Our Life. Our Voice. Young People and Poverty
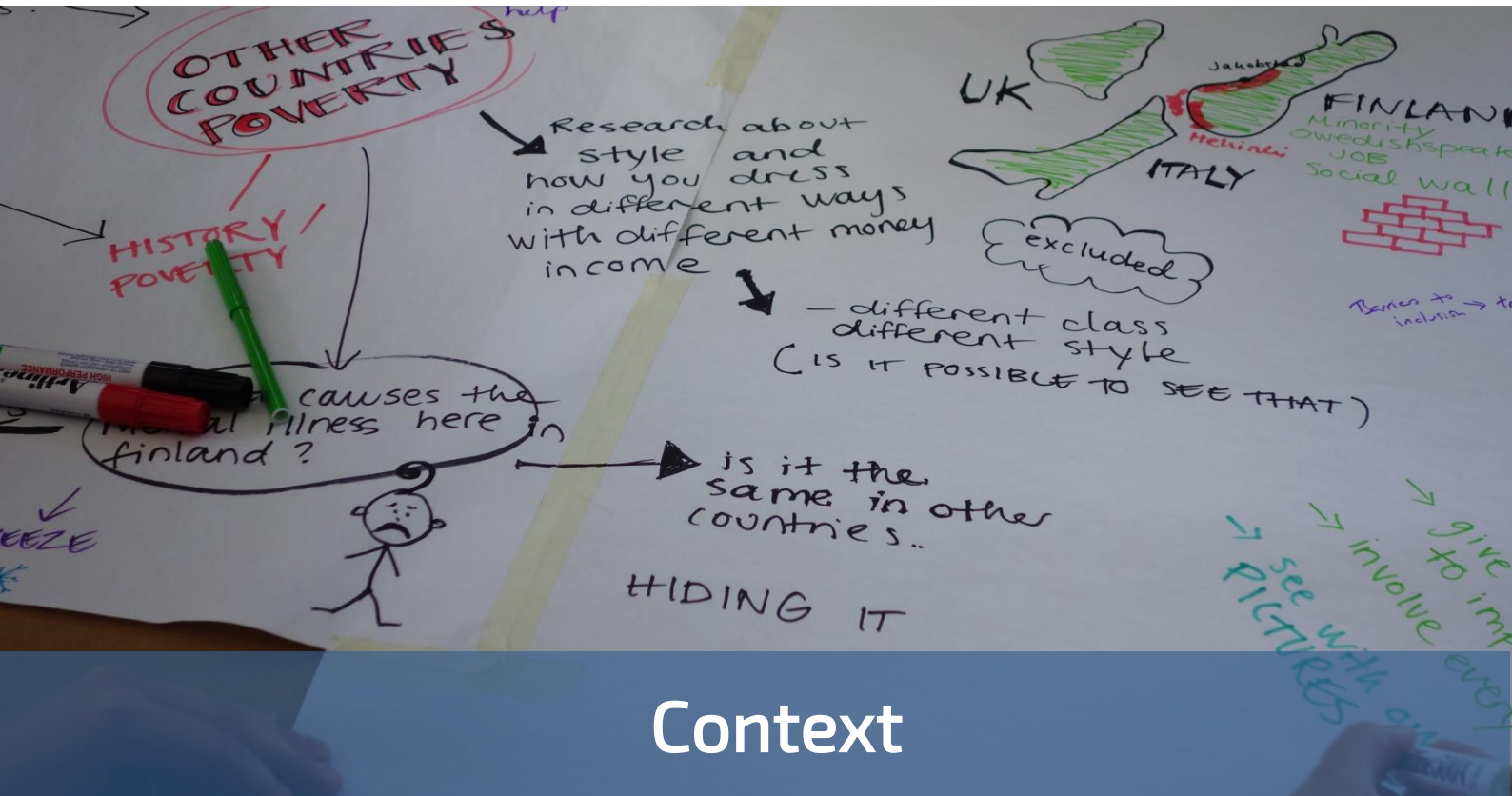
Tool-kit – How to engage young disadvantaged people

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Context

The "*Our Life. Our Voice. Young People and Poverty*" project targeted young people between 15 and 30 years old from 5 EU countries, Germany, the United-Kingdom, Finland, Italy and Romania. Although the size of the organisations varied, most groups included between 12-15 young people. Some groups, such as the Finnish one, consisted of a small group of young people who met regularly throughout the whole project, whereas others, such as the German group, included up to 50 participants who were involved in different stages of the project at any one time.

All young people involved were passionate about and had a personal motivation to explore issues of youth poverty. They had different backgrounds - some of them went to school, others were in professional training and others were at university. For many of the participants it wasn't their first attempt at finishing their education, having dropped out of the educational system for various reasons.

All the groups had a diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds - including people of Arabic, Colombian and Brazilian heritage in Finland, Polish, Turkish, Croatian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage in Germany, white British, African, Middle Eastern and south Asian in the United Kingdom, or Roma and Hungarian ethnicities in Romania. Most of the young people in the Finnish group belonged to the Swedish speaking minority and all attended *Musikcafé After Eight*, either through the education program or as trainees at the "*Liljas växthus*" workshop. The 12 participants from across England were involved in a slightly different way, since some of them had investigated the topic of poverty before, some even for as long as three years. In Germany, most of the participants still lived with their families and faced various difficulties, such as poverty and substance abuse. In Romania, a group of seventeen young people became

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part of the project. All of them were Romanian citizens, but their ethnicities varied. Eight were of Romanian ethnicity, four Hungarian and five were Roma. The youngest members of the group were 15 years old, and the oldest were 22. All of the young Romanian people were enrolled in formal education programs: some in high school, while in Universities, and one in graduate school.

The staff consisted of experienced social and youth practitioners, who work with young people on a daily basis and support them with their training, education, or accessing leisure activities.

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Methodology used to engage the young people

Principles

In order for a project to be truly participative, practitioners and young people must adhere to a set of principles. These can also be helpful when tensions or conflicts arise. The following seven principles are used by *The Children's Society*, when engaging young people in participatory projects and activities. Other organisations utilised similar frameworks in their own practice.

