Platforms that trigger innovation

A NEW APPROACH FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

"la Caixa" Foundation
Index

CHAPTER 1. PAGE 4
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 2. PAGE 6
SOCIAL INNOVATION PLATFORMS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Gorka Espiau, professor of Practice at the McGill University and Senior Fellow at the Agirre Lehendakaria Center

CHAPTER 3. PAGE 21
LISTENING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: TRANSFORMATIVE TOOLS TO UNLEASH COMMUNITY INNOVATION
Jayne Engle, Mc Connell Foundation, and Samantha Slade, Percolab

CHAPTER 4. PAGE 38
TOWARDS THE CO-CREATIVE ORGANISATION: FROM IDEA TO SCALE
Christian Bason, Dansk Design Center

CHAPTER 5. PAGE 44
BUILDING COMUNITY LED INNOVATION ECO-SYSTEMS
Roger Warnock, Social Nybble

CHAPTER 6. PAGE 58
CONSIDERATIONS FOR MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING IN SOCIAL INNOVATION PLATFORMS
Joshua Fisher, Columbia University

CHAPTER 7. PAGE 71
FINANCING AND PROMOTION OF PLATFORMS FOR THE SDGS. THE ROLE OF FINANCING ORGANISATIONS.
Carlos Mataix, Innovation and Technology for Development Centre, UPM
Since 1997, the “la Caixa” Foundation has been promoting international development programmes in order to provide opportunities and improve the living conditions of vulnerable populations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Over this period of 20 years, working in partnership with different cooperation actors has brought us to a process of continuous learning and to formulate new tools and methods that enable us to improve our interventions.

For this reason, in 2016 we decided to launch the Work4Progress programme. It responds to the need to rethink the way in which our organisation promotes international cooperation projects, to experiment with new tools so as to strengthen their impact and to incorporate a new focus on social innovation.

The Work4Progress programme thus supports the creation of “Open Innovation Platforms for the creation of employment in Peru, India and Mozambique” by means of collaborative partnerships between local civil society organisations, private sector, administration, universities and Spanish NGOs.

The main innovation of this programme is the incorporation of new tools and methodologies in: (1) listening and identification of community needs, (2) the co-creation and prototyping of new solutions, (3) the exploration of instruments for scaling, (4) governance, (5) evolving evaluation systems and (6) financing strategies. The goal of all of the above is to try to incorporate innovation strategies comprehensively in all components.

Work4Progress has been designed with a Think-and-Do-Tank mentality. The member organisations of the platforms are experimenting in the field, while a group of international experts helps us to obtain this knowledge and share it...
with centres of thought and action at international level. In fact, this is the objective of this publication: to share the theoretical framework of the programme, to connect these ideas with concrete examples and to continue to strengthen the meeting point between social innovation and development cooperation.

Work4Progress is offered as a ‘living lab’ to test new methodologies that may be useful for other philanthropic institutions, governments or entities specialising in international development.

In this publication, the manner in which its action is structured is defined as a “second operating system”.¹ The aim is not to modify the systems, procedures or devices which the international cooperation entities currently have in place, but rather to launch a complementary space that allows for the testing of new tools and procedures which sometimes cannot be developed due to a lack of time, knowledge or financing.

W4P enables us, as an entity, to depart from the traditional framework of project financers in order to act as a facilitator or driver of innovation platforms alongside other public and private partners. The Sustainable Development Goals require us to work on platforms in this manner. We need to take advantage of this opportunity.

¹ John Kotter, “Accelerate! How the most innovative companies capitalize on today’s rapid fire strategic challenges - and still make their numbers” Harvard Business Review, November 2012
Introduction

This article sets out the theoretical framework upon which new Platforms of Social innovation\(^1\) can be built in the sphere of Sustainable Human Development. To date, most initiatives associated with social innovation have been designed as projects to address specific issues linearly, not as platforms attempting to transform complex systems (Sinha, Draimin. 2016). The way in which international development projects are currently managed, funded and evaluated limit organisations’ possibilities of being able to invest more resources in prototyping new solutions, identifying errors and being able to adapt work plans if alternative solutions are noted during the implementation process because they must demonstrate that these strictly adhere to the considerations in the initial proposal.

The main problems lie in the fact that these types of projects need to build spaces for experimentation if they wish to generate long-term systemic impacts. Equally, social innovation initiatives for development are conditioned by a lack of community listening mechanisms upheld across the whole process and which can adapt possible solutions to the local cultural context.

The Social Innovation platforms outlined in this article seek to interconnect organisations and projects on the basis of shared objectives, methodologies and

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1. We call Social Innovation Platforms the set of (1) actors (2) methodologies and (3) actions that, in being integrated and open, generate new processes, products and services to deal with the challenges developing countries face (Espiau 2017).
Platforms that activate innovation

evaluation systems, in order to bring about a greater impact. Although a platform approach requires increased effort in the design phase and new tools for building a collective vision, it will ultimately contribute to aligning disconnected initiatives and to enhancing their impact, cohesion and visibility.

Methodologically speaking, these platforms must carry out preliminary work to select local partners (local authorities, companies and social bodies), intermediary organisations (specialists in the focused subject areas or innovation incubators) and international institutions that enable knowledge exchange. This set of organisations will thus form a network of actors linked to the platform who can conjointly promote community listening and collective interpretation processes. Innovation platforms are always open to incorporating other public and private agents wishing to share the same methodology throughout the whole process (BOLLIE, 2016), maximising existing resources, reducing investment risk and generating a medium- and long-term exit strategy.

The added value of a platform approach lies in building new community listening tools, fostering large-scale co-creation and prototyping processes instead of isolated and linear projects, thereby seeking to build a genuine ecosystem of innovation in the space where it operates.

There has always been much innovation in the way in which non-governmental organisations, foundations, institutions and companies have worked on their development cooperation programmes, yet these methodologies and practices have not necessarily been connected to social innovation practices. This article aims to set forth a specific contribution for greater knowledge and collaboration between both disciplines.

1. Social innovation and sustainable human development

Social innovation, precisely as we understand it in this article, took shape in 2006 when The Young Foundation powered the creation of the ‘Social Innovation Exchange’ international network and published Social Silicon Valleys (The Young Foundation, 2016). This initial approach was still somewhat abstract. It simply defined social innovation as “ideas that work” and presented examples aimed at demonstrating its uniqueness, such as distance learning universities, fair trade, micro-credits, open source software and participatory budgets. As we can see, some of these examples were already referencing innovative practices of international development.

In 2010 a qualitative leap took place: The Open Book of Social Innovation (MURRY, COULIER-GRICE, MULGAN, 2010) was published, followed shortly after by the European Commission’s newly incorporated definitions and ideas taken from the publication. Social innovation was understood as “new ideas (products, services and processes) which simultaneously satisfy social needs more efficiently than existing ones and create new and long-lasting social relationships and collaborations. Not only are these innovations good for society, they also improve its ability to act.” (HUBERT et al, 2011, p. 9). This decision ushered in the incorporation of social innovation as a cross axis of the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 programmes.
The possibility of having better access to these European funds increased interest exponentially among the organisations that were already developing innovative activities in the social field and it brought together many others that were operating in the field of public-sector innovation (NESTA, The Mind LAB, BEPA), in technology (Fraunhofer, TNO, Tecnalia), and in business development (Cisco Systems, Deloitte, McKinsey, HP, IDEO). Within the global development community, most efforts have gone into new financial solutions (micro-credits), global health initiatives (the fight against malaria, projects of reproductive health education, new technologies applied to the fight against hunger, etc.), education (improving formal education in developing countries and new training and formal training programmes), socio-economic development programmes (Work4Progress of “la Caixa” innovation program to promote employment), peace-building and Human Rights initiatives (the World Bank Social Innovation report on Colombia), and into bringing technological solutions to developing countries. Since then, the first research and training centres and LABS (ESADE Social Innovation, UNDP Accelerator Labs, LABOR-IO, IDB Lab) have also been established to coach professionals and design new processes, products and services. In general terms, we can speak of the standardisation of these practices internationally on a small and medium scale.

In terms of challenges, ‘social innovation’ is still perceived as a “term which almost everyone likes but no one knows for certain what it means” (POL & VILLE, 2007). At the present time, it is still a big hotchpotch which encompasses wide-ranging disciplines such as urban and regional development, public policies, administration, social psychology, social entrepreneurship and sustainable human development. This diversity makes definitions, methodologies and shared evaluation systems extremely difficult and generates the perception that the field might be just a new label to define already existing practices.

Precisely as the European Network Against Poverty\(^2\) states, in many tertiary-sector institutions and bodies there is also the belief that social innovation has been used to hide public-sector privatisation processes.\(^3\)

In February 2017, the Social Innovation Exchange event took place in London to evaluate the development of this field over the past decade and to propose future challenges. Among the positive aspects, there was general consensus on the fact that public and private institutions are increasingly incorporating social innovation methodologies into their programmes and have considered making specific investments to launch SI Incubators, SI Challenges and SI labs. Never-
theless, no proper analysis was conducted at the forum on the growing gap between social innovation practices in the North and South of the planet.

Despite the significant investment efforts, in both contexts there is widespread agreement on the need to gain evidence of a greater impact, make better use of the possibilities offered by digital technology and to have a bigger and stronger influence in the sphere of public policy-making (MULGAN 2017). 4

2. Theoretical Framework.

Since the publication of The Open Book of Social Innovation, most organisations and projects related to his field have adopted a Theory of Change5 linked to the Social Innovation Spiral featured in the following Graph.

For social innovation to take place, the processes to explore opportunities and challenges must go hand in hand with generating new ideas, products and processes that can facilitate different responses – these ideas are aimed at solving specific problems in local contexts (community innovation), addressing thematic areas (health care, employment, the environment, etc.) or both aspects unified towards systematic change (NAVARRETE, LACOVONE 2016). The core of this innovation approach lies in multiplying user-centred design processes (Design Thinking). These methodologies enable us to overcome well-intentioned initiatives that lack the opinion of those people at which they are aimed. This framework change has also enabled more rigorous processes to be set up, ones which are intensively geared towards action, looking for sustainable funding models from day one.

User-focused design processes are currently complemented – and in many cases overtaken – by new collective intelligence and open innovation approaches. Today, collecting the opinion of the user or citizen is no longer enough. Co-creation processes which incorporate multiple and diverse voices during the listening, implementation and evaluation phase provide better solutions than traditional ones offering occasional consultations to the population and led exclusively by

5. A theory of change which puts forward an analysis of the situation/challenge which must be changed, a description of the way in which it can be approached and the network of actions which must be developed to gain a positive result.

According to the Ford Foundation, “a Theory of Change: “draws up a strategic vision of the desired change, analysing and painstakingly specifying the assumption in each step (...), identifying the prerequisites which will permit or inhibit each one, and identifying the activities that will occur in these conditions, as well as explaining how these activities could work (...).”

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Social Innovation Spiral

This spiral outlines how social innovations are developed in a seven-step process.

6. In the sphere of exploring opportunities and challenges, new participatory analysis methodologies have been incorporated in an attempt to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches.

expert thinking. The hackathons, wikis and participation proposals are good examples of these practices, which, furthermore, incorporate the capacity to exponentially increase the level of information through the use of digital technology.

As we will see below, new Social Innovation Platforms for International Development should be able to contrast, in real time, the opinion and suggestions of local organisations and institutions and the family environment of people at which their programmes are aimed. This is the instrument that will enable us to continually evaluate the programme’s development and apply corrections to operate on a greater scale.

3. The major challenges

As with every new discipline, social innovation is constantly evolving, and the limitations of the initial theoretical framework become apparent. As things stand, there are few examples to show that the impact of social innovation projects (inside and outside the sphere of international development) has brought about systemic changes and we are mostly resigned to making incremental improvements. The commitment to building Social Innovation Platforms for Development grants us a new lens which looks for these systemic changes through a regional focus. Novy and Leubolt (2005) stress how social innovation is rooted in and notably influenced by the region’s socio-economic development and political history, with successful processes of social innovation requiring “an analysis of the different scales of (its) historical and geographical roots,” (LEUBOLT, 2005, p. 2).

This is one of the biggest challenges for the future. Attempts to address most problems from an innovative perspective (whether it be issues related to health care, education, employment, the environment or human rights) are developed in a determined cultural and geographical context. There are universal solutions which do not depend on these variables (for instance vaccines or a new financial tool), yet the majority of social innovations must be developed by taking into consideration these place dynamics (WOODCRAFT, BACON, 2013). If we disassociate social innovation from its cultural context, we are trapped in a permanent search of scientific evidence which ultimately cannot be replicated anywhere else. Generally speaking, we have built up considerable knowledge of how to implement social innovation projects, overlooking the cultural, human and community dimension of social innovation processes. In practice, we are still conducting linear actions, hoping to achieve systemic change.

To some degree, we have assimilated the way innovation is interpreted in the tech sector, applying it uncritically to social innovation. This path has led us to forget that human change responds to cultural and relational logics, not exclusively transactional ones.

Despite the many common elements between the two, launching a new technological solution on the market is not the exactly the same as incorporating a new product (a vaccine, a micro-credit, etc.) or service (health care training programmes or developing new businesses) into the transformation of an organisation, neighbourhood or city in Southern Hemisphere countries.

8. The term “Hackathon” is made up from the words “hacker” and “marathon”. In practice, it involves open sessions with people and organisations wishing to find new collective solutions to a set challenge in a limited time frame (normally one or two days), making use of the potential of digital technology and social practices.
The other big challenge for this emerging field is how to tackle the myth of individual innovation. Innovation applied to sustainable human development has also fallen under the spell of the solo entrepreneur (HARDING 2013). Nowadays, the vast majority of initiatives promoting social innovation build their imagery around the search for rare ‘talent’ which will be able to find a unique and brilliant solution. This narrative lacks scientific evidence given that practically the entirety of innovative initiatives with a positive social impact always require a shared ‘mission’ with a collective effort, and also contribute to reinforcing the myth that private sector innovation is always better and more efficient than public innovation (MAZZUCATO, 2014).

Moreover, innovation ecosystems built around individual entrepreneurship, (with Silicon Valley being the best example and one which almost every government wants to reproduce), reinforce inequality to such an extent that they affect the very competitiveness of the region. Today, San Francisco have serious problems attracting knowledge and a workforce that is neither at the top of the pyramid (highly qualified and highly paid people) nor at the bottom (unqualified, poorly paid people who cannot find any other type of employment).

In essence, current innovation models based on the myth of individual entrepreneurship: (1) take advantage of public-sector investments in basic research, (2) adapt them to the market through incubators which back the most advanced initiatives through the possibility of accessing large amounts of private investment and, (3) when one of them manages to become profitable in the market (the vast majority fail), (4) financial engineering mechanisms are activated to avoid paying taxes. The result of the uncritical application of this innovation approach is one of growing inequality and the impossibility of providing real solutions to the main social, economic and environmental challenges set out by the Sustainable Development Objectives.

4. Social Innovation Platforms

Taking into account the contributions and limitations of the above-mentioned Theoretical Framework and the most advanced innovation practices (HUDDART, 2017), this publication offers the possibility of experimenting with Social Innovation Platforms for Sustainable Human Development, such as those promoted by Work4Progress of “la Caixa”. It incorporates the following elements:

1. The cultural dimension,
2. a social movement perspective
3. building a new model of community innovation

4.1. The cultural dimension

Successful examples of large scale socio-economic transformations, (MANG, REED, 2012), demonstrate a series of quantitative (per capita GDP, education levels, life expectancy, wealth distribution, etc.) and interconnected qualitative (social capital, resilience, public/private collaboration, etc.) indicators. Academia normally develop in-depth studies in each of these aspects, but there is a dearth of multidisciplinary approaches to deeply understand the connection between them.
We know a lot about how things have developed and whether they have worked in a set context,\footnote{The “What Works Network” in the UK. https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network} but normally we don’t know why. We are aware of what we can call tangible elements or hardware (public policies, strategic decisions, investments and impact evaluations) and we have indicators to measure them, yet we must discover the software and operating system that has allowed every element to become interconnected; it is this software that can be understood as the cultural dimension of the social innovation process.

As explained in the following Graph, we must consider the set of values and shared beliefs of a particular community, the narratives used to express these values as a mechanism of self-definition, and the attitudes and behaviour stemming from the interaction between these elements. The stories we tell about ourselves condition reality and the possibilities of change.

These stories are defined as meta-narratives in the Theory of Critical Thinking and involve the beliefs shared by a particular society to generate meaning and legitimise collective experiences. They are stories normally built on a shared value system and remain sub-conscious over time. By understanding this dynamic we can gain a deeper knowledge of why certain strategic decisions are made and their real impact on the processes of innovation and change (ENGLE, 2017). From this perspective, the questions we must ask ourselves are: What are the stories we are telling about ourselves? Where is our community, city or society heading? Where is our potential and where are our challenges? What are the power relations? And, the most important, what do we want to do together? (FLIVBERG, 2006). Despite the fact that dominant innovation models are based on the enhancement of instrumental rationality, there is growing evidence to show that value-based decisions generate better results and have a greater medium- and long-term impact. Therefore, the hardware of social innovation lies in tangible and interconnected actions, while the software should be interpreted as new transformative narratives (GENESKE, HATTAWAY, 29014) based on values and common aspirations supporting determined strategic decisions.

A systemic approach to the major challenges social innovation seeks to address requires a profound interconnection between both, operating in a similar fashion to social movements instead of applying a project management mindset.

Unfortunately, social innovation institutions are adopting processes and practices designed by traditional consultancy firms, rather than exploring the potential of reinventing the theory and practice of social movements (LEADBROOK, 2018).

A deeper understanding of the cultural dimension of innovation processes requires qualitative methodologies to measure the operating value systems, the narratives used to express these beliefs and the attitudes that conditions the potential for change. An ethnographic approach to the value system and narratives operating in a territory can help us to connect specific initiatives to the real demands of the community. However, we need new digital tools...
Platforms that activate innovation (HESSE-BIBER 2011) that could exponentially increase the number of people participating in processes of co-creation and the prototyping of new products and services.

For this reason, the listening platform’s qualitative work must be complemented with quantitative initiatives that make use of the potential of digital technologies to interpret large volumes of information on the real-time perceptions of citizens and the city’s main organisations. These instruments provide pertinent information for driving-force institutions in the field, since they will be able to connect major strategic projects directly to the needs and aspirations of citizens in a way which is much more rigorous and effective.

Although international cooperation organisations have a wide array of mechanisms to collect the opinion of the communities in which they work, they usually acknowledge their financial, human and technical limitations with regard to reaching vulnerable communities beyond the circle of influence of already established participation networks. Current community listening methodologies are not able to reach a suitable depth of knowledge on what people in the street really think, and international cooperation organisations normally lack the necessary resources to do this work thoroughly. Most calls for projects expect NGOs to know what is needed to do before starting an intervention, based on the knowledge generated by similar projects in the same region.

Therefore, we must highlight the efforts being developed in the Work4Progress programme in India, Peru and Mozambique. At the moment, a broad group of international cooperation institutions and organisations structured around collaborative platforms are designing new community listening tools which aim to discover shared narratives (the stories people tell) on existing challenges and opportunities. This involves collecting not only a wide volume of information, but also carrying out a collective interpretation of the data.

These organisations work with the conviction that the regions that have been able to collectively build a positive narrative of transformation (HUDDART, 2017) are more innovative and socially sustainable, and are even more competitive. Medellin and its commitment to ‘social urbanism’ is normally the most referred-to example in demonstrating the importance of narrative change in processes of socio-economic transformation in Latin America.

