to become involved in the co-creation, how best to involve them and, in some cases, also on the topics of the policy co-creation. In this sense, it was not a strictly bottom-up type of involvement, but rather a conscious choice of those already at the table to open up a place for young people, who lacked a proper voice. The recruitment of the young people and the process of involving them was thus initiated by us, but we tried as much as possible to then leave the floor to the young people that responded to the initiative and let them take ownership of the co-creation and of the results, acting as facilitators between the youngsters and the implementer partners. In Amsterdam, the place where the co-creation is at a further stage and where results are already coming in, we see that, although the initial topics have been proposed by De Key, the Youth Board has fully taken on the challenge, and brought it much further than the implementer partners would have thought. The young people have taken full ownership of both the process and the policy proposals that resulted from it. Indeed, they have set up their own private communication channels, they are using different expressive means than the ones proposed, and they are engaging in practical collaborations with additional municipal officials and other professionals to take their policy ideas further towards implementation.

Of course, implementer partners are policymakers, either in the form of private organizations or public administrations, and as such they have needs and objectives of their own, which respond to more complex logics than only involving and empowering young people. Their final objective is to improve their policies to make them more effective, which is the reason why, for example, in Amsterdam the topics of the co-creation were to some extent determined by the implementer partners. They noticed that something was problematic or incomplete and realized they needed the input of the young people who were supposed to be at the receiving end of those measures. Implementers and institutional partners also want to get a good result out of the time and resource investment of the co-creation, which implies a risk that the process would be steered towards their needs. In order to mitigate this risk, in Sfantu Gheorghe

there was quite a long preparatory phase with the institutional and implementation partners in order to create the conditions for reflection on motivations and goals, and be truly open to the ideas of the youth group.

As a result of these tensions, there is in all locations a constant need for mediation of needs and expectations, which makes our approach truly reflexive, although rather different from participatory action research, where a direct link with policy implementers is often absent. In our view, the involvement of institutional stakeholders provides the opportunity for the participatory process to have an actual policy outcome, which in itself can be rewarding and empowering for the young people participating in the co-creation. Moreover, the process is also a means to foster change within the policymaking sphere, to influence both public administrations and private service providers and raise their awareness for the need of a better involvement of young people and policy recipients in general.

## 9 Future steps

The next phase of WP4 will consist of the finalization of the co-creation process in all four locations. In terms of research work, we will keep comparing the cases and reflect on the larger implications of co-creation and reflexive policymaking. Moreover, we will work on dissemination of the content-based results of the reflexive policymaking with local authorities, relevant national stakeholders and domain-specific actors. With regard to method-based results of the co-creation process, we will focus on academic dissemination and on policy workshops to engage other actors from additional policy domains in this type of process.

Finally, although the Covid-19 situation has in many cases resulted in delays of the planned activities, or in their fundamental change, we have now come to terms with the fact that this health emergency has become a part of our lives and we have developed strategies to work with it. Our timelines have adjusted, and we now know how to turn in-person events into hybrid or even fully online activities.

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