1. **Respect, Inclusion and no Discrimination**

We will be inclusive and work with children and young people in an empowering way; where we share power, value and respect diversity, and take on board their ideas and views. We are also prepared to be influenced.

2. **Safe Practice**

We will ensure priority is given to keeping children and young people safe online and offline. The well-being and safety of the children and young people we work alongside is always paramount. We will ensure that we gain informed consent to publish any personal information about children and young people.

3. **Self-expression and Autonomy**

We will enable children and young people to express themselves and have a voice in creative ways; through drama, dance, song, artwork, creative writing and to use different platforms to share their

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messages like newspapers, magazines, websites, events and meetings.

4. **Informed decisions and Avoiding tokenism**

We will avoid tokenism and decoration by ensuring we are clear with children and young people about why and what we are asking them to be involved in. This is to be done in a timely manner and we ensure they understand the way their contributions influence decisions.

5. **Acknowledging contributions**

We will acknowledge and celebrate children and young people's contributions and insights to the work of the organisation through formal and informal ways.

6. **Providing Feedback**

We will ensure that children and young people can clearly see and understand how their contributions have influenced changes and give them on going feedback on progress.

7. **Sharing best practice**

We will enable children and young people to have the opportunity to share their work with other children and young people.

The preparation phase

1. Launching the project & Preparing the participants

"Our Life. Our Voice" started with a kick-off meeting to establish the goals of the project and to agree on the timeline. All partner organisations joined this meeting, each bringing two young people and two professionals. The young participants were involved from the very beginning of the process.

The young participants were provided with information about the project and were given opportunities to propose or shape the activities they were going to be involved in. Decisions were made collectively, alongside the youth and social workers. During the initial meetings, the participants got to know each other, with the help of icebreaker activities and other exercises, so that they would feel comfortable and confident working together. In some cases, participants knew each other before the project.

In the UK and Romanian groups, where the participants lived in different cities or villages, participants were contacted by text message, email or mail about session outlines and specific requests, several days or weeks before the session. Usually these were followed up by a conversation to clarify anything or to adapt plans or ideas.

Young people were encouraged to take a proactive role throughout the project, and document progress

through photography and other media. As part of the project launch the group created a video of themselves, which was later used during the final conference.

2. Identifying needs and expectations

Through discussions with the young people, the youth workers identified their needs and expectations. Only through honest dialogues, in which young people are not afraid to give direct answers, can youth workers identify authentic topics that the young people feel are important.

The most common aspirations among the young people and staff were to raise awareness about youth poverty and fight the prejudice that young people affected by poverty encounter. The participants also wanted to stress the importance of solidarity, come up with and share their ideas about fostering self-esteem in young people, and empower young people to take action and make political demands. Last, but not least, importance was also given to bringing together young people and politicians and decision-makers, on local, regional, national and European levels.

> *"[...] the way we have been working have been fun and learnful because we are not just sitting and reading and googling."*

To fulfil these aspirations the project highlighted the following essential needs:

- Committed young people, as well as youth workers.

- Committed project partners and sufficient resources for the planned activities. The activities must be financed through the project budget and young people should never have any expenses connected to the activities – all expenses regarding travel and accommodation should be either pre-financed or reimbursed.

- A platform for young people to express themselves.

- Opportunities for collaborative learning, which involves direct interaction and sharing of experiences, is very important for achieving understanding and finding solutions to common problems.

3. Risk assessment

In the following section examples of risks identified during the launch phase are described.

Firstly, poverty is a sensitive issue for young people to discuss. To avoid any discomfort, from the beginning the the topic was approached slowly and gradually, using a mix of factual and practical/emotional learning experiences. It was important to create a safe and trustful environment in which young people felt comfortable to articulate their thoughts freely. Decisions about activities were

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also left to the young people (e.g. what kind of activities they want to take part in, how they could be adjusted, how they want to approach and organise the meetings with policy-makers etc.)

Another risk, especially in long-term projects such as this one, is that key participants will leave the group during its course. In order to avoid this, a series of short-term activities were planned, with their own outcomes which related to the project's overall goals, which could be, but didn't necessarily, have to be linked. Young people leaving the project can happen because of a lack of engagement from the young people but also due to unexpected changes in their lives, staff changes, restructuring, etc. To ensure effectiveness of the project, it was essential to establish a central project coordination team to gather all the results.