Conversely, those territories which have allowed a negative narrative to develop around them end up limiting their potential for innovation and change. Clearly, there are many structural elements that condition the development of a city or neighbourhood, but there are also many other intangible elements that influence the reality of those who don’t grant it the same importance.

In Medellín, as in any other city or region, there is a wide diversity of competing cultures, identities and narratives, often in conflict, yet every city, like every human group, has a common history or meta-narrative that makes them stand out from the rest (DUNSTAN, SARKISSIAN, 1994).


One of the ways to better understand the narrative of communities, neighbourhoods and regions (the values citizens associate with) and their priorities is to set up community listening processes as seen in the Work4Progress programme in Peru. Once the values, challenges, and shared potential have been identified in the community, it is easier to recognise a series of interrelated intervention projects (in priority fields for citizens) and activate public dialogue on the possibility of building a new narrative of transformation that allows us to overcome a linear project mentality and build a genuine movement of transformation, be it thematic or regional (ENGLE 2015). According to the experience of the Amplify programme promoted by The Young Foundation in Northern Ireland, specific projects activate the network of learning and social economy in the region and can demonstrate that there is a systemic approach alternative to deal with current challenges (unemployment, inequality, ageing, smart specialisation, etc.).

Another example with which to understand the close link between social innovation, cultural dimensions and place is the Mondragón Cooperative Corporation. These industrial cooperatives were borne out of a socio-economic response to the needs of a community going through an extremely difficult situation, which is why its companies are deeply rooted in the Basque area. This relationship enables them to make different decisions and generates a more resilient model (ESPIAU 2017).
Platforms that activate innovation

The biggest industrial cooperative in the world (almost 100,000 employees worldwide) responds to a collective intelligence driving force that differs from traditional companies. Instead of applying an exclusively instrumental rationality (FLYVBERG 2006), Mondragón applies a decision-making process based on a values rationality (HEALES, HODGSON, RICH. 2017), with its main objective to create quality employment linked to high added value activities such as robotics, machine tools and automation. This is why the wage gap in the Mondragón industrial cooperatives ranges from 1 to 6, as opposed to 1 to 300 in companies with a similar number of employees in the US, and part of the profits from each business unit go to an inter-cooperative solidarity fund to support projects with difficulties (HEALES, HODGSON, RICH. 2017). These business decisions, based on values such as justice, solidarity and equality, have not affected the market performance of the most competitive industrial manufacturing; in fact, they can be the key to its success (ESPIAU 2017).

The Mondragon ecosystem is currently responding to their new challenges by creating an Open Innovation Platform in the area and also exploring how to share their experience internationally. On this front, the engineering and consultancy services of the corporation are working in collaboration with the Agirre Lehendakaria Center (University of the Basque Country), the European Commission, the Colombian Government and FARC (today organised under the cooperative ECOMUN) in a platform initiative designed to reinvent post-conflict strategies.

4.2. A social movement perspective

The efforts to develop community innovation processes have been overshadowed by new forms of despotism since the construction of the welfare state. By 1957 Michael Young was explaining the negative effects of new public policies in London that were devoid of the opinion of those people they sought to help (WILMOT, YOUNG, 2013). New urban projects unintentionally broke social networks of solidarity that the communities emigrating to this city had established over generations; these policies were particularly negative for women, who lost community mechanisms to defend against situations of domestic violence. These practices of top down ‘expert knowledge’, disconnected from the population, have also been criticised by NGDOs on a number of occasions.

On the other side, successful examples of socio-economic and systemic transformation, be it in a thematic sphere (global health care, education, access to new technologies, etc.) or a specific geographical area (Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, the Peruvian Amazon, Uttar Pradesh in India, or Antioquia in Colombia), we come across public-private responses which react more to the logics of social movements than linear projects. Leadership is shared and soft
— the whole process is not controlled by one person or organisation — and there are a range of initiatives which, in principle, are not responding to a perfectly structured plan. However, in these cases there is always a deep connection between all these institutions and groups with regard to shared principles, values and a common vision of the desired future. Operating as a movement of transformation enables these organisations and institutions to work collectively as a network, without the need to set up rigid structures or complex legal agreements around a more sophisticated leadership (soft power), and with practices of radical democracy built upon objectives, values and shared discourses (ENGLE, 2015).

Social transformation movements often emerge spontaneously in response to a situation of social injustice and inequality. The UNDP is actively integrating these logics and tools to sustainable human development (Rajasekaran, 2017). The aim is to move beyond the ‘expert’ and ‘top down’ approaches of projects of social intervention, which yield very limited results, to build authentic movement-based transformation which connects a multitude of public and private actions around a vision and common objectives. As outlined above, this objective requires in-depth knowledge of the values and narratives expressed on a fixed set of problems (or geographical space) and to associate the vision of the future we want to reach with a battery of interconnected initiatives.

As we will see in the following graphs, social innovation interventions which apply a social movement approach start by discovering the operating cultural dynamics of the communities we are working with. A deeper listening combined by a collective interpretation of the data will allow the process to co-create, prototye and scale new solutions that are responding directly to the perceptions, aspirations and challenges of local citizens. This work can be done through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, such as those carried out by the Work4Progress program. Therefore, the social innovation spiral (MURRY, COULIER-GRICE, MULGAN, 2010) progressively gains a waveform similar to the Theory U (SCHARMER 2007).

The greater the knowledge of this cultural dimension (values, beliefs, expressed in narratives that condition our behaviour and strategic decisions), the more effective projects can be. Other similar processes (Amplify Northern Ireland and Amplifier Montreal) demonstrate that during the first year of community listening only limited knowledge can be gained; nevertheless, where this type of focus can be maintained over a number of years, perceptions, challenges and potential are discovered and much more complex networks are created, thus giving rise to interconnected actions with a great impact.

The Mondragón Corporation is also an example with which to visualise this action as movement. Each cooperative is rooted in its locality and sphere of influence, and generates quality jobs for families, learning gradually about the community needs and therefore adapting to them (insurance services, banking, vocational training, higher education, research and technology, etc). Although every industrial cooperative in Mondragón is autonomous, they share the same direction (HEALES, HODGSON, RICH. 2017). The logics and instruments which have connected people, companies and institutions in the region under the umbrella of this cooperative cannot be understood exclusively from a traditional business perspective. The cooperative members clearly state that they feel part of something more than just a company — some define it as an experience, others as a family or
Social innovation interventions

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Source: Agirre Lehendakaria Center.

network, yet originally their behaviour responded to the need to generate a movement of socio-economic transformation in the valley. In practical terms, operating as a movement also enables them to channel internal competition positively, maximising existing resources, aligning different strategies and building a narrative of transformation that connects all agents in the ecosystem more profoundly than traditional corporate practices (ESPIAU, 2017).

4.3. Building a new model of community innovation

As we have already highlighted, the current models of social innovation applied to community transformation are heavily influenced by theories of change.

A city-region movement consists of many waves in different neighbourhoods: interconnected and pushing in the same direction.

Source: Agirre Lehendakaria Center.

Platforms that activate innovation
based on the search for individual talent (MULGAN 2017). These theories of change have been built from the experience of technological innovation and, following the models of big corporations, look for new solutions that can generate new products and services with greater added value. The most influential business schools understand that these processes require the search for advanced knowledge and special talent. Applied to the search for innovative social responses, most of current interventions are also looking for the unique and rare talent that individuals or start-ups can have. This way of working is also a commonplace in the Southern Hemisphere (for example, the Social Innovation Global Health initiative). In many cases, this way of working enables genuinely interesting initiatives to be supported and scaled, yet rarely do we generate a systemic change.

Alternatively, Social Innovation Platforms offer the possibility of connecting multiple, movement-based initiatives, multiplying the number of people empowered to innovate.

In point of fact, the most negative impact of this uncritical replica of technological innovation in the social sector is the negative impact generated in the agency that local communities are able to develop collectively. If only very few individuals have rare and unique talent, most of local citizens will not be able to lead the necessary socio-economic transformation.

We once again find ourselves dealing with the cultural dimension (values, perceptions, attitudes) of the innovation process. Equally as important as training for entrepreneurship and the support of new initiatives is a better understanding of the perception (expressed through individual and collective narratives) which people in a particular community have about their capacity to be agents of change. Normally, in the most impoverished communities and neighbourhoods, citizens don’t feel empowered to act as agents of innovation or change. The operating narrative is often stressing negative elements and the impression that change is not possible. Individually, this materialises in a powerful meta-narrative: *Who am I to act differently?* (ENGLE 2017).

Social innovation interventions attempt to address these problems by inviting people of different backgrounds and affiliations to participate in co-creating initiatives of change. Unfortunately, reaching out to ‘unusual suspects’ is normally far from easy. Thus, social innovation projects tend to strengthen previously empowered people and organisations and do not generate evidence of systemic impact.

Despite this existing trend, there are interesting examples of systemic change in communities and neighbourhoods which find themselves in extremely difficult situations. In analysing these cases we find that systemic change (IBARRETXE, 2016) is normally associated with the above mentioned platform and movement building approach.

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As we have also discovered in the Leeds case, a ‘social permission to innovate’ comes about and affects neighbourhoods as a whole. Despite the negative outward perception about a specific community, internally an alternative ‘story’ is created which enables decision-making and more innovative actions to be developed. More specifically, “they think that’s what we’re like and we can’t do things differently, but we’re going to show them otherwise.”

Another aspect of this ‘social permission to innovate’ is that it is difficult to be built externally. As much as expert organisations try to bring about cultural changes through training, the result is often very limited. The permission to act differently spreads when people from a certain community see another person they consider as an ‘equal’ behave in a different way or start up different projects.

As the experience in the Basque Country demonstrates, systemic changes only take place when the community as a whole are invited or empowered to act differently. These narratives of collective change can be seen in the Mondragón case, as well as certain neighbourhoods in the city of Medellín (AGYEMAN, 2015) which have undergone very positive socio-economic changes.

There is certainly a need to gain more in-depth knowledge of these social mechanisms which affect the spread of social innovation, but evidence also points to the need to replace the theories of change which reinforce the search for exceptional talent with generating collective social permission for innovation and collective entrepreneurship (HARDING 2013). This strategic change is supported by the excellent results achieved in new specialised curricula of collective entrepreneurship 19. Instead of looking for the ‘unicorn’, the most advanced forms of social innovation aim to empower the community as a whole so that everyone can innovate.

5. Conclusions

Social innovation has become consolidated as a distinctive field of knowledge and practice over the past decade, one which should be applied by organisations specialised in international development. Unfortunately, the application of theoretical frameworks and methodologies generated by technological and business innovation are producing limited results for achieving Sustainable Human Development.

For all of these reasons, social innovation applied to international development must incorporate new platform and movement building approaches to promote initiatives with greater scope (scaling up) institutionally, increase the number of beneficiaries (scaling out) and bring about deeper cultural changes (scaling deep). With this objective, there is a need to better understand the cultural dimension of the innovation process (software) and connect it with regulatory elements (hardware) which condition its development.
Community listening via participatory methodologies combined with new information technology constitutes a great opportunity to connect, with greater intensity, social and institutional action to the real needs and aspirations of the global south. To date, there has been more stress laid on the correct implementation of prefabricated initiatives than in depth listening to the challenges and potential of each community in order for them to build their own solutions.

The political and economic changes experienced in recent years demonstrate that we lack reliable instruments to understand what the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities actually think. Community listening allow us to decipher the system of values, beliefs and behaviours that conditions strategic decision-making and social action; these are the cultural factors which usually determine the success or failure of socio-economic initiatives for international development.

As we can see in the graph below, the usual way to develop social innovation projects in the sphere of development largely depends on NGDOs as intermediaries between communities and power structures. This mediation often results in small and medium-sized community projects and large scale projects exclusively being designed and without the direct participation of local communities.

By contrast, community listening allows us to break that dynamic and connect local projects with small-, medium- and large-scale initiatives, in addition to public service redesign. Social Innovation Platforms for Development can offer the necessary infrastructure to connect multiple agents, methodologies and actions in new processes, products and services for social transformation. Ultimately, social innovation must also encompass the knowledge and practice of social movements in order to generate systemic change. Operating with a movement-based mentality enables us to generate ‘social permission to innovate’ which spreads across the whole community.

This process of empowerment is associated with the development of new narratives and a series of interconnected actions that constitute a movement of transformation. These systems are set up as platforms and ecosystems of social innovation that combine the following structural elements: (1) new instruments of community listening and collective interpretation of the data (2) laboratories to co-create and prototype new initiatives (3) project accelerators (4) new tools of governance and funding (5) and new systems of evaluation and external communication.

**About the Author**

Gorka Espiau Idiaga is Professor of Practice at the McGill University and Senior Fellow at the Agirre Lehendakaria Center (University of Basque Country). In collaboration with these organizations, his research focuses on the creation of social innovation platforms under extreme difficulty scenarios. Espiau is also advisor to the Work4Progress initiative powered by “la Caixa” Foundation and founding partner of Social Innovation Laboratory Koop (SILK). Previously, he served as Senior Advisor to the Executive Office of the Basque President.
Introduction: A Current Crisis of Listening and Legitimacy

Multiple large-scale crises are increasingly evident across our world, from climate breakdown to rising inequality and threats to democracy. Many challenges are interlinked: declining journalism, fake news, political polarization, and the concentration of power in big tech companies — particularly Facebook, Amazon and Google. Trust in our institutions is in decline, and digital platforms and internet technologies that we expected to be democratizing, are in many ways concentrating power. People across the globe have become mass producers of data — through smartphones, wearables, smart homes, and sensors in private and public space, devices are ‘listening’ day and night. But what is being heard and interpreted from that data, and how is the information used, managed and stored? What are the societal consequences of this kind of ‘listening’? And how does it affect people’s mental health?

“Radical, caring listening constitutes a space of learning and knowing, providing insights about the self, other, and the world that moves us toward, and indeed demands, social change and collective action.”

Valerie Palmer-Mehta
We characterize the situation as a ‘crisis of listening and legitimacy’. An inherent tension is that while people typically desire that their voices be heard in matters they have a stake in, they’d like to determine who or what listens, when, to which bits, and for what purposes. And listening unidirectionally or without agency is hollow; there needs to be dialogue to build understanding, and people need to be able to verify that they have been correctly interpreted. Although the trends vary and are manifest differently from place to place, fundamental to addressing societal crises is the need to build our capacity to listen and dialogue, and build trust with each other, in order to co-create effective change. Can we deepen our listening to each other in ways that would build trust, legitimacy and more effective collective action for positive social change? This chapter explores cases in two quite different development contexts of attempts to listen at the community scale in ways that unleash local innovation and contribute to social change.

Listening is a key methodology to foster more effective collective action for social change. It can harness the power of collective intelligence to build transformative narratives and co-create innovation action. As participatory researchers and practitioners, we know that social innovation needs to get beyond a fragmented project approach to one of ‘innovation platforms’ if it is to be able to address systemic challenges, as Gorka Espiau has clearly argued in Chapter 1. Innovation platforms require robust methodologies and transformative tools. This article aims to discuss and demonstrate how collective listening is a critical part of co-creation in innovation platforms, and demonstrate its power to effect community change and system transformation processes. The focus will be on listening methodologies applied in two case communities, one in Haiti and the other in Canada.

**1. How can collective listening support social transformation?**

To understand a system or community, we must tap into its needs in ways that reveal pathways forward. In processes of system investigation, we often transpose linear plan and control thinking into contexts of complexity and do not obtain expected results. Holistic approaches, that involve deep listening, deal better with complexity. Listening is instrumental to wise and transformative action.

If we are to go fully into the complexity of the social challenges communities are facing we also need to develop our ease and skill with collective processes that allow a system to see itself and lean into its emerging future. We have become accustomed to thinking in best practice and good practice ways whereas collective listening allows ‘emergent practice’.¹ We tend to think solutions will arise from experts who understand the cause and effect connections within a system whereas in complexity these can only be revealed through genuine co-inquiry into the unknown. This is both humbling and uncomfortable. It is also the basis of collective listening and can bring out the potential of an innovation platform.

We argue that robust listening methodologies can help address current crises of legitimacy in various contexts. How we listen to and dialogue with each other.
other is connected to building our collective capacity to renegotiate what social contracts look like in the age of increased uncertainty that we now inhabit. This will also require building our capacity to harness collective wisdom, the foundation of which is listening.

Furthermore, the very act of listening fosters agency. Listening is a basis for participation and dialogue. It is the basis for critical consciousness and social change. For these reasons collective listening and sense making are foundational to an innovation platform for long-term co-created social change.

2. Elements of listening as foundational to innovation

Listening is part of everyday life. But the quality of listening is highly variable and we listen at multiple levels. Theory U (Otto Scharmer)\(^2\) describes four levels of listening.

- Listening to confirm what you already know, your opinions and judgements.
- Listening for the facts, some that might disconfirm what you know.
- Empathetic listening which is seeing through the eyes of the other.
- Generative listening, or listening from the future that wants to emerge.

We have the power to influence systems through the quality of our listening. Generative listening is deep and open and it requires collectively making sense through processes of dialogue. The skills, attitudes and sensibilities of collective listening are foundational to creating a culture of community innovation.

William Isaac\(^4\) explains how listening together is really about dialogue from a perspective of the whole and not the individual. Collective listening is a shared experience and shared learning space balancing thinking, analysing, and strategising with letting go and receiving. Collective listening engenders co-creation. How we listen and make sense collectively of evolving narratives can contribute to changing our view and actions and something that wasn’t there before can reveal itself.

3. Listening Methodology

This section sets out a listening methodology, in which listening is the basis of an innovation platform to reveal transformative narratives and foster collective action for social change. Such a listening methodology is foundational to both the Montreal and Haiti cases that follow. This ‘listening methodology’ is about practice and mindsets, as well as research design. In academic terms, it is situated within the broad range of participatory, action, ethnographic and narrative research. These forms of research are well established and are often transdisciplinary, spanning fields of education, urban planning, human geography, public health, sociology, anthropology, political science and community development. Similarly, participatory learning and action (PLA) methods are frequently applied in international development research. In practitioner terms listening methodologies are an attitude or mindset that allow genuine co-creation to emerge. The methodologies themselves generate relationships and trust that provide conditions for actors to innovate together.

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Collective listening

There are some aspects of collective listening that contribute to the transformation potential of an innovation platform.

By tending to these five elements, listening has the power to create pathways to positive social change.

**Commoning** involves approaching the listening process as a collective culture, a way of working together. It is a mindset shift from being in one's own knowing and expertise to an openness of inquiry into collective creation and means that a group harnesses an intelligence that is greater than the sum of its parts. Shifting in this way amongst different stakeholders creates the conditions for systemic change.

**Collective listening** involves a process of deep listening among people who together interpret one another’s stories and lived experiences in ways that reveal new community narratives. It provides granular information and nuance that quantitative data cannot access. Deeper listening alongside quantitative data allows more robust and collective interpretation that can illuminate meaning behind the numbers.

**Tools for collective sensemaking** have the power to unleash community innovation, particularly when different methods are used and triangulated. Effective tools range from highly qualitative and granular ‘human technologies’ (e.g., ethnographic interviews, mapping, podcasts, focus groups), to those that interface with newer digital technologies, such as machine learning, artificial intelligence and big data observatories.

**Translation** of listening to innovation action requires different perspectives and skillsets. Listening processes, and collective reflection and interpretation are typically carried out by ethnographers and participatory researchers. Storytelling methods often help to bridge the listening to innovation action in ways that local community members and social innovators will be able to put into practice. In the absence of listening processes, communities often change only incrementally and in the interests of a few. Larger scale or breakthrough innovations or policy reforms are often out of reach at the community level in the absence of effective translation of listening to action.

