Class 2 - Introduction to the listening process
(video transcription)

The design of development cooperation projects are based on an analysis of the needs, challenges and opportunities of the communities.

Our experience has shown that solutions devised by experts without the opinion of the people affected are very likely to fail and could even cause undesired effects.

The main problem of such top-down initiatives is that, although they may be based on good ideas and implemented correctly, they're rarely appropriated by the community and have a very limited impact.

Although we realise a diagnosis is important, in most development cooperation projects only a small proportion of the budget can be allocated to the diagnosis phase.

Moreover, the analysis and identification of needs tends to be limited to the beginning of projects.

However, throughout a project we can't regularly follow up to see whether our approach is actually addressing a community's aspirations. Nor can we incorporate systematically the changes that occur in the context when it happens.

Problems may also arise when we scale a successful experience or replicate it for another region without a new identification process. We rely on our previous experience and knowledge.

In practice, organisations end up adapting their work to changes in a particular context, but they don't always do this soon enough or using the most appropriate methods, which almost always leads to budget problems or missed deadlines, or both.

That's why organisations often ask for new tools to make their work easier, helping them to systematise the identification of deviations and allow corrections without it being traumatic, without stopping the project and without wasting resources.

When we talk about the need to design new processes for dialogue and listening, we're talking about tools to ensure we have greater insight into the needs, problems and opportunities of the community.

For organisations, the challenge lies in understanding those needs and opportunities in greater detail and depth, throughout the entire project, to ensure the actions to be implemented are according to the real aspirations of the community involved.

We realise it's not easy and, to achieve this, we need more than the information provided by surveys or statistical data. We need to identify the dominant narrative in the community.

This information can be gleaned from the stories people tell when they talk about their everyday lives.

Such narratives are always subjective, but they strongly influence people's actions, and comprise what they believe is possible or impossible. Inevitably, they influence the work we're doing and it's vital for us to be aware of these narratives and to take them into account.

As a result, we also need to share all the information we've gathered and work together with other actors to interpret it.

By working together, we can benefit from different points of view, helping us to gain a more in-depth understanding of the findings and gradually identify the collective narrative of what's actually happening.

This collective interpretation of the information represents the start of a process to find proposals, solutions, and alternatives. It's the beginning of what we call the co-creation process.

The listening process proposed by the Work4Progress programme requires four fundamental elements:

- *A series of questions on the specific problems to be investigated in depth.*

- *A group of people we can talk to, with different backgrounds and representing the context being studied. We call this our listening group.*

- *A selection of channels and tools to gather information, which can include structured and unstructured interviews, forum theatre and participative videos.*

- *And a place where information can be freely and collectively interpreted.*

In order to manage all these elements, we need to develop specific skills and apply them appropriately.

This might seem complicated now but, through the following classes, we'll look at how this can be achieved, step by step – and you'll realise that all you need is a bit of practice.