Furthermore, as the young people brought their own experiences to the project, their comments were often personal. As such we ensured anonymity and confidentiality to the young people and guaranteed that no personal information would be published without their explicit permission. During the initial session, young people were asked to give consent to their personal information being published during the course of the project. This enabled them to make an informed choice about how much they shared about themselves and for them to have control over when this was shared. For some young people, the amount of information they wanted to share increased during the course of the project. We believe this was due to their increased trust and confidence and the work they were involved in. Our guiding principle as we worked on this project was where we had written consent to publish a photo or a quote, we checked back in with the young person to inform them and show them what was being published. Each media interview required new permissions to be sought so that young people, including their parents and care-takers, were involved in the discussion and the outcome of any exposure.
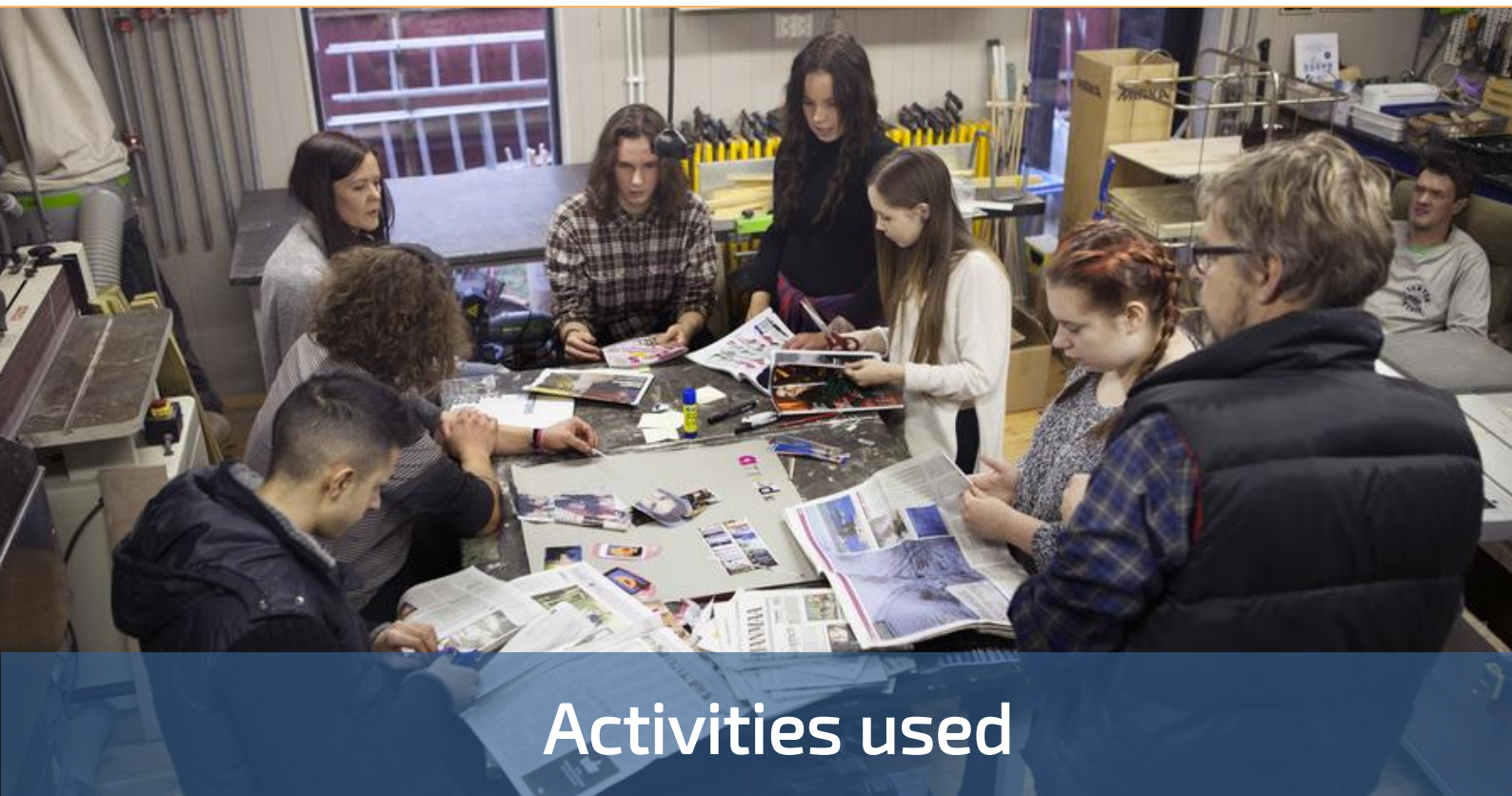
There was also a risk of risk of young people feeling exposed or victimized. Therefore, the young people were encouraged to participate voluntarily and decide themselves how they wanted to be involved. Project activities were conducted on equal terms, with the the staff and young people investigating together.

Most activities took place in the organisation's premises, where the young people were comfortable and familiar with the health and safety procedures, which mitigated these risks.

In Romania, the risk assessment included written consent by parents or legal guardians for children's involvement the project, as well as by the young people to take part in the activities and their photos taken (voluntary agreements stipulated by Romanian Law). The Bihor County Public System School Inspectorate also issued approvals for non-attendance of children in part of their usual school program for international meetings (e.g. Mid-term meeting in Finland). Additionally, it was ensured that professional licensed transportation firms were used and health insurance for international travel was bought.

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English was used as the operational language at the international project meetings. All organisations made sure that the young participants were able to be involved in these meetings and language assistance was provided for those who needed it.

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Activities used

The activities varied a lot depending on organisational culture, including the organisation's particular approach, structure and the young people themselves. In this section, a general description for each country is provided alongside some of the activities.

United Kingdom

The British group used interactive activities, including watching videos, group activities, active games and takeaway activities. These were used to initiate discussion, debates among the young people, and for youth workers to learn about young people's views and opinions. Examples of these are listed below:

- To amplify their voice, young people wrote blogs and appeared on video blogs that featured on the organisation's website and twitter accounts.

- Some young people appeared on national news to discuss their work and the investigation's findings, featured in newspaper articles and presented at regional and national conferences that related to poverty.

The group had the support of and access to experts from a range of teams at *The Children's Society*, including:

- The Policy and Campaigns teams to support with and organise meetings with parliamentarians and civil servants. They also supported with the dissemination of surveys and calls for evidence during the parliamentary inquiry, and supported drawing up the group's policy recommendations.

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- The Digital team to support with website pages and creating blogs, tweets and vines.

- The Media team for support with accessing a platform to share their work.

- The Research team to support with group activities and shaping early discussions.

- The Marketing and Communication team to support with design of publications, communication with supporters and commission of the group's video.

- The Church team to support with the Church of England, in particular the Church of England schools and the governance body that supports that area of work.

- The Community Participation team to support with consultations and interviews with children and young people not part of the Commission, so their views and ideas were part of the discussions and considerations.

- The Evidence and Impact Team undertaking evaluation of the work.

> *"What surprised me most is that children don't get a say in what I see as their future and now that I have joined The Children's Society, I think it is a step up to seeing all the pain that children are going through."*

The young people also gave presentations and led workshops at various events, including:

- Bristol Head Teachers' conference

- Seminar for social workers and youth workers interested in youth participation

- Presentation and workshop at conference on poverty

- The Why Festival –a festival celebrating the rights of children and young people.

Finland

The Finnish group, supported by *After Eight*, investigated poverty in the Ostrobothnia area with a focus on Jakobstad. Expert guests held lectures about different poverty interventions commissions, which provided an inspirational and informative source of information for the young people

> *"The result I'm hoping for: that someone with power will notice what we are doing and how important it is. So many thinks that young people doesn't care while it is that we are not listened to."*

The groups were often divided into smaller groups who worked on different perspectives of the project. The young people were provided with a variety of materials and encouraged to express their thoughts in a creative way.