**Ecosystem curation** is a means of holding and helping to orchestrate a group of organizations and actors in a field so that they can collectively address wicked challenges and forge together transformative futures. For ecosystems to be effective, actors within them must recognize that they are interdependent and must develop skills of authentic dialogue. The ecosystem curator supports these processes, which are nuanced yet essential.

Source: Percolab.
A listening methodology engages primarily qualitative tools, which complement quantitative data and research. These listening methods enable researchers, practitioners and community participants to uncover that which lies ‘behind the numbers’ – going deeper than statistics can in order to reveal structural problems and opportunities for change, and often through storytelling. Listening methods recognise that people have their own community based, local knowledge systems that are often invisible from the outside. They have the potential to yield more accurate data by drawing out and hearing the voices of those who are excluded and often impoverished, thereby deepening understanding about development impacts on local people and power dynamics at play.

3.1. Phronesis questions
This listening methodology engages a ‘practical wisdom’ or phronesis. Phronesis research entails designing a strategy of inquiry to answer the following questions.

1. Of what story or stories do I (we) find myself (ourselves) a part?
2. Where are we going (as a community)? And is it desirable?
3. Who wins and who loses and by which mechanisms of power?
4. What, if anything, do we want to do about it? What should be done?

These questions serve as a guide for research design, and inform choice of methods. They aim to unpack issues at both the level of individuals and communities and their agency, and at the structural level, such as social and economic inequality and factors that perpetuate it. They also serve to expose tensions which involve power relationships that are particularly susceptible to change, because they are fraught with potential conflict, contestable knowledge or dubious practices. Tensions reveal how power relationships can stand in the way of addressing problems, and they open space for activating ‘leverage points’. Leverage points in systems theory are places within complex systems (such as cities, ecosystems, or economies), where a small shift in one thing can bring about big changes in everything (Meadows, 1997). Leverage points represent possibilities for transformative change.

3.2. Values and social change
Listening research is not value-neutral. By engaging these methods, we seek to nurture social learning between participants and a critical consciousness and praxis of their community and the larger narratives of which they are a part. The phronesis questions provide a backdrop, or guide, for eliciting dialogue, and through these processes to contribute to unleashing community innovation and positive social change.

With regard to understanding social change, it is not possible to convincingly argue that dynamic change processes are occurring without a temporal aspect to the platform. Therefore, the listening must be embedded in an ongoing basis in a way that is foundational and provides continuous feedback loops to processes of community change. This listening methodology is well suited to qualitative longitudinal research (QLR), a form of social research that explores phenomena over time and in which the same individuals or groups are followed over extended periods. This research over time can generate new insights into ways that social interventions and policies are ‘lived’ by people, families, organisations, and communities. In international development studies, Qualitative

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5. Attention to ‘phronesis’ (meaning ‘practical wisdom’) in social science research has come about fairly recently through the work of Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) in ‘Making Social Science Matter’. Originally, it was developed by Aristotle as one of three form of knowledge, the others being episteme (epistemology) and techne (technical know-how).

Longitudinal Research is now seen as highly relevant to complement quantitative economic logics and to correct the traditional reliance on static variables to provide explanations. Such listening research often provides strikingly different insights into policy problems’ than numbers can on their own, and are therefore highly complementary to quantitative studies.

### 3.3. Listening method choices

Listening methods can potentially yield more accurate data by drawing out and hearing the voices of those less heard, thereby deepening understanding about community development impacts on local people and power dynamics at play. These methods recognise that people have their own community based on local knowledge systems that are often invisible from the outside. In order to maximise the potential of listening methods, they must be designed according to the local context.

**Table 1. Listening methods at three levels of engagement**

In both the Montreal and Haiti cases, researchers engaged multiple methods, and at three levels of engagement: individual, collective activities, and institutions. Table 1 sets out the methods used to investigate each level of engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>LISTENING METHODS</th>
<th>RECORDING / REPRESENTATION MEDIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual participants / community residents or stakeholders</td>
<td>Participatory photography</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose: To hear stories and analyse what is happening; to enable a personal and collective reflection about past, present and future</td>
<td>Participatory mapping (mobility)</td>
<td>Hand-drawn maps showing social networks, daily trips and spatial connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnography (including household and resident interviews, story interviews, participant observation)</td>
<td>Audio, video, photographs, interview forms, field notes, photos, audio and video (eg walking tour guided by research participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital storytelling</td>
<td>Podcasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective activities</td>
<td>Photo dialogue circles</td>
<td>Audio recording and notes; community timeline with photographs, dates, and drawings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose: To make sense, together, of narratives and to reveal interfaces of structure and agency</td>
<td>Participatory mapping 2 (places and actors)</td>
<td>Chalk drawings on concrete floor, then transposed to paper; flip chart lists of organisations and agencies by sector; floor maps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective sensemaking (research collaborators and key informants, ethnographers and local surveyors, workshop, community core story)</td>
<td>Insight harvest to provide input to local community development plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community walks guided by participants</td>
<td>Audio and video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional evolution</td>
<td>Key informant and organisational representative interviews and workshops</td>
<td>Audio and video reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose: To understand processes of change and to interpret transformative possibilities</td>
<td>Collective sensemaking with key informants and field collaborators / document review</td>
<td>Documents and field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant observation</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In working with *individuals* in interviews, informal discussions, through observation, and in participatory activities, the aim is to listen to voices and local perspectives, often coming at the same questions from multiple angles in order to triangulate data collection. **Collective activities** are intended to reveal interfaces of structure and agency, as in the phronesis inquiry described above, and involve dialogue circles (akin to focus groups) that use individual activities to elicit discussion and collective meaning making about the wider implications of individual experiences, such as through photo taking and subsequent discussion about why the pictures were taken and what they mean to participants. **Institutional evolution** is investigated in order to build understanding of how organisations and social and political practices can be interwoven more effectively and collectively for innovation action and social change.

This listening methodology can be effectively adapted and applied to a wide range of contexts as the following cases from Montreal and Haiti demonstrate.

### 4. Case studies: What we did and found

Two case studies will be presented: one in Montreal, Canada and another in Bellevue-La-Montagne, Haiti. The quite different contexts help to see the applicability and relevance of listening methodologies for transformative change.

#### 4.1. Case study Montreal: Creating a Listening-to-Action Innovation Platform

**4.1.1. Montreal Context: Linguistic diversity and renewal**

Montreal is Canada's second largest city with an interesting linguistic profile. It is the second largest primarily French speaking city in the world, after Paris. The greater metropolitan area has four million inhabitants and the vast majority speak both English and French. About 22% of the population speaks a language other than French or English.

Montreal is emerging from a period of economic decline and corruption scandals, with a renewed sense of possibility. There is still a struggle to overcome some of its linguistic, cultural and economic barriers and tensions from this darker period, particularly in certain inner-city neighbourhoods, such as Côte-des-Neiges.

**4.1.2. Case community and listening methods**

Côte-des-Neiges is a neighbourhood in Montreal with the highest rate of unhealthy housing conditions in the entire province. It has higher unemployment than the norm (13% compared to the municipal average of 9.7%) and half of the inhabitants speak a mother tongue other than French or English. At the same time there is government support into the neighbourhood with anti-poverty, lodging and language programs. Economically, the area benefits from numerous large anchor institutions (hospitals and universities).

The neighbourhood has been targeted for a collective impact initiative, which has helped it to become the location for the listening initiative. At the same time as the listening activities were going on the neighbourhood, running in parallel was its own strategic planning process that included a statistical portrait of the neighbourhood, gathering priorities, co-creating an action plan and setting up

some action groups. This became an opportunity as the two processes were mapped onto each other and integrated at times for collective sense making. Three methods were used in the first phase of listening.

4.1.3. Ethnography 360°
A series of listening methods were carried out in 2017 with the intention of clarifying prospective actions that could have an impact at different levels: community, small and medium social enterprise initiatives, large scale initiatives (ie. with local institutions) and policy change. The initiative describes itself as a local, synchronous 3600 ethnography, of people who live, work and pass through the area. Over a period of 7 weeks ethnographers interviewed people from all walks of life, where they were, in the park, at their homes or at work.

4.1.4. Collective sense making
During and after the process collective sense making took place as a way of making meaning and seeing emerging ideas. There was weekly ongoing sense making by the ethnographic team with the local youth surveyors who were going door-to-door as part of the local strategic planning process, and sense making between the ethnographic team and outside social innovation experts. A public activity took place to connect the results of the ethnography and the results of the strategic planning process. In all these cases the collective sensemaking builds relationships that can be built upon for social transformation.

4.1.5. Digital storytelling
Fifty multimedia interviews were carried out with people who live, work or transit through the neighbourhood. These interviews were indexed and disseminated via a podcast channel to give voice to the stories of the neighbourhood. How can prejudices projected onto it be broken? How can the narrative anchored in the collective conscience be changed? How do people really see this neighbourhood? The footage captured was rolled out in the following year, in collaboration with existing local communication channels. This further strengthened collaborations and partnerships, as well as being a spring board for further collective sensemaking.
4.2. Case study Haiti: Fostering a changemaker culture through education-centered community development

4.2.1. Haiti context: country and earthquake

Haiti’s legacy is both triumphant and tragic. It is a singular nation, in that it was the first -- and remains the sole -- nation in the history of the world to successfully carry out a slave-led revolution for independence. That unprecedented triumph 200 years ago also appears to have been the nation’s demise in many ways. Since then, it has been beset by predatory governments, extractive international interventions, and devastating disasters - most recently the earthquake in 2010. That greatest human disaster of our time left some 200,000 people dead, 1.5 million homeless and most government buildings destroyed, along with thousands of schools, hospitals and churches.

Since the earthquake, Haiti’s societal institutions and communities have fallen into further decline, evidenced in part by its even lower ranking on the UN Human Development Index. Today, massive poverty persists -- most Haitians continue to lack basic services and struggle with daily survival. Yet, in the midst of the dire situation, there are examples of local communities which have harnessed the disaster as transformative opportunity, creating new paradigms for development which provide beacons of possibility. One bright example is Bellevue-La-Montagne.

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**Key Learnings**

**Key Learnings from the Listening Methods: Dynamics of community development and social change revealed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE REVEALED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **360º ethnographic interviews** | » Internal perception is a strong and positive sense of identity within the neighbourhood.  
» There is a negative external image projected onto the neighbourhood.  
» Perception of prejudice from local employers to hire locals.  
» A regular and extended ethnographic process built relationship and trust. |
| **Collective sense making** | » Builds relationships - local expertise mixes with external expertise.  
» Increases professionalism: local door-to-door surveyors were invited in to a wider process and began to see themselves as co-researchers.  
» Builds capacity for innovative thinking especially when structured with some helpful frameworks (ex. Community, social entrepreneurship, institutional level, policy level).  
» The listening activity was able to interconnect with the strategic planning process of the local community and similar themes were revealed (unhealthy housing, language issues). |
| **Digital storytelling** | » Local narrative is taking form and there are a lot of local initiatives related to the issues the neighbourhood is facing.  
» Strengthens a sense of pride in the local area and expands pride into increased engagement.  
» Local organisations begin using the stories for their own communication needs. |
4.2.2. Case community and listening methods

Bellevue-La-Montagne is a fast-growing peri-urban community located in the mountains south of the capital city, Port-au-Prince. It was deeply affected by the 2010 earthquake, when most residents’ homes were substantially or completely destroyed. While very few households have managed to rebuild their private homes, they have substantially invested themselves in transforming the shared assets of their community. With the assistance of Haiti Partners and others, Bellevue-La-Montagne residents have worked hard to innovate a new paradigm, which we characterise as ‘education-centered community development’. Education infuses every aspect of the approach to community development, which comprises six elements: 1) a school and lifelong learning; 2) social entrepreneurship; 3) participatory design and high-quality construction; 4) environmental stewardship; 5) community healthcare; and 6) radically inclusive participation.

Given the participatory culture that local people and organisations aim to embed in their development processes, residents were open to the listening methods of the research carried out alongside the start of school and community redevelopment in 2012. A selection of listening methods carried out in 2012-2013 is set out below.

4.2.3. Participatory photography

Participatory photography, referred to sometimes as ‘photo voice’, involves providing cameras to participants to record their lived experiences and perceptions.

ACTION

1. Compete with large real estate companies in Montreal and devise, together with the SHDM, new development models that incorporate social clauses.
2. Develop a new model of cooperative ownership for the housing tenants of SHDM in the sectors threatened by gentrification.
3. Connect local employment and training with the maintenance and repair needs of existing homes.
5. French teaching programmes.

Given potential barriers between researchers and participants, such as differences in language, culture, worldviews and life experiences, photography provides a common language as a basis for dialogue. In the photo-based dialogue sessions, many critical concerns and aspirations arose that nurtured debate, reflection and social learning among participants.

4.2.4. Participatory mapping

Mapping tools enable participants to present social, economic or environmental information in a spatial form. We used three participatory mapping processes: mobility, places and actors, in order to address the phronesis questions and provide means for the triangulation of data and methods.

**Participatory mapping processes**

**Mobility maps** are drawn in order to expose movement patterns of individuals or groups. Here we asked participants to depict on a map: a) where s/he travels on a daily or weekly basis; b) whether s/he has connections outside the region and/or receives remittances from outside the country; and c) whether s/he has ever travelled outside the region, and if so, where.

**Place maps** aim to reveal how participants perceive their everyday spatial surroundings by mapping roads, homes, water sources, community facilities (school, dance hall, cockfight pit), and sacred places (church, vodou temple, favourite spots). This inspired participants to co-design a walking tour of their community.

**Actor maps** depict important organisations, institutions and service providers in a community and participants’ assessment of each actor’s local importance and effectiveness. We carried out a collective assessment of all community actors operating in the sectors of: education, health, environment, spiritual life, finance and other.
4.2.5. Community core story
Also called meta-narrative, community core story is an interpretation tool that allows for collective meaning-making of various data collected, and then assessing social change over time. Based on interviews, image and mapping analysis, and collective dialogue sessions, we found patterns and created a community core story, which consists of vignettes that participants have socially constructed about their history, from being a ‘forgotten’ place and then living under a violent dictatorship, followed by a never-ending transition to democracy; ongoing disasters, from floods to hurricanes to the earthquake; and to post-earthquake school and community development with a new sense of connection with the wider world and a pride of community place. Future core story work will involve taking this narrative back to the community to provide a basis for discussion about how residents would like their collective story to evolve, and their agency in shaping that. Table 3 highlights some dynamics about community development and social change that were revealed through the listening methods.

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**Key Learnings**

Key learnings from the listening methods: Dynamics of community development and social change revealed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE REVEALED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participatory photography</td>
<td>» Participants value collective community outcomes over individual outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(and dialogue circles)</td>
<td>» Nostalgia for dictatorship years. Even with the threat of violence, life was more affordable and people were less hungry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Social learning in dialogue circles which elicited stories in collective interpretation of community history, human rights, and community problems and aspirations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory mapping</td>
<td>» Residents had a sense of being ‘forgotten’ by the outside world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Participants report a new sense of pride about living in this community because of the education, social enterprise and community development efforts underway and accompanying attention from the outside. They want their stories to be heard, as shown through their deciding to create a community walk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Regarding state/society relations, there is no expectation of participants that the state would act in their interests, or to respect basic human rights. In fact, some participants see violence by the state as necessary to control the population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» People are self-reliant (euphemism for ‘resilient’): residents self-organise to maintain community infrastructure, such as repairing roads and public water pipes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Multiple field visits over time allowed for reflection, testing, analysis, and adaptive learning to inform an iterative research design and strengthen relationships of trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>» Dynamics of power and trust in community relationships are critical and permeate all aspects of life and possibilities for community development and social change; yet these dynamics are often opaque to outsiders and to traditional international development research methods.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3. Case Study Results
The two cases of listening, though in quite different development contexts, revealed some common themes that emerged directly as a result of the methods about the communities and broader structural issues. The issues of housing, economic opportunity and culture/linguistic matters provide potential levers of transformation in both case communities.

With this listening methodology, the aim is not only to collect data and conduct analysis to generate results, such as themes and community core stories, but also to contribute to change through the process of carrying out the methods. The following table depicts what we have learned in the listening process about the methods themselves -- specifically some strengths and shortcomings of ethnography, digital storytelling, participatory photography and mapping, and the synthesis of mixing methods.

In both cases, participatory researchers and practitioners used the lens of phronesis questioning in order to better understand community challenges and possibilities for transformative change. This approach gave rise to the following theory of change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common themes that emerged as a result of the listening methods</th>
<th>COMMUNITY INNOVATION ACTIONS UNDERWAY OR PLANNED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>METHODS</td>
<td>MONTREAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Integrating social clauses in new housing projects, innovation in accessing property, and developing a new business model for housing developments in the area in collaboration with local cooperatives, and support of the Mondragon international cooperative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic opportunity</td>
<td>Develop a new local hiring program with anchor institutions and build cooperatives to employ and train local people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural / language issues</td>
<td>Develop new support efforts for French language learning in the workplace.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Strengths and shortcomings

## Key learnings about the listening methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>SHORTCOMINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic approach</td>
<td><strong>Collective sensemaking.</strong> Builds insights, trust, transfer of skills. Combines external views with local knowledge and history. Adds an intentional layer to build community innovation.</td>
<td><strong>Intense.</strong> The information gathered is not open to all and compromises collaboration thereafter. The ethnography is an intensive and engaging process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital storytelling</td>
<td><strong>Amplifies and extends the stories.</strong> It is multimedia and honours the work that has been completed and extends it beyond in time, space and impact. It contributes to changing narratives.</td>
<td><strong>Experts.</strong> Participants are not aware of the longer process they are part of. <strong>Time.</strong> It takes a lot of energy and time to produce and comes out a long time after a process is complete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory photography and dialogue circles</td>
<td><strong>Creative expression opportunity.</strong> Photographs and photo-taking are highly valued by participants and provide for expression of likes/dislikes, values, concerns, aspirations. <strong>Digital tech skills.</strong> Participants appreciated learning/seeing new skills of cameras, computer, printing, video. <strong>Social learning.</strong> Dialogue circles provided for social learning and revealed meta-narratives.</td>
<td><strong>Unmet expectations.</strong> Expectations sometimes unrealistic about research results. <strong>Miscommunications.</strong> Participants tended to view process as a photography training exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory mapping</td>
<td><strong>Crowd-sourced knowledge.</strong> Produced a comprehensive list of all local and international organisations, agencies, and groups whose work affects the community.</td>
<td><strong>Low tech.</strong> Minimal data inputs and low technologies (i.e. no topo, no precise scale or proportioning, and lack of detail represented on geography and existing buildings).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis: mixing methods</td>
<td><strong>Multiple voices.</strong> Enables hearing voices and stories as well as multiple narratives and perspectives; empowering the aspect of sharing stories outside. <strong>Rigour.</strong> Triangulating both methods and analysis: toolbox of methods and multiple means of analysis, e.g. narrative to collectively interpret and produce core stories for agency.</td>
<td><strong>Data overload.</strong> High quantity and variety of types of data collected present challenges for systematic analysis. <strong>Lack of immersive time.</strong> More time or frequency in the field would likely enable further nuanced understandings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Theory of Change: Transformative tools for community innovation

We derived a theory of change through learning from the Montreal and Haiti cases. It is based on an inductive (also called ‘bottom up’ or ‘grounded theory’) approach, in which theory is built from learning from experience in the field and patterns observed. The core elements are described below.

### A. Listen to local voices and make sense collectively of narratives that emerge.

By listening to voices and stories of local people and engaging context-specific methods, such as ethnographic interviews, participatory photography, mapping, and dialogue circles, we interpret patterns and meta-narratives. An aim is to value local knowledge and lived experience of community development processes and change underway.
B. Expose tension points.
Scrutinising emerging narratives from different perspectives exposes tension points, which involve relationships of power particularly susceptible to change because of dubious practices, contestable knowledge, and/or potential conflict. Tension points were revealed in both cases in the areas of unhealthy housing, lack of economic empowerment, and cultural/linguistic barriers.

C. Identify and activate levers of transformation.
Like crises, tension points open possibilities for change. Certain levers show promise for transformation with relevant community development processes underway, and others represent opportunities for developing new innovative interventions. Levers of transformation in our cases include issues around housing (such as the creation of worker cooperatives to provide housing repairs), economic opportunity (such as social enterprise start-ups), and culture/language matters (such as improving education practices and curricula).

D. Co-create community innovation initiatives that contribute to narratives of social change.
Activating levers of transformation engenders community innovation, which, in turn, opens pathways to new development trajectories and changing narratives. When embedded effectively in innovation platforms that employ ongoing listening methods, these new narratives produce and perpetuate transformative community development experiences that can be scaled up, scaled out and scaled deep.

Conclusion: Case learnings and looking ahead
The two listening cases in Montreal, Canada, and Bellevue-La-Montagne, Haiti, show that listening is contributing substantially to strengthening processes of community innovation, social entrepreneurship, and structural change. There is early evidence of social change at the community level through collective practices of listening, which have revealed shared narratives and are in the early stages of unleashing community innovation. Listening methodologies are different and complementary to quantitative methodologies and are critical to fostering social innovation.

“A society that maintains so much exclusion simply can’t achieve development. No way. Development has to involve everyone. Progressive ideas have to come forth. And there has to be space for participation by all citizens who’ve courageously begun the development of their communities with their own means, however modest. Change will come when the people are engaged right at the heart of things.”

Josette Pérard
Collective learning

The following five learnings cut across both case studies and serve to inform future work in the case of communities, as well as other contexts.

1. Build a robust model first, then scale.

The cases illustrate that listening and participatory tools and methods connect granular community level innovation to structural transformation. Results show that the community level innovation model must be made robust and its evidence must be convincing on multiple scales - local community, region and more broadly. Only then can it be scaled and adapted in ways that fully realise the potential.


The methods are context dependent and adapted in real time based on learning and multiple kinds of feedback. In order to be transformative, engaging these tools and methods requires high level skillsets, familiarity with listening methodologies, and capabilities of adaptation based on learning in the field.

3. Create a listening culture, build agency.

The listening methods cannot be thought of as a ‘first phase’ which then results in action. Rather, collective listening and participation, if practiced on an ongoing basis, becomes foundational to community culture. This contributes to building not only an individual sense of agency but, importantly, collective agency, which is needed for effective and transformative collective action (akin to Freire’s critical consciousness and praxis).

4. Place grounds platforms (as in ‘hubs’).

In both Haiti and Montreal, hubs in the community are the physical and metaphoric centre which serve as the space to build the participatory culture. In Haiti the school and grounds anchored the development of an education-centered culture. In Montreal, a meeting room in the community economic development organisation became the collective office, anchoring the connection with the strategic planning that was ongoing. Place based, physical hubs serve as grounding for longer term relationship building in listening processes.

4.6. Looking ahead

Two of the greatest challenges of our times, extreme inequality among people and planetary degradation, are clear and present. They demand new forms of collective action that have the power to unleash innovation of local and global communities to solve complex problems in new ways. We have argued in this article that collective action for social change can come about by activating more effective collective listening as a foundational platform for innovation.

The hopeful news is that many technologies exist, and are emerging, that can enable more effective collective listening. Here are several.

1. Transmedia methods, which involve telling multiple stories over multiple mediums. Examples include digital storytelling, videos and animations, podcasts, interactive theatre, solutions journalism, and others.

2. Mobile data collection for community and household level interviews and observation -- including self-reporting by participants, which enables new
forms of longitudinal study. For example, rather than collecting data every 3-5 years, participants can collect and report their own data much more frequently.

3. **Big data observatories** (and other big data tools) can bring together quantitative and qualitative data and technologies of artificial intelligence and machine learning with human-machine interactions in ways that provide for rapid processing, analysis and access to massive amounts of data for potentially deeper learning and more extensive understanding.

4. **Commoning methods**, such as regular and open meetings and radically inclusive access, participatory culture to foster individual and collective learning and growth, and to provide a sense of agency for collective action.

The combination of existing and rapidly emerging tools, such as those above, opens up new horizons for harnessing collective intelligence, which represents huge opportunity, given the world’s exponentially rapid population growth. However, given the increasing noise of daily life for massive numbers of people, particularly from digital platforms, listening in meaningful ways is a great challenge. Our aspiration in this work of listening for social change is grand. As we design and iterate our listening tools for transformation, we return regularly to this question: What becomes possible if we innovate in how we listen to each other, in the interest of creating communities of structural equality in a world that is regenerative to people and planet?

Based on our experience and case studies, we believe that the possibilities for community innovation are bounded primarily by our lack of listening. The challenge and the opportunity is for us to innovate our capacity to listen collectively in order to advance more effective action for social change.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**DR. JAYNE ENGLE** is with the McConnell Foundation, where she directs Cities for People, an initiative that fosters inclusive urban innovation for the Great Transition. She has experience in the US, Canada, Eastern and Western Europe and Haiti managing complex systems, and leading urban policy, community development and participatory research initiatives. Her doctoral thesis in urban planning, policy and design investigates Haiti’s post-earthquake reconstruction approaches to participatory governance, social change, and education-centered community development with social enterprises. She is Adjunct Professor at McGill University in Montreal.

**Social innovator, SAMANTHA SLADE** supports teams, organizations and ecosystems to work with complexity and grow a conscious innovation mindset. Samantha co-founded Percolab, an international self-governing network of for more than profit codesign firms. Based in Montreal, Canada, Samantha is a member of the Quebec Social Innovation network. Engaged in the living lab, fablab and the commons movements, business as commons, is the theme of Samantha’s TedX. With a background in cultural anthropology and education, Samantha is tuned into the subtleties of alignment of working culture and values. Author of Going Horizontal: Creating a Non-hierarchical Organization, One Practice at a Time (2018), Samantha believes that organizations can and should be a microcosm of the world we want to live in.
The past decade has seen a massive rise in the concept of co-creation: designing services and policies with citizens and other actors, not just for them. However, few organisations have yet to embrace co-creation fully as a mode of innovation at scale. Recent experiences from the Danish Design Centre show some approaches towards new and more scalable systems of co-creation. Perhaps the idea is not new, but its application is becoming much more widespread: the notion that in order to develop the best possible approaches to a given problem, it is relevant to explicitly involve a wide range of stakeholders – including end-users such as citizens or customers. A decade ago, you could sometimes find organisations which practiced such co-creative approaches; today, co-creation is beginning to be mainstream.

1. What is co-creation?

Typically, the methodologies of co-creation – which is sometimes also called co-design – revolve around three dimensions. First, exploring problems from a human perspective by the use of ethnographically inspired approaches such as open-ended interviews, field research and shadowing. Second, creating new
ideas with others through a range of workshop formats, sometimes digitally enabled. Third, building and testing new concepts through the use of prototypes: tangible suggestions for how a new product or service might look and function, which can be shown to potential users to get their feedback. The focus of co-creation can vary broadly: from exploring relevant services for at-risk youth to designing more hygienic products for a hospital to crafting new digital experiences for banking customers.

2. Innovation labs as co-creation facilitators

A strong indicator of the popularity of co-creation is the global rise of innovation labs: dedicated environments devoted to experimentation and fostering new ideas. By one account, there are at least 35 innovation labs in public sector organisations globally now, up from none at the turn of the century, while others such as the UK’s innovation foundation Nesta set the number as high as 100. The tendency is towards a proliferation of dedicated units, teams and spaces for systematic work on public and social innovation. Labs are being embedded in government structures at all levels, ranging from international organisations such as the European Commission and World Bank to countries including the United States, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal, the UK, Chile, Brazil, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and New Zealand, to cities ranging from New Orleans and Boston to Copenhagen, Seoul and Mexico City (Puttick et. al. 2014, Bason, 2014, 2016; Tonurist et. al. 2017; OECD, 2017).

In all of these cases, public organisations have built a capacity for co-creation and innovation by establishing separate units which can facilitate a wide range of involvement processes for them. Increasingly, private businesses embrace these methodologies as well. For instance you will find a growth in design thinking and co-creation in global firms such as IBM, SAP, Siemens and Intuit. In my own country, leading companies like Maersk, ISS and Leo Pharma are also embracing ‘corporate garages’ and innovation teams (we run a network of such labs which we title ‘X Labs’).

I was myself the director of such a lab, the Danish government’s MindLab, which I led from 2007 to 2014. At MindLab, we worked with policy domains such as employment and labour market services, education reform, and business and enterprise policy. We developed and honed methodologies for engaging citizens and businesses in processes of co-creation, and we extensively drew on design approaches.

We also spent significant time sharing our experiences with other governments and emerging labs globally. For instance, we worked with the government of Chile to support their establishment of the Laboratorio de Gobierno, an innovation lab hosted by the central government with the aim of creating a space for citizen engagement, collaboration and experimentation. As with many other emerging labs, there were a number of questions concerning governance, finance, competencies, organisational structure and methodological choices which had to be addressed. Learning from others can be a powerful way of accelerating development and success when venturing into something new, such as embedding innovation and co-creation in the heart of public administration.

3. Out of the lab: building an impactful organisation by design

When I moved on from MindLab to become CEO of the Danish Design Centre, I took the co-creation toolbox with me – not physically, but philosophically, as well as practically. When I started, the Centre was in a crisis and in need of reinvention. Having been part of the Ministry of Business for nearly 40 years, there was a desire from government to see a revitalised and dynamic Centre.

Faced with rebuilding a well-established organisation to become more engaging and more impactful, it seemed natural to deploy co-creation as an approach. Over the past three years we have built the Danish Design Centre as an entirely new organisation, increasing staff from around 14 to around 30, and more than doubling the operating budget. During that period, we have engaged several thousand business and government leaders in pursuit of our mission, which is to bring design and co-creation methodologies in play to power business development and new value creation across the Danish economy. Measurements done by externally validated standards show that with public investment in our activities over three years totalling five million euros, we have generated economic value in excess of 25 million euros, in terms of new revenue and economic activity in society.

4. A model for going from idea to scale

In the following section I would like to share and describe the organisation we have built, because it illustrates a model for how to codify co-creation into a holistic model for value-creation.

The model essentially encompasses four key principles: horizon scanning, co-design, co-production, and impact measurement.

![A model for a co-creative organization](image-url)
Horizon scanning is where co-creation is ignited. It concerns sensing coming trends and developments with potential policy or organisational consequence: establishing insight, foresight and scenarios to visualise plausible futures. Here, the function in the organisation — in our case led by a Head of Futures and Digital — is to create awareness of context factors of importance to the organisation; to build preparedness and resilience in view of possible disruptions; and to form a basis for policy planning and action. When horizon scanning, key questions include:

- Which political, economic, environmental, societal and technological factors should we care about?
- How could these driving forces influence us in the future?
- What should we do now to shape our future in a desirable direction?

Around the world, public organisations such as the Singaporean Government, Policy Horizons Canada, the OECD and the Dubai Future Foundation deploy foresight activities systematically. At the Danish Design Centre, we have recently developed four scenarios for the future of healthcare in Denmark in 2050.

Co-design involves, as mentioned, processes of exploring problems from an end user perspective; co-creating new ideas with users and stakeholders; and prototyping and testing early ideas. The purpose is to build an early validation of the fit and function of a policy idea, and create the basis for redesign and ultimately for decision-making. Key questions include:

- Who are the end users?
- How might this policy intervention work for them?
- Which other aspects do we need to take into account?

These kinds of questions were at the heart of our practices at MindLab, and indeed are often applied in innovation labs around the world. At the Danish Design Centre we are currently in the early stages of co-designing a programme together with a major philanthropy to address the circular economy in the future of construction. Here the ambition is to build an innovation challenge, addressing the question of how to build with zero waste. Establishing such a programme requires deep and comprehensive stakeholder and user involvement in the scoping phase.

Co-production is a term which is sometimes confused with co-creation, but is fundamentally different. Here the focus is not on new ideas, but on the realisation of objectives into practice. Co-production is by no means a new term; it was originally coined in the 1970s by US Nobel laureate Eleanor Ostrom. Her insight was that any (public) service is essentially not ‘delivered’ or ‘implemented’, but co-produced between the public organisation’s intervention and the citizens who engage with it. In practice, this entails organising and implementing policy through collaborative networks, and leveraging all relevant resources in an organisation’s environment to produce policy outcomes. Done well, this also entails establishing the hypotheses of change to experiment with policy by co-production; and ensuring the rigorous collection of qualitative and quantitative data which can document the extent to which outcomes are likely to be achieved.

Establishing such ‘hypotheses of change’ is important since it helps make staff in the organisation be explicit about which actions and factors we expect will
create intended change. It also raises awareness about critical success factors, and it helps the project team know what to measure to track changes, including unintended consequences. Key questions in co-production include:

- Based on our co-design process, which hypothesis are we now testing?
- What inputs, activities and outputs do we expect to realise?
- What would outcomes look like, if we are successful?

What we seek to embrace in the Danish Design Centre’s model is to view all policy interventions as essentially experimental. This means we need to start small scale, try things out quickly, and if somewhat successful, iterate to a larger scale. (If unsuccessful, try another small-scale experiment, or cancel the effort entirely). As illustrated in the figure, we work to realise co-production at three different scales, which allow for a high degree of risk management. First, when possible we start at prototype level. Here we place the biggest emphasis on experimenting; we ask: How does the intervention work? Who does it work for (who benefits)? Second, at programme level we shift the emphasis more towards learning. We ask: How can we learn from this now that the design is being realised? Third, we push successful programmes to scale where the emphasis shifts to sharing. Here, we ask: How can we share our insights and tools? Which actors can embed activities to go to scale? How can we reach more people/businesses?

An example of co-production in practice is our PLUS programme, which first involved six businesses in testing a model for matching them with design studios and providing monetary grants for them to work on a relevant business challenge. Based on successful experiences with this prototype, we scaled the programme to reach another 12 businesses, and conducted in-depth case studies and quantitative impact measurement. Finally, this year, we are building the essence of the learnings into a nation-wide effort to facilitate new digital business models in 100 firms.

Other examples of experimentation at scale – through co-production – could include the UK’s Government Digital Services, which successfully built digital platforms to power citizen engagement and interactions, or the UAE’s Future Accelerator Programs.

**Outcome measurement**, which ultimately concerns the ‘so what’ of co-creation: Do the efforts ultimately generate value? Here the task is to establish a systematic set of methodologies to document inputs, activities, outputs, and short- and long-term outcomes of interventions. Additionally, to suggest key

We develop and perfect methodologies for the involvement of citizens and the business world in the processes of co-creation, seeking to use innovative designs as much as possible.
performance indicators: the best indications of what success could look like; and then of course collecting data systematically. The purpose here is to use data to document for accountability and transparency of the co-creation and co-production activities; to drive continuous learning, and increase organisational performance; and most of all, to produce stronger outcomes. Some of the questions we ask are:

- Do our hypotheses hold?
- Are we achieving the positive change and outcomes we intended?
- What are unintended consequences — what should we adjust?

An organisational model such as this one is of course just one way of embedding co-creation into an institutional fabric. In our experience, one of the hardest parts is to get the roles and base organisation right: underpinning the processes, what is the reporting structure and responsibilities? What competencies are needed? How do we balance experimentation, learning and sharing? At the Centre we have addressed this by establishing a matrix organisation combining strategic platforms focusing on health, cities, SMEs, start-ups and design firms with practice areas across themes like executive training, transformation programmes, and branding activities. This structure is quite new and so only time will tell if it is appropriate and effective.

5. Can a country be a lab?

Some years ago, the British thinker and writer Charles Leadbeater observed that what we tried to do in bringing experimentation and co-creation into play was “to discover better ways of being Danish”. I always thought that was a very nice way of illustrating the ongoing efforts to try new approaches, learn, adapt, and try again.

It has made me think that the true systemic challenge of co-creation is not only to use the methodologies and mindsets involved to build and run a particular organisation; rather it is to use the organisation for a much bigger purpose: to drive societal change at scale.

At the Danish Design Centre we have recognised this perspective by establishing the following long-term vision: shaping the next society. By this we mean that through using and leveraging design methodologies, we can help advance an exploration of not just better products and services and business models, but better ways to conduct business, to conduct our lives, and to conduct policy. And here’s the essence of co-creation: Who would not want to take part in shaping what comes next? You are hereby invited to join us.
Introduction

In the 21st century the world faces social, environmental and financial challenges of unprecedented magnitude and complexity. Globally, governments and society are struggling to deal with these ‘wicked’ problems, and are increasingly looking at new methods of identifying solutions to these huge challenges.

However, the world is brimming with creative and committed ‘Social Mavens’ or ‘Community Vanguards’ who want to find new, innovative solutions to tackle inequality within their communities, developing a new social innovation lens and coming together through the power of co-creation and collective impact.

A key ingredient to any entrepreneurial and social innovation success is a supportive community eco-system. By community eco-system we don’t just mean the usual support structures that are available to social entrepreneurs and innovators, but the overarching support that is available through the community where those people live and have chosen to set up their businesses or new organisations driving positive purpose and change.

Agents of social change

- **Social Maven**: They will listen deeply and use their lived experience and expertise (knowledge) to identify solutions to key issues within their communities.

- **Community Vanguard**: Individuals and social entrepreneurs who want to create positive social change in their community.

This article provides a high-level starting point and background research that new community eco-system builders can use to provide new dynamic and innovative approaches in order to create meaningful social impact and increased community cohesion or become the new ‘social glue’ within their communities.

As will be highlighted throughout this article through ethnographic and participatory research, in movement building, design thinking and entrepreneurship it is possible to enable the creation and scaling of new interventions, movements and institutions that empower people to work together to address inequality and lead happier and more meaningful lives. By applying a bespoke range of methods, it is possible for communities to create new micro-movements to develop new support systems, breaking down barriers which hold back aspiring social innovators and entrepreneurs – the next wave of social mavens and community vanguards.

1. Starting with a conversation

The core principle of developing any community-led innovation programme and engaging with individuals and organisations in those communities is to “tread lightly and listen deeply.” It is imperative that as designers of community-led innovation programmes that we do not offer the solution to an issue as this can lead to bias and stifle innovation led by the community.

Designing meaningful and innovative solutions for new innovators and social entrepreneurs within their communities begins with understanding their needs, hopes and aspirations for the future.

It is essential to tread lightly and listen deeply – you must believe that people from all walks of life are able to tell their story and put forward their ideas for change.

By starting these ‘conversations’ you can begin to focus on three core aspects:

1. connecting a diverse movement of people who are passionate about creating a fairer place to live;
2. amplifying the evolving narratives of a place; and
3. supporting people and communities who have ideas for positive social action (i.e. social entrepreneurship or activism).

Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.
2. Motivations: “an overarching theory”

Community-led innovation is underpinned by the formation of movements and this primary vehicle can deliver genuinely transformational social change. This ‘overarching theory’ or alternatively a ‘socially sustainable places model’ brings together the key mechanisms that need to be present in communities and wider society for micro-movements to form and connect into larger regional movements.

This model proposes that deep-rooted social transformations – like the movements for sanitation in early industrial cities, desegregation in America, peace in Northern Ireland and workers’, women’s, LGBT and disability rights around the world — are founded on five elements within this overarching theory:

1. **Recognition of a collective problem:** inequality is corrosive as it impacts adversely upon people’s individual lives, upon their communities, and upon society in general. Often this recognition pre-exists in a place and is the basis for initial discussions there.