The goal was to define poverty from the perspective of the young people's experience, and develop a creative product led entirely by the young people.

Germany

As the German group was led by *Internationaler Bund*, which has a network across the country, there were several groups of young people in three different German cities who worked in parallel, each of them shaping the activities according to the local context.

> *"I was impressed by the work the volunteers do at the soup kitchen. I'm now thinking about getting involved myself."*

In Frankfurt/Oder and Dresden, the investigation took place as part of workshops on youth poverty with different young participants. In Stuttgart, on the other hand, a fixed group of three young people worked together over three meetings, exploring together how young people are affected by poverty.

Italy

The Italian group, supported by *Zefiro*, investigated educational poverty as a cause of social exclusion, marginalisation and lack of opportunities leading young people to poverty. The majority of participants were themselves drop-outs.

The activities were at first focused on letting the young participants express themselves, share ideas and negotiate concepts with each other through practical activities in which participants were responsible of their own contribution.

> *"It is the first time that someone is asking my opinion about educational poverty."*

These activities led to the above-mentioned focus on education and its links to poverty, a reality they experience first-hand. After the participants expressed their willingness to speak for themselves in order to raise their voice, this led to activities involving other stakeholders in this phenomenon such as teachers, students and head teachers.

Romania

In Romania, young people met monthly at the *Ruhama Foundation*. All of the activities were interactive and collaborative, and included group discussions and debates, visits to segregated Roma communities and watching videos, movies, and documentaries about Roma people, poverty and discrimination. The young people also conducted interviews with human rights experts and professionals with experience in working in predominantly Roma communities, as well as with Roma people themselves.

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The group also read and discussed government documents about Roma poverty and discrimination, participated in human rights meetings, and community awareness raising activities, and presented the "*Our Life. Our Voice*" project during an academic conference organised by the Social Work Department of the Babes-Bolyai University. The participants also took part in round table discussions with the School Inspectorate from two counties, mayors, and ten school directors.

> *"This project made me realize the differences between how poverty is experienced by a large number of Roma youth from my country, compared to how other young people from Europe experience poverty."*

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On the following pages, you can find the examples of the activities.

Activity 1 (The Children's Society, UK)

Take a Stand

Time: 20 – 45 minutes

Resources: Some statements, and signs with 'Agree', 'Disagree', 'Not sure'

During the first few sessions, the group discusses and listens to a range of views that young people express about poverty and those living in poverty. The 'Take a stand' activity is used to explore these views further. It is useful to get people moving about and listening to each other. It also gives a visual representation of where people stand on certain issues.

1. Start with a few fun statements to do with youth culture, sport, and food. Read out each statement and ask young people to move to their position: "Agree", "Disagree", "Not sure".

2. As the group warms up introduce statements that relate to the theme of work (e.g. poverty).

3. Encourage young people to discuss and debate why they agree, disagree, or are not sure.

4. Encourage young people to change positions if they hear something making them think differently.

What worked?

The Children's Society used this activity throughout the project as a conversation starter and energiser. It is important to explain at the start of the activity that there are no right or wrong answers.

Young people views are not always what project staff think, so it's a good way to explore how young people view things.

What didn't work?

The more we used this activity the more confident young people were of expressing their views. This is a reflection of them growing as a group and feeling safe to express themselves. At a certain point, the activity was therefore not necessary anymore.

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Activity 2 (The Children's Society, UK)

Photo Activity
Time: 5 minutes per person to feedback   **Resources:** Camera/ phone camera, laptop, projector.

1. Early on in the process whilst exploring a selected theme (e.g. poverty), ask each young person to take photos in their own time (as many photos as they wish representing the issue at hand to them, such as poverty).

2. At the next session, ask the young participants to show their work and explain it if they wish to do so.

3. Others in the group can be invited to ask questions or share their reflections.

What worked?	What didn't work?
The Children's Society used this activity over 3 sessions to make sure those who hadn't taken any photos had the opportunity to share at a future session if they wished. With 16 young people at the meetings, this style was perfect to give each young people the space to feedback.	Sometimes hardware and software were not compatible to transfer photos to a laptop. There are ways around it, but sometimes there are unforeseen issues.

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Activity 3 (The Children's Society, UK)

Moving Activity
Time: 15 minutes **Resources:** - Large sheets of paper - Images to represent home, school, neighbourhood - Sticky dots
Begin by introducing the activity – the theme is moving and transition. The activity helps highlighting a complex factor of poverty: mobility. 1. On each large sheet of paper, symbolise one of these areas: Home, School, and Neighbourhood. Place them at different spots in the room. 2. Give the young participants some coloured dots. 3. Ask them to think about their lives to date whilst living in the country, and to place a sticky dot for the numbers of times they have moved or changed homes, schools and/or neighbourhoods under each heading. 4. Summarise what the information tells you. 5. Invite reflections and questions. The activity is useful to highlight the complex relations between poverty and mobility, as it can be a cause and/or a consequence of poverty when it is forced upon a family (for financial reasons for instance) and not chosen.

What worked?	What didn't work?
Useful for participants who are comfortable with each other. It highlighted things about young people that the collective group were not aware of. It invited a conversation about the different impacts of different types of moves.	

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Activity 4 (Ruhama Foundation, RO)

Word Storm Exercise

Time: 30 minutes

Resources: Flipchart/Whiteboard and markers.

This activity can be implemented during the first meeting with a large group of young people.

1. The young participants are asked by a youth worker to say all the words that come to their mind when seeing the word 'disadvantage' written in big letters on a flipchart.

2. They call out all the words during a 5 minute period.

3. For the remaining 25 minutes, these words are grouped together according to how they relate to each other. Words that are associated or related in some way are grouped into several categories.

This exercise helps building creativity, confidence and helps the young people using their own words to discuss the problem of disadvantage, which then opens up a discussion about poverty and how it relates to disadvantage.

What worked?	What didn't work?
The exercise was helpful in getting all of the young people to contribute to the exercise by speaking out and interacting with each other in a cooperative way.	Some of the young people present had a Hungarian ethnicity and did not speak Romanian, requiring a translator. Although with encouragement, they did contribute to the activity, they were more hesitant in interacting with the Romanian speaking crowd.

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Activity 5 (Ruhama Foundation, RO)

The Wind Blows for….

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Resources: Flipchart/whiteboard, markers, chairs set in a circle.

This activity can be implemented in the early stages of a project. The activity helps the young people familiarize themselves with each other and gain confidence to speak in front of others.

1. One person stands in the middle. All the rest sit on chairs placed in a circle around this person.

2. Whoever is in the middle says something that he/she thinks is true about him/her. The young people are given a series of starting words: power, community, neighbourhood, influence, authority, courage, responsibility, voice, marginalization, silence, frustration, anger, help, hero, example and hope.

3. After they make a true statement using one of the given words, the participant in the middle says "The Wind Blows for…" and finishes that sentence by saying one thing that is true about the others (e.g. "The Wind Blows for anyone wearing red"). Once the person in the middle has made this statement, all those identifying with the statement go out of the seat and try to find a new one. The person in the middle also tries to get into one of the seats.

4. A new person who hasn't found a seat then stands in the middle, and the game continues this way until most people in the group have a chance to stand in the middle.

This game creates the opportunity for the young people to stand in front of the group and share their opinions and feeling about words that can be associated to youth poverty. Also at the end of the game the young people can share with the group their thoughts and feelings about standing in front of others and talking spontaneously about something, which leads to a discussion about leadership.

What worked?	What didn't work?
This activity works well for groups up to 20 people. With _Ruhama_, everyone spoke in front of the group. Creative ideas and opinions about youth poverty were shared.	There was not enough space for all chairs in a single circle, so additional chairs were placed behind the first circle. Each time the people sitting in the back chairs moved about, the chairs were re-arranged. It led to quite a few laughs, but the activity also took longer than expected.

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Activity 6 (Ruhama Foundation, RO)

Generating Policy Recommendations

Time: 60 – 80 minutes per session.

Resources: Flipchart/whiteboard, markers, paper and pens, reading materials, Internet access.

This activity is designed to take place at the end of the project.

1. The mission of writing policy recommendations is divided into smaller pieces and responsibility is allocated to different people for different parts of the group project. Some people can decide to create art projects about youth poverty; others read policy papers and share their opinions with the group, or collect interviews from parents and young people about the cost of education. A time line is developed, including who will do what, in what form and by when.

2. At the end of each meeting, young people review their work and decide on what they will prepare for the following session. Care should be taken so that everyone has a chance to make a contribution to the discussion and to the group project.

3. At the beginning of each meeting the youth workers and the young people decide what they can expect to accomplish by the end of the meeting. A first goal is to produce as many ideas as possible without evaluating them first. All ideas are listed on a flipchart. After ideas have been generated and noted down, a second goal is for the young people to examine them. The young people themselves agree on the process of choosing from those ideas. Advantages and disadvantages of different policy recommendations are listed and then voted on. The three main policy recommendations that receive most votes are chosen.

What worked?

With *Ruhama*, most young people completed the activities they set out to do.

Some young people brought additional materials, discussion topics or proposals, deciding to do more than they were originally responsible for.

What didn't work?

Some young people did not have access to a computer/internet outside of *Ruhama* Foundation, so they were provided with the opportunity to bring print-outs home.

Repeated encouragement from youth workers and other participants was needed to keep some of the young people involved.

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Activity 7 (Musikcafé After Eight, FI)

Name that person (Icebreaker)

Time: 45 minutes

Resources: Blank cards and pens.

In a project, the first meetings should involve a lot of getting to know each other activities and icebreakers so that the group can be comfortable working together. The main goal of this specific game is to get to know each other better and strengthen the group dynamic.

1. Work with about 20 participants. Divide the group into to 2 teams.

2. Each person gets a blank card, where they write 5 things about themselves that they think the group doesn't know.

3. Then collect the cards into two team piles. Draw one card from the opposite team pile.

4. The other team tries to guess who the person is, based on the info on the card.

5. Five points if they guess right on the first clue, then 4, 3, 2, 1, 0. The team with the highest points wins.

What worked?

With *After Eight*, the activity worked out well. The group had a lot of laughs and at the same time got to know a lot of new things about each other.

What didn't work?

Depending on the group you can choose to give a few examples so everybody get some inspiration what to write. For example, "I was born in Iceland", "My favourite food is spinach", "My grandmother's name was Doris", "I had a mouse as a pet when I was little".

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Activity 8 (Musikcafé After Eight, FI)

Collage activity
Time: 2 hours **Resources:** Magazines, newspaper, different kind of pens, scissors, glue, cardboards.

At the beginning of projects aiming to explore specific issues (e.g. poverty), divide the group into smaller groups. The main goal of this exercise is to get a lot of information about what the young participants really feel about this issue.

1. Work with 20 participants in 4 groups.

2. Each group gets the material handed out and has one hour to make a collage together that represents their opinions on the selected issue.

3. All the groups then present their collage in the end and explain their thoughts. The other groups can ask questions.

What worked?	What didn't work?
With *After Eight*, the groups had many clever and honest thoughts and answers, and it could already be seen that the young people had a more precise topic in mind (the mental ill-health issue as a big poverty problem in Finland).	Smaller groups can help everybody to equally get involved.

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Activity 9 (Musikcafé After Eight, FI)

Who am I? (Icebreaker)
Time: 60 minutes **Resources**: Lots of Lego.
This is a creative and innovative exercise for getting to know each other and presenting yourself in a group, involving individual tasks at first: 1. Use Lego and let the young people build a character/figure/form that represents themselves in an innovative way. 2. The participants then show and explain the result to the group.   This exercise focuses on the self-knowledge of each participant and on how to present yourself in a different way. This task is not focused on looks or appearance but on the inside: "How you would present your qualities or strengths to others".

What worked?	What didn't work?
The *After Eight* group got to use their creative side and think about their personalities, strengths or qualities that they wanted to present themselves with.	