2. **An understanding of the scale of the challenge:** inequality is highly complex, multi-factorial and manifests itself in many ways. This complexity means it is not amenable to simple solutions or single sector approaches.

3. **A belief that change is possible:** inequality is not inevitable, and it persists partly due to a dominant narrative which sustains the myth that it is inevitable and entrenched, and as a result, it cannot be challenged. This leads to piecemeal approaches which seek only to mitigate its worst effects rather than disrupt and eradicate its causes. Inequality is neither inevitable nor acceptable.

4. **Collective action:** momentum for change must be people-led. Communities and places that have seen positive transformation demonstrate that all parts of a place can come together around the values which they share if they carry the core conviction that a different and fairer future is possible. It is only with this conviction that real change can be made.

5. **A connection between recognition and action:** new ideas must connect to a shared narrative of transformation. To have an impact, these new ideas and ways of working must connect to values which are shared between and across communities, and which buy into a collective narrative about a positive future. Without this connection, innovations will be likely to fail due to a lack of support, contribution, and advocacy, from their supporters, beneficiaries, and funders. For social innovation to have a lasting impact, there must be deep integration and interconnection between initiatives to form a movement of transformation.
3. Let’s talk about values

The methods used in community led innovation aren’t unique to a particular purpose – they are tools of engagement and innovation that can be used for many different reasons.

What shapes new movements and outcomes through community-led innovation are the core values that bring people together, and the way in which the process is facilitated or led by those who are already involved.

Throughout community-led innovation initiatives, it is essential that the team supporting the participants from the community are united by the beliefs that:

- change should be defined and made by those who have lived experience of the issue, and rooted in place;
- everyone has a role to play. We recognise mutuality, and prioritise principles of inclusion and participation;
- we should not be afraid to challenge the power dynamics that perpetuate social inequalities; and
- for positive transformation to happen, more just and inclusive narratives must be grounded in the positive values and collective strengths that exist in communities.

4. Key Components within Communities

In the introduction I highlighted that communities are brimming with creative and committed individuals that are either social mavens or community vanguards, but equally important are those other people who live in those communities and who have:

- **Lived Experience**: the experience of people on whom a social issue, or combination of issues, has had a direct personal impact.
- **Lived Expertise**: knowledge, insights, understanding and wisdom gathered through lived experience.

This leads to many of these people being

- **Experts by Experience**: social change-makers who seek to use their lived experience to inform the work of social purpose organisations, to drive and lead social change, and/or drive their impact, to become the next social mavens and community vanguards.

From this, we can combine the latent and explicit skills of the community to drive innovation, co-creation and create long-term community cohesion.
5. So, here’s the thing – What is community?

A common perception is that communities relate to just the people (residents) living in or associated with that community. However, communities are much more complex by nature and should consider the networks and micro-movements contained within that community. These may include the following: informal (people), non-profit organisations (3rd sector), social enterprises, educational establishments, business, government and associated statutory organisations.

These micro-movements are inter-linked into a local community ecosystem impacting directly and indirectly on each other. These local communities also link into wider regional communities and so forth. No one micro-movement should be treated in isolation when identifying ways to create social change and impact.

6. As an aside: Can business be the ‘anchor’ of community-led innovation?

At a time of decreasing government support in developed nations, coupled with significant demographic and societal shifts, communities are becoming increasingly fragile with increasing levels of inequality (e.g. youth unemployment, poverty, ageing population etc.) that may eventually impact on local businesses. Businesses are intertwined in the community eco-system, providing employment, training, purchasing from local suppliers and income (salaries) distribution within local communities and micro-businesses (e.g. hairdressers, corner-shops etc.). These bigger SMEs can be viewed in many ways as ‘anchoring the community’.

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**Good Capitalism – A Snapshot**

Over the last few years the term “Good Capitalism” has appeared in numerous articles suggesting that business has moved from a position of being purely driven by profit to one where both environmental and societal issues have been reflected in business strategy. Indeed many are fully aligned to their societal and environmental commitments, but the majority are just “responsible” businesses compliant with regulations and government policies.
However, in recent years, there has been growing recognition that increasing inequality in local communities will be a significant threat to business (e.g. lack of skills, educational attainment, etc.). To date, many businesses have focused on corporate social responsibility which may be well-intentioned and aligned in some part to the ethos of the business, but have limited impact on the local communities that the business is anchoring. Business needs to understand what its impact is on the local community and build a detailed understanding of what the social issues are. Only then, once it has connected through deep listening in
the community, can it identify a ‘common purpose’, aligning its social aims with the community and leading to effective co-creation.

The adjoining panel describes a new framework that has been designed to enable business, government and communities to harness the power of social innovation and create a more inclusive economy within those regions and nations.

7. Transformers – Introducing social innovation into communities

So, what is innovation? The word ‘innovation’ means bringing in something new. As such, it is not inherently virtuous. Innovations can fail, and they can damage services. But innovation also enables many fields of human activity to advance through the systematic experiment and testing that demonstrates what does and doesn’t work.

In applying this to communities it becomes clear that innovation is created across all sections of the community and initiated by individuals, business, 3rd sector organisations and combinations of the above (e.g. micro-movements). At its core, innovation is about solving problems and there are as many ways to innovate as there are types of problems to solve. There is no ‘true’ path to innovation.

However, within community-led innovation eco-systems there are five distinct types of innovation driven by different factors and needs:

1. **Micro (Informal) level innovation**: social innovation driven primarily by the informal sector – citizens/residents within micro-communities (e.g. residents within a street, specific postcode etc.). Innovation is ordinarily linked to issues directly affecting that micro-community through lived experience, mostly linked to social activism, micro-capacity building and limited enterprise.

2. **Micro (enterprise) level innovation**: social innovation and enterprise driven by the informal sector and individual entrepreneurs. Again, citizen/resident led within micro-communities. Innovation driven by both social issues, lived experience and individual needs within that micro-community (i.e. skills and training needs, unemployment, health issues, etc.) leading to increased levels of start-up enterprises (including social enterprise).

3. **Small and medium-sized innovation**: social innovation and enterprise driven by a range of actors with direct links into the wider community (i.e. combined micro-communities such as housing estates and small villages). This range of actors includes citizens, micro-enterprises, local businesses, 3rd sector organisations, local government and statutory organisations. Innovation driven by social entrepreneurs and micro-movements (e.g. collaborations) leading to small/medium-sized innovations, social enterprises and social activism supported by increased levels of funding, investment and technology.
4. **Large and corporate level innovation**: social innovation and enterprise driven by a range of larger scale organisations (e.g. large business, corporates and NGOs etc.) tackling larger scale ‘wicked’ problems, incorporating wider CSR initiatives and national/global collaborations. Innovation driven by senior management teams and internal social intrapreneurs leading to new product/services and spin out innovations supported primarily by business itself, larger scale social investment, technology and government incentives.

5. **Policy reform and public-sector innovation**: Primarily driven by successful social innovations and associated social impact from micro, small/medium and large/corporate-led innovations. Internal public sector social innovation driven by public sector intrapreneurs leading to policy creation and reform, incentives and capacity building support across all levels of community led-innovation.

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**Amplify NI**

Amplify NI designed by the Young Foundation is an excellent example of a socially sustainable places model that can act as a catalyst within communities to nourish and propagate community-led innovation at a micro and small/medium innovation level.

Whilst innovative and creative work can be found in every community in Northern Ireland, there are also stark inequalities – unemployment, low educational attainment, social isolation, alcohol abuse, debt and discrimination to name but a few. These pervasive and accelerating manifestations of an unequal society are exerting huge pressure on communities, services and civic and political systems and holding back economic performance. Whilst these deep-rooted problems are shared with most developed regions around the world, the challenges in Northern Ireland are particularly acute.

The Amplify approach generates new narratives of transformation capable of connecting the identity of the territory with a “collective decision” to build a socially sustainable region, which people are proud to be associated with, and proud to be living in.

The role of Amplify NI is to bring people together, to help them understand what is happening in their community, to find the shared values hopes and aspirations around which they can act to enable them to build the skills and access the support needed to maximise their impact. At every step on the road map outlined our aim is to build capacity in the community, to build movements of people working together, and to build overarching narratives of transformation that have broad community ownership and traction.

Over the last three years Amplify NI has connected the initial listening process to action by employing the following steps:

- Open dialogue and partnerships.
- Research (ethnographic and participatory)
- Storytelling
- Co-Creation
- “Peoples” accelerator
- Keeping the movement connected

www.amplifyni.org & www.youngfoundation.org
8. The art of co-creation: The ‘linchpin’ of community-led innovation

Co-Creation is defined as “an initiative, or form of strategy, that brings different parties together to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome”. In community-led innovation the definition needs to be reframed as “a community-led initiative or form of co-design and co-production bringing people together to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome for that community.”

In a true business context co-creation is not easy, as highlighted by McKinsey: “involving outsiders in the creative process of developing products and services is harder than it sounds... While attempts to create products or services jointly may produce desirable side effects—in the form of reduced market-research costs or increased customer loyalty—the ultimate goal of bringing outstanding products to the market remains elusive.”

However, within community-led innovation in places where significant dialogue (conversations) and research has been undertaken this culminates in storytelling sessions connecting lived experience and expertise in the community and enabling it to be heard. This acts as a catalyst for people to be inspired, leading to effective partnerships and collaboration within the community. Critical to this process is expert facilitation and mentoring.

Co-creation should naturally flow from this series of steps and is crucial to developing ideas. It could be stated that co-creation is the linchpin that connects all the components of a community-led innovation pathway.

9. Does business have a social purpose?
Bringing business back into the conversation

Returning to the subject of business as an “anchor in the community”, it is essential that community-led innovation involves local businesses. In the past, companies rarely perceived themselves as agents of social change. Yet the connection between social progress and business success is increasingly clear. Also in the last decade, research has emerged from universities, think tanks and organisations such as the IMF and Standard and Poor’s showing clear evidence that “inequality actually hinders growth”.

If the evidence suggests that inequality is bad for the economy of any country and that it consistently erodes community cohesion, then it is critical that businesses at all levels from micro to corporate need to be integral actors providing the necessary enablers for community-led innovation.

There has been considerable research into how business can maintain its competitiveness and the health of the wider community. Kramer and Porter have developed the concept of Shared Value which focuses on connections between societal and economic progress.
The Social Jam framework offers an alternative lens on a community-led innovation pathway that is driven by all actors in that community, including the management and employees of businesses, to find new, innovative solutions through a deep understanding of each other’s lived experiences.

10. The Practical Side of Community Led Innovation

Due to the diversity of communities, a wide range of methods and tools need to be employed to enable change-makers and their communities to come together through ‘combined narratives’ that ultimately lead to ‘transformative narratives’, leading to change within communities driven by connected micro-movements and greater community cohesion.
11. The community-led innovation pathway – six steps

The role of community-led innovation is to bring people together, to help them understand what is happening in their community, to find shared values, hopes and aspirations around which they can act, to enable them to build skills to access the support needed to maximise their impact. At every step on the community-led innovation pathway, the aim is to build capacity in the community, to build movements of people working together, and to build overarching narratives of transformation that have broad community ownership and traction. The programmes that have been highlighted in this article show a clear process of how to do this by following six fundamental steps:

1. **Open dialogue with partners:** at its simplest, this is starting a conversation to gain the trust of the residents in the local community. There is normally always a level of suspicion within communities at the start of any community-led innovation process and this can only be overcome by building trust and empathy within these communities. Whilst the methodology for this step is straightforward – meet with people and talk with them in open dialogue – it is often a step that is too often short-circuited. By prioritising these discussions, it’s possible to build strong partnerships and working relationships with a wide range of actors within communities.
2. **Research**: following on from the initial conversations within communities is intensive research. The approach combines two complimentary strands: (1) ethnographic research undertaken by the team facilitating the overall process and (2) participatory research undertaken by the community with support from the facilitation team. By taking this approach, it is then possible to harness the benefits of both the ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives. Again, a range of mixed methods (e.g. Building Blocks Approach) are used to achieve a holistic understanding of people, place and inequality.

3. **Storytelling**: this is the key element of community-led innovation that connects the listening and research to action. Stories are fundamental to how we all understand the world and our place in it. Through this process, it’s possible to reframe and change stories to create new possibilities of positive transformations that can be achieved. These stories can inspire people and lead to effective partnerships and collaboration.

4. **Co-Creation**: this is the ‘crux’ of community-led innovation, as already highlighted in this article. Communities are best placed to understand, shape and identify the innovations that are likely to deliver the transformation to which they aspire. Co-creation allows people in communities to direct the development of new processes, services and products, enabling people from across communities to build a deeper understanding of local needs and collectively identify new responses.

5. **Accelerator**: the innovations with the most potential need to be accelerated. This will enable the people leading these new innovations to have ongoing support to develop and sustain them. These accelerators should concentrate on several areas, as highlighted, which have been identified as the ‘missing middle’ of expertise that has been found to be missing in supporting social entrepreneurs and innovators in their ventures. Accelerators also need to be designed from the ground up to engage a much broader audience, bringing those innovators who would otherwise be excluded to the fore. A typical accelerator would normally be delivered over a 4-6-month period and may consist of the following five components:

- a formal taught curriculum through several workshops over the period of the accelerator;
- provision of coaches from the team facilitating the community-led innovation programme who work with entrepreneurs, innovators and teams to help them refine their idea;
- provision of mentors with relevant experience of successful venturing matched to each entrepreneur, innovators or teams;
- regular opportunities to ‘pitch’ for support from the local community as this will support longer-term sustainable community cohesion; and
- showcase days where entrepreneurs, innovators and teams can take their ideas to a wide range of funders and investors.

6. **Keeping the movement connected**: it’s imperative that a movement of people and organisations is formed to work together to advance action on the identified narratives of transformation. Movement building is integral to every aspect of community-led innovation.

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1. **The Crux**: “The most important or serious part of a matter, problem or argument”
A Building Blocks Approach

All communities are unique, so it is essential that no one set method is applied to drive community-led innovation.

A flexible and adaptable “building blocks” approach needs to be applied with a suite of methods that can be used within different communities. A sample list of methods is shown below:

- Appreciative inquiry
- Theory of Change
- Life mapping
- Stakeholder mapping
- Empathy mapping
- Asset mapping
- Focus groups
- Walk a mile immersion
- Story telling
- Ethos mapping
- Fly on the wall observation

12. Final Thoughts – sustainable waves of transformation and future outcomes

Communities are unique and multi-faceted places with many complex and varied social issues. This article has highlighted the importance of engaging with individuals and organisations in communities, by treading lightly, listening deeply, co-creating with and supporting community-led innovation through a flexible building blocks approach.

However, community-led innovation is not just a one-time process but a continuous iterative cycle of transformative waves that combine to create a sustainable platform for social change, and larger scale movement building through inter-connected micro-movements. If successful community-led innovation occurs and these larger social movements gain momentum and traction, then communities will be able to combat social issues and the underlying structural inequalities to deliver the following outcomes as identified by the Young Foundation:

- **Things change for everyone**: the new insights, opportunities and networks generated by the movement are not simply located within one part, sector or community. They extend across a place.

- **Sweeping change is delivered**: there are real changes in ways in which decisions about resources are made, and new voices are involved in taking these decisions. Funds are controlled by local people and new voices are recognised and represented in decisions about distributing these resources.

- **The movement sustains itself**: while the location and nature of the movement may change within a place, the cause on which it is built does not. The movement sustains because, for its adherents, the cause, and not the form of the movement, is the top priority.

- **The movement generates action**: the word movement means to create action, to go from one place to another. The movement must result in a pipeline of new ideas and innovations. Sustaining a movement is about sustaining action.

Additional to these outcomes there will also be other benefits to the communities that design and co-create effective social innovation through community-led initiatives, such as:
Increased levels of entrepreneurship within communities and embedded community support for these entrepreneurs and their enterprises.

Increased levels of social innovation and retained knowledge retained and embedded in communities through new and existing social mavens and community vanguards.

Increased awareness of business of social issues and structural inequalities within their external communities leading to more collaboration, partnerships and community-led innovation.

Increased social and impact investment through traditional and new crowdfunding platforms, as well as renewed support from government through incentives and support.

The stage is set and the methods in place to now build these new transformative waves through new social movements driven by community-led innovation.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead
Introduction

In recent years there has been a shift in international aid and human development programming away from linear cause and effect-oriented models and towards more integrated approaches that account for the context specific to the social, technical, logistical and political aspects of a target market, value chain, or recipient society. Funders and financiers of development initiatives have been influential in driving this shift by changing their funding priorities, the types of projects and implementers that are funded, and their role in end-to-end project engagement. Many funders have moved away from being mere donors to a more embedded model, where their involvement ranges from partners in design and co-creation to active participants in implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Within this changing focus in the development agenda, an interesting evolution has been the rapid increase in the creation of social innovation labs in both developing and developed country contexts. This investment into innovation has been spurred by an increasing acknowledgement and understanding that today’s development challenges occur in, and are products of, the complexity of the world’s social and ecological systems.
In contrast to the more traditional development approach that utilises a logical framework to implement activities that are prescribed to respond to concrete, prespecified development objectives, the new development paradigm outlined above has a much different set of data and information requirements to enable adaptive management across a project life cycle. Across development programming (traditional or in the new paradigm of complexity-oriented approaches), performance monitoring is a keystone of monitoring, evaluation and learning.

However, the characteristics of complex systems create several ‘blindspots’ for this type project monitoring that inhibit the implementing team’s and funder’s ability to collect the data and information needed to adaptively manage a programme or development intervention, particularly one where co-creation and collective development action inside a complex development ecosystem is required.

These blindspots and shortfalls limit the utility of a purely performance-based approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning. As such, both traditional funders such as foundations and bi-lateral donors have focused on designing tools and methods to enhance the effectiveness of data collection efforts across the programme life cycle in order to provide more complete, more accurate, and more timely information to design more appropriate intervention strategies, better assess programme effectiveness, and more responsive adaptive management. In addition to designing complexity-aware monitoring, evaluation and learning tools, there has been a rise in knowledge around good practices in their use.

For interventions that seek to catalyse social innovation, a complexity-aware approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning is critically important throughout the entire programme life cycle. Such an approach should seek to collect and analyse information on multiple scales of change in the development ecosystem, including the following:

- **Who are the stakeholders in the system, and how do they define the multiple social development challenges that are relevant to them?**

- **What interventions are co-created, and which of the identified development challenges are they seeking to address?**

- **What are the baseline conditions in the ecosystem that are relevant to the identified challenges in terms of individual characteristics of each stakeholder (including implementers and funders) and environmental or economic factors? What are the baseline interrelationships among stakeholders and factors? How does each stakeholder perceive those relationships? And what is external to the development ecosystem that...**

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**Blindspots**

- Unanticipated or unmeasured outcomes
- Attribution dilemmas
- Multiple drivers of change
- Unobservable and non-linear changes

**Recommendations of good practices**

- **Design monitoring, evaluation and learning strategies to account for the blindspots** of traditional performance monitoring;

- **Synchronise monitoring, evaluation and learning** with the pace of change (or paces of change) in the development context; and

- **Create monitoring, evaluation and learning strategies that inform programmes** on a) interrelationships among actors and factors in the development ecosystem, b) the perspectives that each actor has regarding the intervention, interrelationships, and the changes that are occurring in the system, and c) the boundaries of the system in order to direct energy and resources into relevant factors and dynamics.
could impact or be impacted by the interventions?

How are relationships and structures changing over time as a result of endogenous and exogenous shocks? What unintended and unobserved changes are occurring?