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Activity 10 (Internationaler Bund, DE)

Visit of a Soup Kitchen for the Homeless

Time:
- Preparation: 1H
- Visit: 2-3H
- Evaluation: 1H

Resources: Travel arrangements.

To investigate the specific issue of poverty, the youth worker organises a visit at the local soup kitchen, where the young people have the chance to talk to staff, volunteers and guests.

1. The youth worker plans the visit alongside the soup kitchen.

2. The young people together with the youth worker collect facts about the soup kitchen (e.g. target group, financing, history, volunteers) and prepare questions (e.g. What are the main issues the guests experience? What is their background? Why are volunteers helping?)

3. The young people together with the youth worker visit the soup kitchen. First there should be an introduction from someone at the soup kitchen, then young people should have the chance to help distributing the food by themselves, then there should be another opportunity for discussion.

4. After the visit the group should have the opportunity to reflect on their experience= and talk about what they have learned and how the visit has affected their thinking. The youth worker should lead the discussion towards the question of how the experience links to the lives of the young people (e.g. what are mechanisms of social exclusion you know/ you have experienced? Do you know people who are/ were excluded from something? How did others react? How did they react? How should people react? What actions are taken/ should be taken on a political level?)

What worked?	What didn't work?
The activity was a success because the youth workers made sure to: - Create an open atmosphere in which all questions and reflections are allowed; - Give young people enough time to build up trust and to get used to the situation; - Give enough time to reflect and encourage young people, to link their experience to situations in their own lives.	

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Activity 11 (Internationaler Bund, DE)

Workshop "Role Models"

Time: 2 hours

Resources: Pens, Paper, Articles on famous "Role Models" from Magazines, Newspapers, Internet.

The main goal of this activity is to encourage young people to get engaged and to strengthen their self-esteem by realising that they can inspire others through what they have achieved in life.

1. The youth worker collects information about famous role models The role models should be artists, politicians, activists who engage on a specific issue, such as the fight against poverty, and who stand up for social inclusion of marginalised groups.

2. The workshop is conducted in one room with one youth worker and a small group of young people. In a first step the youth worker introduces the main question and the procedure. Then the young people in pairs, choose one role model and prepare a creative poster with information concerning the person chosen. After that, each pair presents their poster to the group, describing their role model.

3. After the presentation the youth worker facilitates a discussion - what is inspiring about the presented role models? What could be their motives? What is their background? Who are role models in our surroundings? Who can I inspire? How can I stand up against social exclusion? Why is it so hard to stand up against social exclusion?

What worked?	What didn't work?
The activity was a success as it could: - Facilitate discussion leading to the question of personal role models (fathers, mothers, teachers, social workers, etc.) - Encourage young people to be proud of their own achievements and to take their own political positions.	

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Activity 12 (Zefiro, IT)

"Building your own school"

Time: 6 – 8 hours

Resources: Paper, cardboard boxes and tubes, sturdy tape, reused washed plastic bottles, glue, scissors, tempera paints and brushes, markers, pencils Construction or drawing paper.

The activity aims at highlighting what makes a good school (or more generally, learning environment) for young people:

1. Young people are asked to create their own 'miniature' school and are encouraged to build two, one representing their personal experiences of school and another reflecting their ideal school. The model of an ideal school should reflect the needs of young people; they should create an environment which matches to their wishes.

2. The miniature schools are then gathered and everybody explains their own piece of work. Debates/discussions can follow.

This method should be embedded into a wider reflection about school and school environment.

What worked?	What didn't work?
- The practical nature of the activity gave everyone the possibility to participate and share ideas with the others. - The negotiation inside the groups worked well. - The young people got deeper in their points of view	

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Activity 13 (Zefiro, IT)

"Test the Teachers"

Time: Several sessions over a few days to prepare the interview, and a few hours to edit the final video.

Resources: A video camera/smartphone, a small microphone, a computer, paper and pencils.

Zefiro's young participants had the idea to test the teachers about school abandon and educational poverty. This idea developed into an interview of teachers, students, head teachers and among the young participants themselves.

The main goals are to:

1.   Let the participants face the phenomenon of drop out;

2.   Produce a tool to spread young people's voices;

3.   Produce a document about the awareness of students, teachers and head teachers about the main topic.

The participants meet several times to decide what questions should be asked. Eventually, some nearby schools and teachers are invited to participate in the interviews.

The young participants should be active in this part, personally inviting students and teachers to participate and leading the interviews. The interviewed students and teachers sit in front of a camera and are asked to sincerely answer the questions. After they finish, the young participants can also take the interview themselves.

In editing the video, the young participants should also play a part, choosing together with the social worker what parts should be kept or not in the final product.

What worked?	What didn't work?
The young people had a great interest in testing the teachers about school abandon and realized they sometimes knew a little about it.	Many schools and teachers refused to participate in the project.

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Activity 14 (Zefiro, IT)

"The street of Crowdfunding"

Time: 1.5 hours.

Resources: Pieces of cardboard, pencils, Lego, a big table, chairs.

This activity focuses on identifying the needs of a young person experiencing poverty, raise awareness about them and how to "fight" for them:

1. All participants are first asked to write and/or paint, on a piece of cardboard, a sentence asking for money and stating the reason why the need it: this must be a concrete, specific need;

2. Afterward, each participant is asked to explain his/her choice and try to convince the others;

3. All signs are then put on a table in order to let everyone have a look at all ideas. Participants are given 5 Lego pieces each, that they can use as currency to "vote" for the sign(s) they'd give money to.

4. As a result, signs get more or less votes. After all participants have expressed their choice, they discuss together the results: What are the main areas of interest for the young people? What do they need most? Health? Family? Relationships? Education? Free time? Is there a reason? And how do they choose which project to support?

What worked?

- Everyone participated actively, felt involved and gave an important contribution.

- We found out that the activity was very stimulating for the young people: they were happy to express their needs and were curious to see what the others wrote.

- Voting made them go deeper in the topic and reflect in a more collective perspective, going beyond the individuality.

What didn't work?