At the macro level, what can be learned from changes across interventions/programmes? Are there meta lessons on how change happens in development ecosystems?

A monitoring, evaluation and learning system that is responsive to those information and analytical needs will need to include a variety of performance monitoring techniques, complemented by more sophisticated strategies and methods for overcoming the blindspots described earlier. However, by re-envisioning the role of monitoring and evaluation as essential for real time, responsive programme management, and by re-envisioning the role of implementors, funders, and beneficiaries as all stakeholders with access to and responsibility for various types of information, the burden of monitoring and evaluation can shift from a costly responsibility to an essential, value-additive programme management strategy.

2. Background on evolution of development programming

In recent years there has been a shift in international aid and human development programming away from linear cause and effect-oriented models and towards more integrated approaches that account for the context specific to the social, technical, logistical and political aspects of a target market, value chain, or recipient society.

While many discrete sectors and programmes embody this transition, the shift is globally visible in the movement of the international community toward the Sustainable Development Goals that recognise the interconnectedness of those various context-specific aspects, as well as the complementarity of a multi-pronged approach to development.¹

Funders and financiers of development initiatives have been influential in driving this shift by changing their funding priorities, the types of projects and implementers that are funded, and their role in end-to-end project engagement. Many funders have moved away from being mere donors to a more embedded model, where their involvement ranges from partners in design and co-creation to active participants in implementation and monitoring and evaluation.² In many developing country contexts, the change in funder priorities and engagement strategies is a product of several factors including: 1) decades of external investment without many tangible and measurable achievements in poverty reduction or market sophistication, particularly for the rural and peri-urban poor; 2) acknowledgement of the critical role that private sector actors play in increasing efficiency in markets and value chains and mobilising capital to create and strengthen market linkages; and 3) a growing evidence base that innovation and entrepreneurship lead to emergent markets, value chain linkages, and social returns on investment.³

Within this changing focus in the development agenda, an interesting evolution
has been the rapid increase in the creation of social innovation labs in both developing and developed country contexts. These innovation labs can facilitate the co-creation of new technologies, policies, and practices by leveraging the experience, expertise, and perspective of multiple actors. This is particularly the case when significant attention is given to the co-creative process by creating opportunities for active participation by multiple types of actors in the ecosystem who work at different levels of social, economic, political, and geographic aggregation. The logic that underpins this is to elicit the knowledge, expertise, perspective, and experience of participants across the development ecosystem to generate new and deep knowledge about system dynamics.

This investment into innovation has been spurred by an increasing acknowledgement and understanding that today’s development challenges occur in, and are products of, the complexity of the world’s social and ecological systems. Whereas the more traditional approach to development understood the world in linear, cause and effect-oriented terms, a complex system view of the world acknowledges that we live in systems with multiple interconnected physical, social, and political components, and that the interaction of those components across multiple spatial and social scales create dynamics that affect the behaviour, function, and interconnectivity of the entire system. In a complex system, cause and effect are not directly traceable and any action in one part of the system will initiate a cascade of interaction and change across interconnected parts of the system and across multiple scales. This gives complex systems emergent properties that impact various actors and components in the system in unique ways and make it difficult for any individual actor to have enough information to predict how a given action will affect the system. Thus, action and intervention in complex systems can be understood as being ‘Wicked Problems’.

As interest in wicked problems has grown, a great deal of academic and practical work has been put into identifying strategies to create successful change in complex systems. There is now a rich body of theoretical and practice-based literature describing how to effect change in such systems.

### The common elements\(^5\) are generally grouped into the following steps:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formulate the Problem:</th>
<th>Identify Potential Strategies for Intervention and Innovation:</th>
<th>Test Interventions and Refine Hypotheses:</th>
<th>Monitor, Evaluate, and Learn:</th>
<th>Adaptively Manage Interventions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>through a participatory process, determine what problems are faced by various actors, identify the relevant stakeholders, collectively identify which what resources are available, and prioritise how to focus collective action toward constructive change.</td>
<td>generate hypotheses about how change occurs in the system, identify entry points and levers for change, and design intervention strategies.</td>
<td>mobilise financial, human, political and social resources to implement interventions and refine hypotheses through trial and error.</td>
<td>design systems for collecting information that can be used to monitor the progress and effectiveness of interventions, create systems for learning from implementation.</td>
<td>design interventions to be flexible to changes in system, utilise information from monitoring, evaluation and learning to implement course corrections to adapt to changing system dynamics and contexts.</td>
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</table>

4. Discussion of the role of innovation labs as facilitators of co-creation is provided more fully in Bason, C. (2018). *Towards the co-creative organization: From idea to scale.*

In contrast to the more traditional development approach that utilises a logical framework to implement activities that are prescribed to respond to concrete, prespecified development objectives, the new development paradigm outlined above has a much different set of data and information requirements to enable adaptive management across a project life cycle. As the next section of this paper describes, development interventions in complex systems, and particularly those that seek to initiate and drive social innovation, require a complexity-aware approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

3. Traditional monitoring, evaluation, and learning and its blindspots

Across development programming (traditional or in the new paradigm of complexity-oriented approaches), performance monitoring is a keystone of monitoring, evaluation and learning. According to USAID, performance monitoring, “...is the ongoing and systematic collection of performance indicator data and other quantitative or qualitative information to reveal whether implementation is on track and whether expected results are being achieved.” The goal of this approach to monitoring is to enable implementers to assess and measure the contribution of activities and actions towards producing specific outputs that will lead to the desired outcomes for the development project or initiative.

Performance monitoring is typically based on a causal analysis framework that identifies a concrete problem and the underlying causes and conditions that give rise to it. From there, the causal framework will specify a theory of change or development hypothesis that links action to desired change and specifies which activities are required to achieve the desired goals. That framework is then used to identify indicators and milestones that signal whether or not the change is being realised. Finally, this approach will specify data collection and analysis tools, and techniques to ensure the timely collection of information needed to monitor programme performance. An example of a causal analysis framework is provided in Figure 1 below.
Performance monitoring serves a critical role in development monitoring, evaluation and learning. This is typically the core activity in a logical framework for programme design and management, as it enables the project team to demonstrate an empirical basis to justify programmatic activities, and provides accountability and transparency between funders, implementers, and recipients of programming.

However, the characteristics of a complex system described earlier create several ‘blindspots’9 for this type of project monitoring that inhibit the implementing team’s and funder’s ability to collect the data and information needed to adaptively manage a programme or development intervention, particularly one where co-creation and collective development action inside a complex development ecosystem is required. These blindspots are briefly described below.

### 3.1. Unanticipated or unmeasured outcomes

A traditional logical framework or indicator-based approach to performance monitoring will utilise a programme’s limited human and financial resources allocated for monitoring and evaluation as efficiently as possible in order to collect enough information to sufficiently assess programme performance. This typically means that programmes will only collect information on pre-specified activities, outputs, and outcomes. For instance, the example provided in Figure 1 above describes a programme whose goal is reducing infant mortality. To accomplish that, the programme will conduct education programmes with mothers to encourage breastfeeding for infants younger than 6 months of age. According to the causal analysis, this should limit exposure to environmental hazards and should increase infants’ access to a nutrient-rich food source.

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9. These ‘blindspots’ are detailed more fully in a presentation by Wilson-Grau (2013) that was given at the launch of USAID’s Complexity-Aware Monitoring programme on 21 October 2013 in Washington DC.
A performance monitoring approach for such a programme would track whether or not the education programmes are conducted, rates of participation and behaviour change for participants, nutrition and disease levels for infants, and mortality rates. However, it is entirely possible that such education programmes could lead to a host of other outcomes including potential changes in household labour force participation, changes in spending in household income, changes in local markets for breastmilk substitute, and so forth. A narrow performance assessment would fail to capture any of those changes, because it is focused on monitoring indicators that are logically tied to the specific programmatic activities and hypothesised changes. As such, this blind spot leads to failure to recognise and measure alternative and additional outcomes in the system that result from the cascade of changes initiated by a single programmatic action. Importantly, once a change has been initiated in a complex system, it can further influence the system through feedback processes and create new dynamics that did not exist prior to the intervention. In this way the system is constantly changing through endogenous and exogenous influences.

3.2. Attribution dilemmas

The second blindspot of traditional performance monitoring involves the difficulty in causally linking programmatic activities with observed changes. A logical framework or causal analysis framework demonstrates the logical linkages of cause and effect in an intervention. In the example provided in Figure 1, the causal linkage is an increase in knowledge for mothers resulting in reduced exposure to environmental hazards and increased exposure to nutritious food, which in turn results in lower rates of infant mortality. However, in a complex system a host of changes are simultaneously occurring across multiple social and environmental scales in the system, and it is extremely difficult to attribute the observed changes to the programmatic activities. For instance, it is possible that a municipality in the hypothetical example above implemented an upgrade to water infrastructure and reduced the risk of exposure to water borne illness. Thus, reduced infant mortality would result from the absence of environmental hazards, and not mothers’ participation in education programming. However, traditional performance monitoring would not capture that contextual information, and as such a causal link between the education campaign and reduced infant mortality would be spurious.

Certain experimental designs like Randomized Control Trials can overcome such attribution dilemmas by reducing error in measurement. Unfortunately, however, they are typically too costly in time, human and financial resources to be viable for many development interventions.

3.3. Multiple Drivers of Change

While the attribution dilemma may seem to indicate an either/or duality to development outcomes, the reality is that there are actually multiple processes and pathways for change to be expressed in a complex system. Because development programmes occur in a constellation of other political, economic, cultural and environmental activities, it is often difficult to measure the impacts of a single intervention. In the example above, rather than either the education programme or the infrastructure improvement being the sole cause of reduced infant mortal-
ity, both interventions (as well as many other concurrent changes in the system – for instance better access to healthcare, better antenatal care, more general access to information made possible through enhanced internet access, etc.) contribute to any observed reduction in infant mortality rates. A traditional performance monitoring programme will likewise fail to capture the contribution of multiple contextual factors as well.

3.4. Unobservable and non-linear changes
Whereas the first three blindspots described above refer to observable outcomes not being measured, the final blindspot deals with outcomes that are extremely difficult or impossible to measure. The logical framework and indicator-based measurement included in traditional performance monitoring is rooted in a positivist or empiricist methodological approach that collects data on empirically observable outcomes. However, many development goals require (or inadvertently result in) changes in belief systems, attitudes, cultural practices, and social relationships, which are by subjective phenomena and thus defy positivist empirical measurement. In the example above, the causal analysis logic relies on education leading to a change in perception and belief around the nutritional value and cultural acceptability of specific infant feeding practices. Such shifts in perception can be difficult to observe. Behaviour change around those feeding practices may be a proxy for changes in beliefs and perceptions, but a host of intervening factors may alternatively be responsible, like incentive programmes or household needs that stimulate participation without changing underlying norms and values. Thus, a proxy will serve to satisfy indicator-based monitoring requirements but will not actually provide evidence of the phenomena in question.

Many development objectives require changes in belief systems, attitudes, cultural practices and social relationships. These are subjective phenomena and, therefore, positivist empirical measurements are not applicable.

Alternatively, or in some cases additionally, there is often a lag in time between project implementation and the expression of change in a system. This is known as a non-linear change function. In the example above, shifts in cultural practices and beliefs can be slow to change and might require a certain critical mass before reaching a threshold where the shift occurs. This can often take much longer than a typical grant or project cycle. For instance, an education programme may begin the shift with a few participating individuals. Over time, more individuals may adopt practices that they see working in other families. However, the culture at large may still retain old beliefs and practices until enough individuals adopt the new value sets. By the time that occurs, the grant or project that initiated the change could have expired or terminated. In both, this case of lagged expression of change or the previous case of change being difficult to observe, traditional performance monitoring will fail to capture those changes.
4. Overcoming the shortfalls of traditional monitoring, evaluation and learning

As the human development paradigm has increasingly shifted towards more investment in social innovation and agendas that work at the level of the development ecosystem, these blindspots and shortfalls limit the utility of a purely performance-based approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning. As such, both traditional funders such as foundations and bi-lateral donors have focused on designing tools and methods to enhance the effectiveness of data collection efforts across the programme life cycle in order to provide more complete, more accurate, and more timely information to design more appropriate intervention strategies, better assessments of programme effectiveness, and more responsive adaptive management. Among the suites of tools and methods that have been developed are those aimed at context monitoring, and those aimed at complementary monitoring.

According to USAID, ‘context monitoring’ is the systematic collection of information about conditions and exogenous factors that affect the implementation of strategy, projects, and activities. The tools dedicated to this type of monitoring aim to overcome the attribution and the multiple drivers blindspots by enabling an implementer to maintain situational awareness of the competing, countervailing, and complementary exogenous forces that are influencing the development ecosystem, thereby enabling them to account for shocks to the system and adapt implementation strategies to respond to such shocks.

‘Complementary monitoring’, on the other hand, includes a suite of tools and strategies to address the unanticipated/unmeasured and unobservable/non-linear blindspots of traditional monitoring and evaluation. The objective for complementary monitoring is to augment indicator-based metrics with additional and alternative data types to fill knowledge and information gaps, and/or to stage and staff data collection methods and procedures differently in order to account for the non-linear dynamics of a system.

Due to the extensive range of new tools, methodologies and practices that have been designed to overcome the blindspots of traditional monitoring, evaluation and learning, a thorough review is well outside the scope of this paper. However, recent initiatives by other organisations have shown that a wide variety of information on methods, toolkits, and good practices is publicly available. For instance, a consortium of academics and development practitioners from the United States, various African countries, and civil society organisations conducted perhaps the most recent and thorough assessment of complexity-aware tools for monitoring and published their assessment in 2016. Included in that review is the typology of tools in Figure 2 below that are designed to enable monitoring, evaluation and learning for development interventions in complex systems.

The SPACES MERL typology above groups tools and families of tools into their functional group and assesses each tool or family of tools according to its basic analytical utility. The accompanying report assesses each tool according to its data requirements, overall strengths, overall weaknesses, resources
Typology of Complexity-Aware tools

Typology of Complexity-Aware tools for monitoring, evaluation and learning included in the SPACES MERL assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>VISUALIZATION METHODS (MAPPING)</th>
<th>VISUALIZATION METHODS (MODELING)</th>
<th>NARRATIVE-BASED APPROACHES</th>
<th>INDICATOR-BASED APPROACHES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples of Tools and Approaches</td>
<td>Social Network Analysis</td>
<td>International Futures</td>
<td>Most Significant Change</td>
<td>The Dynamic Project Trajectory Tracking Toolkit</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Systemigram</td>
<td>Causal Loop Diagrams</td>
<td>Outcome Harvesting</td>
<td>Process Monitoring of Impacts</td>
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<td>Participatory Systemic Inquiry</td>
<td>HERMES</td>
<td>Scenario Planning</td>
<td>Sentinel Indicators</td>
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<td>RHEA</td>
<td>Innovation System Analysis</td>
<td>Outcome Mapping Approaches</td>
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<td>JANUS</td>
<td>Innovation System Enablers and Barriers</td>
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<td>TreeAge</td>
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*Tools / approaches represented by the SPACES MERL team are in bold above. Reproduced from Lee et al. (2016, p. 8).

required, availability and user-friendliness, and provides reference material for case studies that have employed the tool or family of tools. The typology in Figure 2 highlights the specific tools that the SPACES MERL consortium employs in their ongoing academic and practical work but also includes other tools and families of tools as well for comparison and objectivity.

The tools and methodologies included in these approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning range from qualitative and narrative-based methods to retrospective and forensic analytical techniques, and others that leverage the power crowdsourcing, participation of multiple stakeholders, community listening, and the new data revolution and social media to gather near real-time qualitative and quantitative data. The underlying logic is to include new and different information in development monitoring in order to triangulate multiple types of data, collected in through a variety of mediums. There is an increasingly common awareness that change in a system is a product of both endogenous (programme driven) and exogenous (system driven) factors. In order to assess how change occurs in the system, it is thus important to account for both types of factors and design programmes that are simultaneously adaptive and resilient. This means that development initiatives that fall under the new development paradigm need to be designed for implementation in complex systems, and need to include monitoring, evaluation and learning strategies to enable them to understand how they are impacting and impacted by the dynamics of the development ecosystem.
5. Good practices and recommendations in evaluation for innovation platforms

As described earlier in this paper, investment in social innovation platforms is increasingly pursued as a development strategy by donors, governments, and beneficiary communities. Recent studies articulate the principles of such platforms\(^\text{12}\) and make compelling arguments as to why social innovation platforms are particularly suited to eliciting and sparking new approaches to social dilemmas like poverty, urban planning and social inclusion, women and youth participation in social, economic, and policy spaces, and others. The principles that underpin these innovation platforms include community listening to define problems and potential intervention points, the co-creation of intervention strategies by multiple stakeholders working at multiple scales of the system and leveraging unique information about the system, multiple concurrent interventions creating waves of transformation that resonate and amplify across a system, and a new role of donors and financiers as active stakeholders in the system rather than passive change supporters. Whereas complex systems are inherently unpredictable and subject to endogenous and exogenous shocks across levels in the system, social innovation platforms enable connectivity in interventions that are both informed by and responsive to such system dynamics.

Because development ecosystems are unpredictable, the challenge for social innovation platforms is to design monitoring, evaluation and learning platforms that can collect and integrate multiple types of data from multiple sources at multiple time scales to enable multiple interventions to nimbly and deftly respond to changes as they are produced by an intervention or as they occur exogenously. In their brief on complexity-aware monitoring, USAID\(^\text{13}\) describes three sets of good practices that can enable more effective implementation of development programming in complex environments.

1. The first good practice is intuitive; namely, designing monitoring, evaluation and learning strategies to account for the blindspots described above. In other words, a good practice for complexity-aware evaluation includes multiple methods of data collection and analysis across the project life cycle. This starts with a project design that is informed by multiple types of information about the system and stakeholders and includes multiple strategies for data collection and analysis throughout implementation and final evaluation. Importantly, these data collection and analysis efforts should seek to triangulate data sources to deepen the implementation teams’ understanding of system dynamics in order to better understand how change happens in a system.

1. The second good practice recommendation involves synchronising monitoring, evaluation and learning with the pace of change (or paces of change) in the development context. Non-linear dynamics were discussed earlier in terms of how action during implementation can exhibit lags before the subsequent change is manifest. Those lags can be products of existing and emergent dynamics in the operating context. The rate of change will fluctuate across a programme life cycle, and responsive programmes will adapt their monitoring (performance, context, and complementarity) to conserve resources and utilise them effectively. It will take time for an implementation team to refine its ability to sense changes in the need

\(^{12}\) For instance, see Espiau (2018), Mataix (2018), Engle and Slade (2018), and Bason (2018).

\(^{13}\) See USAID (2016).
for and availability of relevant information, particularly in programmes designed under a social innovation platform. However, this is a critical skill for such programmes to develop in order to be responsive to exogenous and endogenous dynamics in the ecosystem.

3. Finally, the **third good practice** recommendation for a complexity-aware intervention is to create monitoring, evaluation and learning strategies that inform programmes on interrelationships among actors and factors in the development ecosystem, that provide deep and transparent insight into the perspectives that each actor has regarding the intervention, interrelationships, and the changes that are occurring in the system, and finally that maintain focus on the boundaries of the system in order to direct energy and resources into relevant factors and dynamics. In terms of the interrelationships, it was discussed earlier that the dynamics of a system are produced by interaction among social, physical, economic, and political actors and factors. A change in the system will change those relationships and the dynamics they produce. It is therefore critical to understand how those relationships are changing and evolving over time. Importantly, as those relationships change, each actor's view about themselves and others will change as visibility, funding, power, and prestige evolve among actors in the ecosystem. Understanding how each actor perceives such changes is essential to prevent marginalisation, disenfranchisement, and other negative and potentially detrimental impacts. This is critical for maintaining constructive working relationships and cooperation among stakeholders. Finally, the boundaries of a development ecosystem need to be explicit so that both factors and actors in the system are identifiable. While those boundaries can change and evolve over time, understanding where they are can focus an intervention’s monitoring, evaluation and learning to refine the intervention(s) with relevant information.
Lastly, the limits of the development ecosystem need to be explicit so that both the factors and the actors of the system are identifiable. Although these limits may change and evolve over time, knowing where they are located will help focus the work of monitoring, evaluation and learning for the intervention in order to fine-tune it using the relevant information.