Often friendly choices were made instead of ideal ones

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Dealing with conflicts

In the beginning of each activity, group rules based on mutual respect and appreciation of every contribution were established. The young people were asked to determine themselves how they wanted to work together, e.g. keep themselves safe, involve everybody in the activities, accept differences, etc. Conflicts which arose were discussed either individually or with the whole group based on these rules. It was important not to ignore participant's wishes, or complain about them voicing their opinions or fears, or blaming anybody.

In the Finnish group, for instance, a few conflicts between the participants occurred, due to different individuals with strong personalities. These were followed by a discussion between the specific participants and staff. The conflicts were solved by adapting tasks so that they fit the needs of everyone. Sometimes it occurred that the participants had not been comfortable with the activity. The staff had to be adaptive and to respect the participants' wishes of work methods.

Evaluation & Follow-up

The evaluation was constant during the project. After each activity, the participants were asked to reflect and give feedback on methods, results and learning outcomes, mostly in face-to-face meetings, in individual questionnaires, or in the groups. These were then taken into account when planning future activities. The project was also evaluated by the youth and social workers.

In the British group, the young people also wrote blogs about their involvement and their experience. The Evidence and Impact team at *The Children's Society* undertook focus group discussions with young people to explore the things that worked well and those that didn't on the project.

In the Romanian group, the young people were involved in a series of creative activities, such as blog writing, creative drawing, and talent competitions, during which young people were able to creatively share their opinions about the project.

Throughout the project the activities looked similar, but had different perspectives. The results of the activities achieved team spirit, and mutual insights of how the issue looks in the region. There were a few challenges to provide meaningful variety of activities giving the project a natural push forward.

Lessons learned

The participative approach used in the project gave the opportunity to form political opinions and to get active in society. The participants were encouraged to treat the topics discussed both professionally and personally and had the room to be creative and bring their own initiative, with the guidance from the youth workers or experts. The young people in the Finnish group, for instance, had the opportunity to work together with an editor of a newspaper. It was a unique opportunity to get young people's insights on the topic of poverty and into their life situations.

The organisation's network has been expanded, both through the new partners from abroad, as well as through meeting with guest lecturers, teachers, policy-makers and other stakeholders on the local levels. The staff that participated learned about new methods used in other countries, which they can use in future projects.

As the British group noted, involving young people very early in the project would have been beneficial, because it would accelerate the group formation stage. It is also important to understand and keep in mind that young people have a choice and can change their minds about the level of exposure they want during a project like this and as such to continually check with them about consent of photos and exposure in the media and digital platforms.

The staff also identified a number of important aspects that are important for smooth running of the project, especially with regards to their behaviour towards young participants.

The goal of the project, among others, was to strengthen the self-esteem of young people, support them to take an active role, respect their decisions and support them during the path that they have chosen. Young people have to be taken seriously and treated on an equal level. Youth workers should always listen to young people and their opinions and everyone has to be treated equally.

The focus in the collaboration with the young people is always on their resources (courage, solidarity, being a role model to others) rather than on deficits (lack of education, problems within the family, etc.). A true participatory project is successful if professionals connect the work to young people's everyday experiences with sufficient room for reflection.

Disseminating the project's outcomes

Each project partner organised at least one multiplier event, in which the outcomes of the project were presented to relevant stakeholders such as policy-makers, experts and youth workers, actively involving the young people.

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Throughout the project, the results were also shared through different platforms: on the websites and in newsletters of the participating organisations, blogs of the young people, social media. The results were disseminated in the organisations' networks; local, national and international.

The Finnish group created a magazine as the final product, which was distributed during the multiplier events and will be available at the centre after the project has finished. The German group contributed to an IB directed campaign "*Aktiv gegen Armut*" and also reported about the project on the respective website.

In the United Kingdom, the investigation culminated in a final report detailing the key findings and the policy recommendations. A video clip was also produced, about the work aimed at school leadership teams and school governors. To launch the investigation as part of the "*Our Life. Our Voice*. Young People and Poverty" project, an event was held with key stakeholders in the UK. This included head teachers, governors and senior leadership teams. The group also attended a number of presentations and workshops (mentioned in the 'Activities' section) where the young people presented their findings.

In Romania, a video animation and a report detailing the young people's policy recommendations were made and disseminated during the multiplier event and also handed out to policymakers and service providers. Updates were also posted on *Fundatia Ruhama*'s Facebook page. Young people participated in academic conferences, community awareness raising activities, human rights meetings and workshops were they shared their findings on youth poverty with a wide range of stakeholders including representatives of various City Halls, city managers, directors of social work services, Mayors from nearby towns and villages, local councillors, school directors and representatives of NGOs.

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Conclusions & Sustainability

Changes of the young people

The project raised awareness about youth poverty and reduced prejudice about young people who are in one way or another affected by it. The importance of solidarity was brought to light and young people who participated in the project gained more self-esteem, skills and capabilities. These include team-work, confidence in public speaking and expressing one's opinion in groups, ability to reflect on experience and use those reflections to think about the future.

Their progress was visible throughout the project. They learned how to take action and talk to policy-makers and politicians. They saw it is possible to take a concrete action connected to this topic of poverty, which at first seemed to be out of reach. The project also raised young people's interest in European politics and increased their motivation to learn English.

> *"…when I gave a speech in parliament. That was, yes, genuinely one of, like one of the most, like proudest moments for me actually"*

Based on reflections after the project, it was shown that young people went through a process of active reflection about not only what can be done on a political level but also what is the personal responsibility of everyone in their own surroundings. They gained knowledge of poverty as an issue that affected themselves and others.

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"This project offered me an opportunity to express my opinions and share my ideas without judgement [and] to interact and become friends with young people of different ethnicities, religions and nationality, people who were happy and proud of who they were."

As recognition, all of the young people from the UK gained a Bronze Youth Achievement Award, Diana Award for their work in the community. One of the young participants in Romania received a prize for his involvement in the project during a Volunteer Gala organised by the Oradea City Hall. Information about the project was also included in a newspaper article about the event.

Impact on the organisations

The project gave an example of how to support young people, how to develop their perspective and form political opinions. It gave the opportunity to develop new activities or expand and build on existing ones, such as in the case of *The Children's Society*. The *Musikcafé After Eight* also reported that it inspired them to reach out to even more vulnerable people in various life situations.

The project partners are keen to use the methods further and develop them. In Germany, for instance, the methods will be used to investigate poverty with a group of young people currently doing voluntary services, a group of young unaccompanied and students of a private school of *Internationaler Bund* to explore the aspects of poverty in their surroundings.

For *The Children's Society*, the project was also an opportunity to do a large scale participation project with different teams and departments at the organisation who do not normally work with young people. The young people brought fresh insights into the experience of school children who live in low income families and enabled youth and social workers to focus their attention on things that mattered to the children and youngsters rather than adults. The majority of participants plan to stay involved with the respective organisations. They will either take part in other activities and projects, in the case of *The Children's Society*, they can join other working groups, becomes supporters of the organisation (speakers, campaigners, volunteers, etc.), or be signposted to other participation opportunities outside the organisation run by the other NGOs.

In Finland the group got several invitations to schools during the 2016 spring in Jakobstad to come and talk to the students about the project and the topic. The group showed the videos of the project, lead discussions and handed out the magazine.

"It has given us a mandate to work on 'poverty' issues and take it further to effect change by involving partners on a local level"

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For the *Ruhama Foundation* the project provided an opportunity to engage non-Roma young people in a collaborative experience with Roma people. *Ruhama Foundation* aims to create opportunities for Roma and non-Roma people to interact in an open and friendly environment and to offer training opportunities for young Roma ambassadors for people living in communities with limited opportunities. This project allowed the *Ruhama Foundation* to continue its mission by encouraging the personal development of young people in Romania, by engaging people in multi-cultural interactions, and by continuing to have a positive impact in the larger community.

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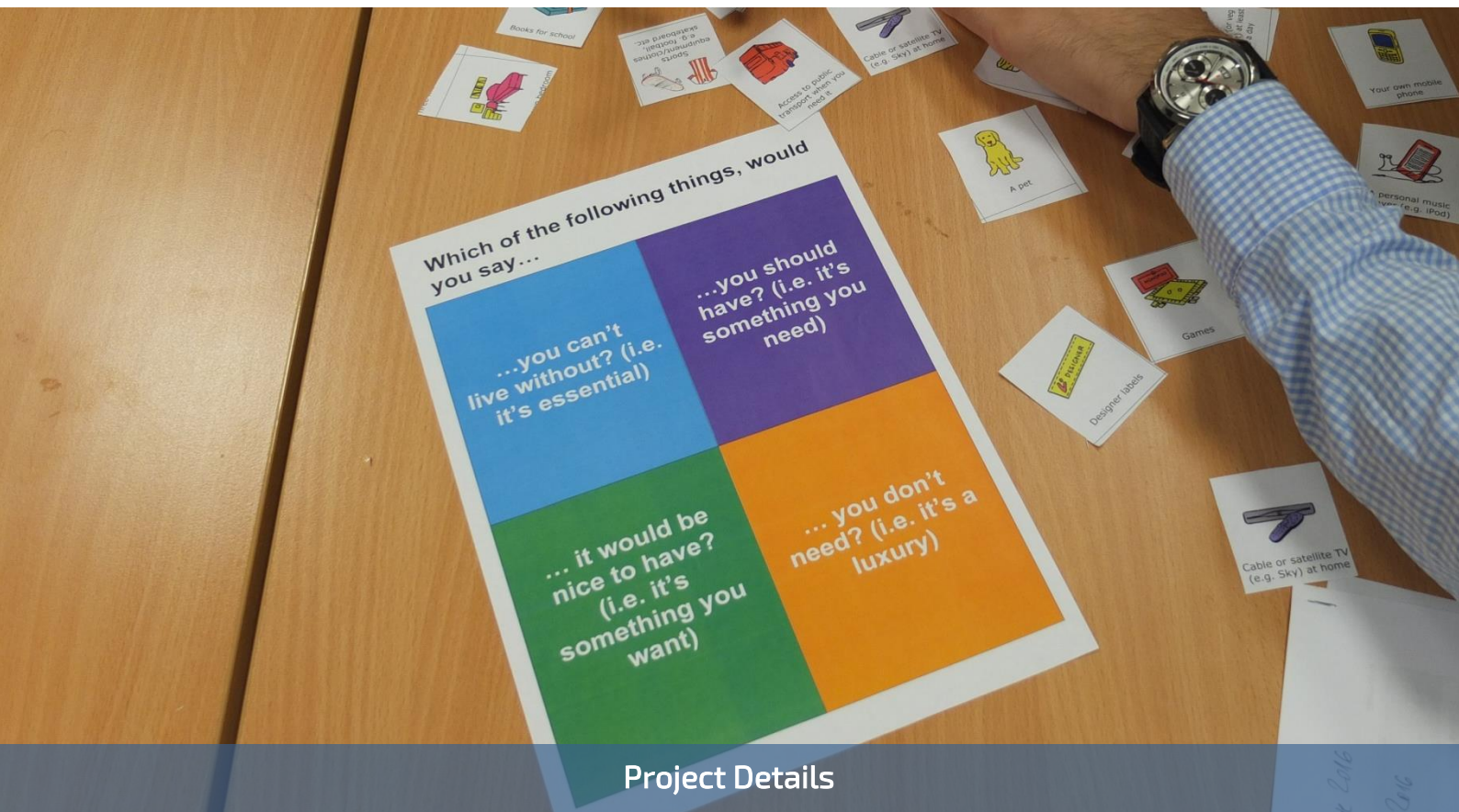www.cooperativazefiro.it
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From 2015 to 2017, groups of young people in 5 different EU countries – Finland, Germany, Italy, Romania and the United-Kingdom – worked together to explore young people's experience of poverty and what it means for them to live in families struggling to make ends meet day to day.

The present document is the project's third Intellectual Output. Its content was written by the project partners, reviewed and edited by Angharad Lewis, Katerina Konecna, Elie Demerseman and Annett Wiedermann.

For more information or to check our other Intellectual Outputs, please visit the project's website (**ourlifeourvoice.eu**) or contact us directly.

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