A monitoring, evaluation and learning system that is responsive to those information and analytical needs will need to include a variety of performance monitoring techniques, complemented by more sophisticated strategies and methods for overcoming the blindspots described earlier. However, by re-envisioning the role of monitoring and evaluation as essential for real-time, responsive programme management, and by re-envisioning the role of implementors, funders, and beneficiaries as all stakeholders with access to and responsibility for various types of information, the burden of monitoring and evaluation can shift from a costly responsibility to an essential, value-additive programme management strategy.

For interventions that seek to catalyse social innovation, a complexity-aware approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning is critically important throughout the entire programme life cycle. Such an approach should seek to collect and analyse information on multiple scales of change in the development ecosystem, including the following:

- Who are the stakeholders in the system, and how do they define the multiple social development challenges that are relevant to them?
- What interventions are co-created, and which of the identified development challenges are they seeking to address?
- What are the baseline conditions in the ecosystem that are relevant to the identified challenges in terms of individual characteristics of each stakeholder (including implementers and funders) and environmental or economic factors? What are the baseline interrelationships among stakeholders and factors? How does each stakeholder perceive those relationships? And what is external to the development ecosystem that could impact or be impacted by the interventions?
- How are relationships and structures changing over time as a result of endogenous and exogenous shocks? What unintended and unobserved changes are occurring?
- At the macro level, what can be learned from changes across interventions/programmes? Are there meta lessons on how change happens in development ecosystems?

JOSHUA FISHER is Director and Associate Research Scientist at The Earth Institute at Columbia University. He holds a PhD from George Mason University, where he studied the ecological correlates of conflict. He specialises in developing methods for monitoring, evaluation and learning in economic development, extractive industry management, and biodiversity conservation. He has worked in multiple countries in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and S.E. Asia, and has extensive experience in participatory and quantitative methods.
Introduction

At a time which is characterised by the acceleration of changes and uncertainty regarding the future ahead of us, the approval and application of the 2030 Agenda and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitutes the most extensive and encouraging civic process of our age. Extensive because its adoption is spreading among governments, administrations, companies, social organisations and citizens around the world. Encouraging because the SDGs are demonstrating their capacity to become a common language for the collective interpretation of the great challenges facing the planet, and a positive story regarding the considerable transformative capacity of our current generation.

It is clear that achieving the SDGs requires, in addition to resolve and creativity, the large-scale mobilisation of financial resources, assigning them carefully in order to foster and sustain real systemic changes. Concern over the financing of the Agenda was already apparent in 2015 at the Addis Ababa Conference, 1 months before the SDGs were ratified by 193 countries, and continued afterwards with the creation of working groups created by the Secretary-General of the UN for this purpose. This all coincides with an unfavourable context, in which the only global redistributive mechanism, the Official Development Assistance, is in recession.
The 2030 Agenda contains challenges that cannot be addressed exclusively with additional injections of capital, although this is essential. It also requires doing things differently, and deploying new forms of collaboration that strengthen a true global alliance for sustainable development, as reflected in SDG 17.

1. Financing organisations and the 2030 Agenda

In the current socio-economic system there is a wide variety of organisations that have the capacity to allocate economic resources to the search for new solutions to significant social and environmental problems, such as those addressed by the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Most of these organisations belong to one of these categories: (i) public administrations that finance local or regional development, both in cities and in rural areas; (ii) national and multilateral development and cooperation agencies and bodies; (iii) public or private-public organisations that finance programmes in science, technology and innovation for development; (iv) private philanthropic foundations; (v) business foundations and resource transfer programmes linked to corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes; (vi) NGOs with the capacity to carry out their own financing programmes; (vii) social investors and social investment funds (also known as “impact investors”).

We shall call them all financing organisations (FOs) although, as we will see, this description does not mean that they cannot take on other additional functions as well as financing, which is what in fact happens in the majority of cases.

A growing number of FOs are explicitly incorporating the SDGs into their strategies, seeking to bring the initiatives they finance in line with the 2030 Agenda. Although at the early stages this does not involve any more than a new ‘labeling’ of their portfolio of activities, the FOs are aware that strategically aligning themselves with the ‘major transformation’\(^2\) will entail managing a profound organisational shift and change in focus. The specific direction of this change will depend on the choices that each FO will have to make on their own, but the change of context affects them all, and this invites them to participate in a broad and sectoral analysis that has already begun.

This chapter aims to provide elements for this analysis, paying special attention to the desire of many FOs to increase the impact of the resources they allocate, through new ways of relating with their stakeholders and, in particular, with the organisations to whom they consign their resources.

What is proposed here is not based on systematic data collection, but rather it is the result of the authors’ own experiences, their relationship with the heads of numerous FOs, and the consideration of recent articles and papers on the subject.
2. Towards a change of approach in the financing of SDG initiatives

Much has been said and written about the ‘challenges’ of the 2030 Agenda, its multi-level and multi-sectoral nature, and its universality. Within this general, ambitious and comprehensive framework, the FOs are wondering which SDGs and which targets they should devote their efforts to; or, to put it another way, on what types of sustainability issues can they have a positive impact. Furthermore, most FOs express a desire for innovation, that is, to promote the search for new solutions which are more efficient than those that are known today, and which, in addition, can be reproduced and ‘scaled’.

The objectives and goals of the 2030 Agenda are established in order to address types of issues which are characterised by their complex or ‘entangled’ nature, which require financial and technological resources to be employed, but which also need an innovative response. For example, it will not be possible to achieve universal energy access by the year 2030, as put forward in SDG 7, if the emphasis continues to be placed on conventional solutions, which consist of extending power lines in order to reach each home from large production plants. Doing so is extremely expensive and slow. The good news is that today we have at our disposal increasingly affordable and efficient technologies that enable electrification using isolated renewable energy systems. Their use in poor and remote regions requires new models of service provision, which can only be viable and expandable with the collaboration of a wide variety of stakeholders. In Latin America, for example, we can see sustainable initiatives aimed at giving access to power for isolated populations which involve the population in the design and management of new solutions tailored to the local context.

One feature that helps us to understand these ‘entangled’ problems is that only with hindsight is one aware that their effects have been resolved or mitigated. That is, there is no milestone at which a clear signal is received that the problem has disappeared. This gives us an idea of its evolutionary nature. The solution cannot be ‘delivered’, but rather one advances towards it through repetition, acting simultaneously in multiple lines of action, which progress the problem and its context, until we reach a sufficiently satisfactory state of affairs. However, despite their persistence and the fact that they are difficult (or impossible) to resolve, if not addressed in time, they become more complicated and chronic.

This all leads us to a result that could be used as a starting point by the FOs: addressing ‘entangled’ sustainability problems (we shall call them ‘SDG problems’ from now on) entails abandoning the ‘problem-solution’ duality upon which the rationale of the programmes and projects that the majority of FOs support is based.

The solution cannot be ‘delivered’, but rather one advances towards it through repetition, acting simultaneously in multiple lines of action, which progress the problem and its context, until we reach a sufficiently satisfactory state of affairs.
This rationale, which we can simplistically call the ‘traditional approach’ and which has its expression in what is called the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) – widely used in the world of development cooperation - is appropriate for ‘ordered’ or ‘structured’ problems and, in fact, can be considered a good way of addressing them.

In the traditional approach, there are two underlying hypotheses which, when applied to SDG problems, become two fundamental shortcomings which make it unsuitable. Firstly, it is assumed that it is possible to isolate the problem until we can establish logical causal relations between the problem itself and a potential solution that can be devised beforehand. Secondly, the hypothesis of linearity in the propagation and expansion of solutions is accepted when they are shown to be successful.

The first hypothesis leads to the ‘oversimplification’ of the problems, which leads us to accept, implement and persist with hasty solutions, which are designed “all at once and from an office”, are poorly thought out and often influenced by patterns and trends which are imposed among the FOs.

The second hypothesis is a legacy of industrial models typical of consumer markets, and can be summarised as follows: to the extent that a project gives rise to a good solution, it will be adopted en masse by the users who benefit from it, whether they are institutions or people.

However, in reality things do not work this way, and resistance to the adoption of new solutions, however good they are technically, should never be underestimated. This explains the frustration of many FOs regarding the much-desired ‘scalability’. Projects are not scaled, despite the emphasis on the implementation of ‘pilot projects’ or demonstration projects, inspired by approaches in technological innovation.

The concept of scaling has its origin in manufacturing, in which the objective is to achieve economies of scale, distributing the fixed costs in greater quantities of production. This notion cannot be applied directly to the social sphere since the outcomes of social processes are not standardised products.

It should be noted that this criticism of the shortcomings of the traditional approach is not new. In fact, it has been the subject of study and theoretical analysis from fields such as ‘systems theory’ or ‘complexity theory’, for example.

However, the resistance to change, the persistence of standards, processes and practices that make it difficult to work in less rigid structures and to accept higher levels of risk and uncertainty, have meant that the traditional approach has prevailed up to the present day.

But, above all, many FOs are still waiting ‘to be served’ a menu of new methods to replace the LFA or other similar methods. Most likely, this will not happen, because what needs to be changed is not only the processes of project evaluation and resource allocation. In order to address SDG problems, what needs to change above all is the position, indicators and responsibilities taken on by the FOs in their relationship with other stakeholders. Some pioneering organisations are already beginning to experiment with this change.
3. Pioneering Financing Organisations

At the UPM’s Centre of Innovation in Technologies for Human Development (itdUPM), we have the opportunity to work with a broad representation of FOs, public and private, who are looking to increase their impact on SDG problems through innovation. What's more, in order to achieve this they are taking risks and developing programmes that involve significant changes with respect to previous modes of action.

We can mention here private foundations, such as the “la Caixa” Banking Foundation, which is a leader when it comes to working on platforms and which prompted this publication; multilateral organisations, such as the UNDP, which is promoting a multi-actor laboratory programme for innovation in the public sector; development agencies, such as the AECID (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation), which has developed a platform with multiple actors for innovation in humanitarian action - the Shire Alliance -; universities, such as UPM, redirecting its traditional call for development projects towards the establishment of interdisciplinary platforms; large companies, such as Iberdrola, which through programmes such as Electricity for All are financing and increasing their contribution to the SDGs, drawing on strategic collaborations with suppliers, universities and other stakeholders; local administrations, such as the Madrid City Council, with whom itdUPM is launching a live laboratory in order to create, with multiple actors, a platform of innovations that contribute to improving the air quality of the city. The European Union itself, through Climate-Kic, one of the knowledge communities linked to the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, is currently redefining its strategy so as to move from a traditional financing approach in order to become a backbone organisation of multiple academic and business institutions and bring about systemic and rapid changes towards mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

In all these experiences we observe similar aspects that respond to a strategic drive to change approach. Let’s look at some of these.

In their organisational basis, the aforementioned programmes operate as a ‘second operating system’ which is compatible with the conventional operating system that continues to operate in the FO itself. In this way, they reduce the risk of the programme being perceived internally as a threat to the status quo, and the most significant organisational and cultural resistances are counteracted temporarily. In fact, many of the workers involved in the programmes mentioned move between the two operating systems.

As for leadership, all the programmes have a ‘governing coalition’ of people with management positions in different areas of the organisation, who obtain ‘institutional license’ to experiment and take risks. They often have to devise creative ways of getting around rules, procedures and customs which are established in the organisation, in order to make their programmes viable in practice.

Shire Alliance

In the Shire Alliance for the supply of power and lighting in refugee camps, the representatives of the participating organisations that form its “governing coalition” (companies, agencies, universities) point out the different work approach in the Alliance, in relation to the usual approach in their organisations of origin.

For example, the emphasis on seeking consensus, the importance of the processes of participation and co-creation, and the complexity of the formal agreements, are aspects that characterise work in the Alliance.
All the experiences mentioned above place particular focus on the organisational context and the relational processes with the actors involved. Particular care is taken of the work and communication procedures, the language and the narratives used, including the preparation of the physical spaces in which the programme’s on-site activities take place. These aspects are considered crucial in order to create a safe and creative environment in which one can discuss with greater symmetry, including participants with very different levels of information and power, placing special importance on listening and to the conversation that the programme is generating at any time.

In every case observed, the FOs are aware of the importance of collective action and diversity and, therefore, of the need for the programme to integrate all the parties involved in its diagnostic and design, not only in its execution. They know that the knowledge which is applicable in order to solve an SDG problem does not typically come from a single discipline or from a single actor. On the contrary, it requires creativity and the input of knowledge from various disciplines in interaction (multi- and inter-disciplinary), as well as knowledge from local actors who are well-versed in the specific problem and its environment (trans-disciplinary).

Ultimately, the pioneering FOs aim to build systems of relationships that endure beyond the timeline of the projects, and to this end they devote significant measures of institutional and financial energy.

In other words, they invest not only in individual projects, but in ecosystems which are capable of creating and implementing diverse and interconnected initiatives over time. In this way, the pioneering FOs are developing genuine inter-organisational networks, and they are aware that the links and the context in which they are developed are as important as the nodes themselves.

4. “SDG Platforms”

It is important for us to consider how the FOs are naming these pioneering programmes.

In every case, we find a certain similarity as regards identity in terms of their developmental and experimental nature, as well as their multi-actor vocation. In their own descriptions, terms such as ‘ecosystem’, ‘cluster’, ‘alliance’, ‘lab’, ‘backbone’ and ‘platform’ appear.

None of these terms is entirely satisfactory. It is possible that one will eventually prevail, or that several of them will coexist and evolve in accordance with trends. In this chapter we are going to use the term ‘platform’. It is true that the notion of platform is sometimes misleading, especially among professionals with technical training, because it leads them to the world of technology. However, in return, it can serve to establish a parallelism that helps adopt useful elements of the technological platforms themselves.

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### Living laboratory

In the **living laboratory** (Living LAB) promoted by the City Council and the itdUPM, and linked to the air quality plan of the city of Madrid (Plan A), organisations from very different fields (research, companies, student associations, etc.) participate.

One of the laboratory’s lines of action is dedicated to promoting solutions which are based on nature and it is implemented in the Matadero Madrid cultural space. This has allowed for the integration of a group of creators and artists in the devising of prototypes, which are designed in conjunction with researchers, companies from the sector, and managers and users of the cultural space itself.
In order to minimise confusion it would be helpful to endow the term with some ‘surnames’. We will use the more general notion of ‘platform approach (PA)’ to refer to the practices and methods that are being developed in order to implement the new approach. And we will use the concept of ‘SDG Platforms’ for initiatives that follow this approach in order to address SDG problems.

We find ourselves squarely within the scope of SDG 17 of the Agenda, which stipulates the need for organisational forms and innovative means of implementation.

«Developing and implementing innovative approaches to complex challenges goes beyond creating new programmes, policies or social enterprises. At a more fundamental level, it involves deepening relationships among government, finance, business, civil society, academia, media and citizens. Thus, we all come to see ourselves as part of local and global efforts to advance the human condition — as expressed, for example, in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, whose final goal is ‘partnerships for the goals’.

Jayne Engle

It should be pointed out that the SDG platforms share certain characteristics with the ‘collective impact’ initiatives, although in others they differ. In the latter, an extensive array of actors, professionals and financers identify a wide-rangiing social or ecological problem and agree to tackle it by means of coordinated actions over several years. To do this, they create a dedicated team of professionals, they outline structured processes in order to converge upon a common agenda of objectives and they establish systems of shared surveying, continuous communication and mutual support. The underlying idea is that it is more likely that large-scale changes will be facilitated with actions which are coordinated inter-sectorially, than with individual organisations acting alone\(^8\).

For its part and in addition to the aforementioned characteristics, the SDG Platforms stem from a desire to remain after a specific issue has been resolved, and they innovate in various aspects of the work, such as the listening processes, those of co-creation, the interactive involvement of different levels (people, organisations, public administrations) or the development of new systems of indicators and evaluation.

5.5. Ten key functions of the financiers in the promotion of SDG Platforms

The construction of SDG Platforms is, because of their collaborative nature, a joint creation that is only made possible when the strategic commitment of organisations and people who have the capacity to work in open schemes, to take risks and to invest efforts with a plan for collective impact in the long term, is achieved.

However, in our experience, all the initiatives referred to in the previous section include at least one instigating FO, whose role is crucial, especially in the early

stages. This role involves carrying out one or more of the functions that will be explained below, and which have been summarised in ten points.

Before we do that, however, we should point out that it is difficult for an FO to take on all the functions at the same time, using its own resources and capacities. Sometimes, for the incorporation of some functions for which the FO does not have the resources and appropriate expertise, it can be assisted by partner organisations such as, for example, universities, research and innovation centres, or social consultancy organisations.

5.1. Selecting the members of the platform
An SDG Platform needs to incorporate the organisations that have an influence in the diagnosis and management of the problem, as well as in the integration of potential solution paths that stem from the platform itself. This is a condition which is necessary (although not sufficient) in order to reduce the barriers to the adoption of innovations and, therefore, to achieve the subsequent scalability.

Consequently, an SDG Platform is not a spontaneously or randomly assembled network. The composition of its members is a crucial aspect of the design, and must be done carefully by its promoters. In other words, an SDG platform will not function as such if it does not achieve the involvement of the key actors in the system in which it operates.

This means, in many cases, attracting non-traditional participants who can contribute points of view and knowledge that are not normally used as ‘raw material’ in a standard design process. However, we know that many success stories regarding innovation are based on ideas that did not emerge from within the perimeter of the promoting organisation, or its usual reference system.

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**Campus Comestible**

The ‘Campus Comestible’ (Edible Campus) initiative is a pilot project developed in 2018 at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid in order to demonstrate that the food on offer in the canteens on the university campus can incorporate healthy food, produced by local farmers, at an affordable price. One of the main factors that led to the success of the project was the involvement of the managers of the university cafeterias in the design process, participating in a working group with researchers, representatives from local farmer networks and students. This allowed the project to overcome barriers that, at the beginning, were expected to be difficult, since the ‘terms and conditions’ of the cafeteria service did not include activities that were necessary in order to be able to integrate supplies of fresh foods that were smaller in volume and more frequent.

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**Luz en Casa**

The Luz en Casa (Power in the Home) programme in Peru, promoted by Acciona.org Foundation, has managed to develop a sustainable service provision model. The key to its success, examined in the report carried out by the itdUPM for the Inter-American Development Bank, was the capacity of the programme to act as an intermediary between the different levels of social organisation. The programme was based on strengthening the organisational capacities of the communities (which are key to their management through local electrification committees); at the same time, it was able to influence the legislation of the country (achieving approval of the photovoltaic tariff), and was able to negotiate as the best technology providers in the international market.
In particular, when dealing with platforms that address situations of poverty, we must bear in mind that “not leaving anyone behind”, as advocated by the 2030 Agenda, requires the platform to be able to accommodate the participation of the most vulnerable groups, whose ideas and perspectives have to be included in the processes of collective interpretation and co-creation.

When reflecting upon whether the successful experiences of the platform could be transferrable and scalable, it would be advisable to consider from the beginning the involvement of pertinent actors from the other potential contexts of application. They would thus participate in the diagnostic and co-creation processes, which would benefit the solution pathways and facilitate adoption in the new contexts (avoiding the usual “not invented here” syndrome).

In all cases, it should be kept in mind that the most profound and successful social transformations take place when the different levels of social organisation interact (community, small, medium and large-scale organisations, as well as local authorities and public services). This interaction can be achieved, either by incorporating actors from all levels into the platform, or by developing appropriate relational processes.

5.2. Attracting and inviting organisations
But who will do the inviting? Who is suitable? Who does it appeal to? Acting on a platform may not be agreeable to a large majority of organisations that are used to operating using the ‘traditional approach’. In fact, the accounts of the platforms themselves often give rise to mistrust as they are a concept which is too open and lacking in rules that clearly equip the financers and the financed with a strict framework for the division of functions and arbitration in case of conflict.

That is why it is useful to think in terms of the motivations or incentives that the promoter organisations of a platform have at their disposal in order to attract the right partners. Accordingly, the FOs operate two types of incentives. On the one hand, the financial resources and, on the other hand, their own reputation and credibility, since they are actors perceived as ‘principal’ by the organisations to which they traditionally allocate their financing.

Using both incentives intelligently can be necessary in order to ensure that the platform attracts and incorporates, in its formative stage, the organisations needed in order to incorporate the required diversity of actors and voices.

5.3. Facilitating the platform
Once its participants are incorporated, an SDG platform can be formed as an organisational space for co-creation and collective learning.

The platform’s FO(s) play a key role when it comes to outlining the standards, practices and values that will make up this space. However, as we will now see, this is a role that a large majority of FOs are uncomfortable with.

Traditionally, the innovation programmes financed by the FOs are designed with the aim of promoting competition and attracting the best organisations and the best projects (“picking the champions”). To achieve this, designing the programme means establishing the appropriate tendering and allocation procedures, that is, designing the ‘rules’ for the awarding or the call.
This mechanism can sometimes be appropriate, especially when the programme is seeking the best supplier of products or services that the market is known to provide, and whose specifications are known beforehand.

However, when applied to the field of innovation in order to address SDG problems, this mechanism does not usually work well. We may consider that its success is dependent upon the veracity of an implicit assumption: somewhere there are exceptional organisations and projects, capable of providing innovative and efficient solutions.

In short, it is expected that, by means of adequate financial stimuli, the FOs will attract these ‘champions’ to their ecosystem, and they will subsequently be improved and scaled thanks to the resources invested. This is a very prevalent rationale, reinforced by the seductive myth of the entrepreneurial hero and the ‘start-up’, with all the thriving infrastructure of incubators, accelerators and ‘hubs’.

We observe in some fields, such as in that of international cooperation, how the FOs compete in order to identify and allocate resources to those organisations and projects that are supposed to have greater innovative capacity. As a result, we find initiatives and projects that acquire a certain iconic status, that attract many FOs and become saturated with financial resources, while other projects which are less well-known or with a lower profile do not come under the financiers’ radar.

The FOs that are developing SDG Platforms have begun to act in a different way. They accept that SDG problems are too complex to be left to a single actor, or to be addressed by a single type of project. These FOs are changing their position in the system of relations between actors. Moving from their traditional position as arbiters, they now act as facilitators, maintaining the relationship space, in which a new type of dialogue and interaction between the participants is established. They do not relinquish their responsibility in the allocation of resources, as we will see in the next section, but they establish the conditions in order for this assignment to be made in accordance with the advances and learnings of the platform. In this way, the funding programme generates a ‘safe space’ for collective learning and innovation, in which the FOs encourage the participants to share and discuss the progress made in the initiatives and projects in which they participate, and to solve problems or incorporate new ideas when necessary.

The creation and development over time of such ecosystems requires particular attention. A stable team of people with the capacity to exercise the function of facilitator and promoter of alliances between different actors is needed. Some authors call this a platform ‘curator’, because it is related to the process of maintaining the health of the ecosystem. The ‘curator’ team is in charge of allocating

**Climate-KIC**

Climate-KIC is a programme that finances training, innovation and enterprise as regards climate change. It has updated its “theory of change”, placing an emphasis on the connection of project networks and the promotion of systemic processes that require increasing the degree of diversity of actors in the fundable proposals. This involves the organisations that make up the programme (most are companies and universities) working hand in hand with “non-traditional” actors (NGOs, social organisations, for example). Climate-KIC has the legitimacy to demand this change because it is a “European programme” and also because of its potential as a financer.
Platforms that activate innovation

Platforms that activate innovation


Work4Progress

Work4Progress (W4P) is a programme promoted by the “la Caixa” Banking Foundation (FBLC), the objective of which is the creation of employment opportunities for women and young people. The FBLC is the FO of the programme, which is carried out with an NGO network in Mozambique, Peru and India. The FBLC’s role is not limited to the allocation of financial resources, but rather it acts as a genuine facilitating partner throughout the process, carrying out actions of training, exchange and active listening at the service of all the participating organisations. To this end, it has been equipped with a facilitation team made up of its own and external personnel.

FBLC’s W4P Programme enables solutions to emerge that are promoted by the community in which it is worked on, given that during the co-creation stage space is given to the unpredictability of the initiatives that may arise because they are not decided upon in advance. Solutions which are predominantly “expert” or “top-down” are discarded. This is part of the use of a new methodology for the field of development cooperation, which involves four structural elements:

- Analysis and listening platform - during the whole process -;
- Laboratory of co-creation and prototyping;
- Project accelerator; and
- Developmental evaluation system.

The FOs have to guarantee that this function is properly designed and outlined in the platform, and for that they have to understand the importance of having the resources and capacities needed to carry it out.

In short, the SDG problems concern multiple actors (people, organisations, public entities), each of which has their own views, interests and values in relation to the problem in question. The solution pathways to be explored will therefore require their consensus. The processes of deliberation and justification over the course of the initiatives thus take on great importance in order for them to be successful. Conceptually, these situations can be characterised as “cooperative multi-personal non-zero sum games”. The facilitating team, be it an organisation or a person, has a crucial role which is recognised by the parties in these situations.

Therefore, one of the assets to be generated by the SDG Platforms would be to have a set of ‘facilitating’ professionals that assist the various initiatives of the platform, providing training to the actors and guiding the processes of convergence and consensus.

5.4. Willingness to assume financial and institutional risks

The SDG platforms are multi-actor organisational spaces designed to promote innovative transformation processes. As we have seen, they must therefore create the conditions in order to assess and re-frame SDG problems, and to generate ongoing processes of co-creation, prototyping and demonstration.

On the one hand, the FO can indicate to the platform that they are willing to finance actions that belong to the realm of the ‘not obvious’,\(^\text{10}\) that allow for the exploration and piloting of new possibilities based on the collective intelligence generated by the platform itself.

On the other hand, they can develop methods in order to flexibly assign the financial resources to the changing needs of the projects of the platform —connected to each other — and their cross-learning processes. The knowledge thus generated will create new investment opportunities and will allow other initially promising ones to be discarded in time. This will reduce the gap between the financing process and the evolutionary process of the problem.

The FO representatives are often aware of this necessity, but they consider it unfeasible due to the lack of suitable instruments and procedures. This is especially common in public FOs that have very rigid procedures for allocating resources. Modifying these procedures can take years and depends on major reforms of public administrations.

While the reforms are coming, there are cases that show that, even within conventional bureaucracies, financing methods can be developed which allow the needs of the platforms to be financed. This is what some have called the ‘hacking’ of bureaucracies.\(^\text{11}\)

Information technologies can and should help in this process of adapting the standards. As Indy Johar points out, we need to invest in process innovations in aspects such as the management of public and private resources targeting social change. This is referred to as ‘boring innovation’\(^\text{12}\) because it is, in general, less exciting than technological innovation, but no less important. On the contrary, large amounts of boring innovation are needed in order to create a favourable context for the proliferation of SDG platforms. Hacking the bureaucracy may be the only option in order to launch demonstration initiatives, but it is not a structural option.

5.5. Development of common methodologies for the projects of a platform

The organisations of an SDG Platform will start initiatives or actions that, in general, are designed using a project rationale. According to Espiau, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the platforms is the creation of a collaborative methodology that does away with projects’ isolation.

While the projects cannot ‘assume margins of error’ in relation to the objectives originally proposed, in actual fact these do occur. Numerous documented cases\(^\text{13}\) and our experience means we are aware of the pressing need to implement mechanisms that allow for rapid learning and the implementation of actions not originally included.

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10. Expression used by Giulio Quagiotto.

11. Some authors have recently used the notion of “hacking” bureaucracies, in reference to circumventing certain administrative processes that do not add value, without violating the law. See, for example, this article by Milica Bergovic and other authors: https://medium.com/@UNDPeurasia/can-we-hack-bureaucracy-431254ab7d80.


13. See: https://www.admittingfailure.org/
5.6. Investment in platform technologies and platform infrastructures

As the size of a platform increases, the complexity of the management of the information that is generated also increases, as well as the organisational processes that connect organisations and initiatives of the platform itself. There is a ‘minimum viable size of a platform’, but there is also a ‘maximum size’ above which management can be inefficient by conventional means.

The SDG Platforms can strengthen their scaling capacity by using appropriate technological infrastructures. The FOs can invest in them, integrating in the SDG Platform a ‘technological platform’ with functions such as: (1) the interpretation of big data that can be used for the development of, for example, ‘listening processes’ in the communities or territories in which the platform operates; (2) the creation of dialogue and consensus-building processes; (3) the ongoing training of all the participants, and (4) co-creation with large-scale participation.

5.7. Development of collective impact evaluation processes

Many projects — such as those promoted by the FOs looked at in this text — which are based on subsidies and grants, end up languishing and, although originally they were based on good ideas, they fade out simply because the financing ends and the FO withdraws. Often, this does not mean that financing has been inadequate. What happens is that the financer only provides administrative and financial support within a limited framework, and is not able to provide a genuine integrating and strategic impetus.

This is a recurring problem which has been examined in full. The treatment that is usually prescribed is to invest more in the evaluation, so that the best projects and best ideas can be identified and selected and their continuity ensured.

However, evaluating ‘project by project’ is too expensive, and the management response — that is, the capacity of organisations to incorporate what has been learned — almost always underestimates the internal barriers and resistances to change.

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Living LAb

The Living LAb project of the Madrid City Council, together with the itdUPM, has reached an agreement with the MIT Centre for Collective Intelligence for the adaptation of a co-creation platform related to climate change (Climate CoLab) which has more than 200,000 users who act as co-creators of solutions. The customised platform is beginning to be used for open innovation processes in order to prototype urban mobility solutions with broad communities of users and, in particular, university students.

14. For example: the radio content analysis tool of the Global Pulse Programme, more information available at http://radio.unglobalpulse.net/uganda
By promoting and standardising permanent dialogue between projects, the platforms enable us to view the evaluation process as a genuine collective and continuous process of learning and transfer between projects.

The monitoring mechanisms do not focus exclusively on overseeing expenditures in relation to the activities or objectives set out, but rather try to keep a record of the lessons learned or discoveries, as well as of the activities or ideas that were set aside, those which they have decided not to explore. Thus, the FO maintains an open and flexible attitude to changes in the structure of the platforms, as well as in the working arrangements.

The FOs that are involved in addressing SDG problems show understandable concern for the different aspects involved in the evaluation. On the one hand, because these problems are complex and the SDG Platforms, as an organisational instrument for addressing them, are new and there is not enough experience with regard to its operation. On the other hand, because the FOs are putting into play resources from outside, whether public or private, in conditions of risk which are seemingly less controllable than in the usual financing situations.

Because of their innovative nature, the SDG Platforms need to be evaluated in order to generate knowledge about their suitability, in general, and that of their methods, in particular. In this way, they will be able to facilitate, in the medium term, the configuration and design of the most appropriate platforms for different problems and circumstances.

In the management of the particular initiatives that a specific platform is taking on, evaluation is crucial to selecting the most worthwhile initiatives to be tackled, selecting ex-ante the most appropriate design for each initiative, reshaping the execution process when appropriate, and assessing ex-post the results achieved.

The knowledge that is thus gained concerning the different tasks of evaluation has to be crucial in order to learn, spread and validate the SDG Platform approach that is proposed here.

5.8. Reinforcing systemic thinking

It is common for organisations working in social transformation to become enamoured a priori with solutions that they can ‘deliver’ in order to address urgent problems. But SDG problems are characterised by the complex tangle of relationships and constraints which make them persist.

It could be said that SDG Platforms are spaces that invite us to look more closely into SDG problems and the complexity of their nature, rather than adopting a solution that may be too simple or too hasty. However, it is important to emphasise that looking more closely into the problem is not a merely discursive or analytical process, but rather it is often carried out by means of prototypes and experiments that help to discover the different aspects of the problem and their interrelations. As a well-known quote says: “if you want to get to know a system, try to modify it”.

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**Dialogue and lifelong learning**

The W4P Programme periodically gathers the organisations that promote the different projects of the platform. At these meetings, all the organisations have to make an effort to share the learning obtained in the period.

Accountability occurs in a context in which all organisations are present, and they share successes and failures. The FO (the “la Caixa” Banking Foundation) creates a context for this process to be framed as a genuine cross-learning process, and for it to be useful for cross-learning between projects, as well as for the rapid solution of problems.
There are two basic outcomes that can be expected as a result of adopting a genuine capacity to see through the lens of systems thinking: the capacity to deal with the interrelationships of the problems (this is fundamental when dealing with SDG problems, since the SDGs are interrelated) and overcoming the disciplinary limits of analysis. As RSA points out: “Systems thinking is a context for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots… The right boundary for thinking about a complex problem rarely coincides with the boundary of an academic discipline, or with a political boundary. Ideally, we would have the mental flexibility to find the appropriate boundary for thinking about each new problem.”

One aspect that deserves special consideration is the definition of the perimeter of the reference system of an SDG Platform. What is ‘inside’ and what is ‘outside’? As Mulgan points out, the key to collective intelligence is that the mobilisation of latent intelligence sources that are ‘outside’ the system will always provide value, so we should not rely solely on what is ‘inside’, or on the contributions of expert personnel.

**5.9. Innovation in organisational structures and management practices**

All of the above means that the FOs need to innovate in their own organisation and management forms. They need to stop being, exclusively, entities that manage resources, in order to become promoters of transformation processes; shifting their position with respect to the financed organisations.

This would mean they would abandon the classic standard of the transactional relationship (“I finance, you provide accountability and show results”) and move towards a system of mutual reciprocity and association (“each of us allocates resources and complementary capacities; we take risks and share successes together”).

It should be obvious that a change of this nature entails reducing the predominance of the role FOs have traditionally held in the development programmes in order to, simultaneously, increase the role it plays as a partner and promoter of initiatives.

As the McConnell Foundation points out: In addressing complex challenges, the practice of foundations acting on their own is profoundly limiting as it perpetu-
ates patterns of privilege and dependency that hold problems in place. Putting too much power in the hands of any one organisation dampens the natural dynamism and resiliency that arise from combining the efforts of multiple partners with diverse views and complementary capacities. It’s better to live by the adage that there is almost no limit to what you can accomplish if you are willing to not take credit for it. In doing so, we move from rigid hierarchy to networked collaboration, adopting philanthropy so as to more closely reflect the shape of the complex problems we seek to address.16

It is clear that this change is not easy, and for many FOs it means acquiring and developing new relational and management capacities. However, it is also an excellent opportunity to bring about a change that most of the FOs know they have to make if they want to align with the true meaning of the 2030 Agenda.

For many of their staff members, the change will provide an impetus to turn their workplace into a stimulating learning environment that reduces their exposure to the inefficient machinery of traditional management. Many staff at the FOs are today overwhelmed by the bureaucracy involved with filing and subsidies, which, rather than being reduced, is increasing in recent times due to the need for more checks in order to prevent fraudulent practices.

**5.10. Collaboration between platforms**

The initiatives that we have characterised as SDG Platforms are very recent and are now beginning their journey. Connection and collaboration between them will help to strengthen them.

On the one hand, it will allow for the exchange of methods and experiences, contributing to their systematisation and propagation. On the other hand, the platforms can collaborate in order to coordinate their aims and increase the impact at higher levels of the systems, orienting themselves towards far-reaching missions.

Lastly, the platforms can also collaborate with a view to validating the concept itself. The development community is very susceptible to the emergence of trends which, every so often, seek to revitalise the international scene with the promise of having found the ‘missing ingredient’. The platform approach for the SDGs does not provide a prescription nor, as stated above, can it be administered as a new methodology. It is an innovative organisational approach, suitable for addressing SDG Problems and compatible with other approaches, which invites all actors, and in particular the FOs, to embrace complexity and deploy large amounts of collaboration and collective intelligence.

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**Shared and distributed leadership**

The W4P Programme maintains a model of shared and distributed leadership, in which there is no single person or organisation overseeing the entire process. It seeks to create a new culture of collaboration between the entities that work in the same geographical area - local and international organisations - that provide sustainability to the action.

The FO of the programme (the "la Caixa" Banking Foundation) provides technical and training support to the platforms. The technical support includes the option for organisations working in the programme to access personnel who are experts in the methodologies used, and support in all stages of the process. The training support includes the design and implementation of a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) to which all the members of the platforms access, as well as the holding of work meetings between the members of the three platforms and training seminars.

**Research and innovation under discussion**

Mariana Mazzucato has added the notion of “missions” towards sustainability to the debate on research and innovation of the European Union, with the intention that public policies set a course towards “SDG missions”, thus directing much of the investment and innovative commitment, public and private, of the Union, similar to what the Apollo mission involved in the 20th Century. If this proposal goes ahead (which is quite likely), SDG platforms could be operation bases directed at future missions towards sustainability.

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6. Final considerations

In this chapter, we have drawn attention to the need for the actors involved in the transformation towards the SDGs to increase, through a more genuine and profound collaboration, the probability of bringing about systemic changes.

In particular, the financing organisations (FOs) have a central role in order to promote new ways of working and of relation between actors, promoting and financing more diverse environments of collective interpretation and listening, which are the essential foundations for bringing about innovations with a social impact.

This task is not an easy one, but nor is it impossible. There are pioneering FOs that have already begun to show that they can shift positions, diluting their traditionally dominant role in order to become facilitators and promoters of ecosystems of change and transformation, which we have here called SDG Platforms.

Today, most FOs do not want to limit themselves to their traditional role of being mere fund managers. Proof of this is the mantra, repeated so often in conversations with top-level management of the FOs and which, although maybe put differently, says that: “we do not want to be considered exclusively as a source of financial resources; we want to be partners and to be involved in the projects.”

We must recognise that the platform approach increases uncertainty and risk, it necessitates significant cultural changes in the FO, and it requires developing the ‘art’ of ecosystem and network management, an art not usually taught to managers of the organisations. However, when it is achieved, all the evidence suggests that ‘virtuous circles’ can be created.
As the UNDP points out: “There are still a lot of concerns around the impact that a platform approach will have on the brand, the institutional agreements, the skills needed in agencies such as the UNDP. This is understandable given the inherent pressure of accountability that such agencies have to their stakeholders and to the public opinion in general: not easy to come up and honestly say, ‘we don’t know the solution, we need to experiment and learn’. Furthermore, those working in these agencies today inherit almost a century of narrative that pictures them as someone delivering perfect solutions.”

Nobody is surprised that, in order to produce technological transformations, such as that which the change in energy model entails, it is necessary to invest in new material infrastructures, such as, for example, the new ‘electric stations’ network. The same should be said of social and cultural transformations.

We need to invest in their new organisational and social infrastructures. The initiatives with a platform approach that we have addressed in this chapter may be the laboratories: the new organisational infrastructures for the SDGs.
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