



**HECSOs**  
community engagement



## **TOOLKIT n°5**

Theory of change: engaging communities in designing social change



Erasmus+

# INDEX

1. Rationale and Scope Pag 03

---

2. Social change Pag 05

---

3. Theory of Change Pag 08

---

4. Stakeholder Mapping Pag 15

---

5. Conclusions Pag 23

---

6. Bibliography Pag 26

---

# 1 - Rationale and Scope

As argued in Toolkit 3, although various terms exist to refer to engagement (including civic, public, regional and societal engagement), the goal of jointly addressing societal needs reveals to be a common aspect. Moreover Toolkit 4 analyzes the concept of community engagement as a preliminary objective to achieve social change.

***But how do we collectively tackle a societal need or a social challenge?***

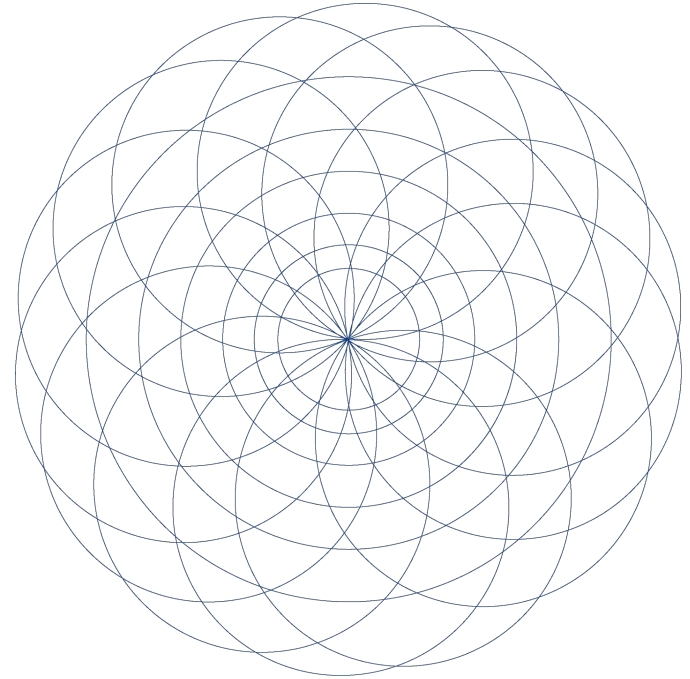
***How do a community shape a common vision of a desirable future?***

***How do professionals foster the different stakeholders of a community to be part of a shared decision-making process?***

***How to foster collaboration and cooperation around a common vision?***

***How to guide a community in designing a common vision of change?***

The **Theory Of Change** is a useful tool to answer all these questions. Toolkit 5 is a step-by-step guide into this approach and method, briefly preceded by an examination of the meaning and **concept of “social change”**.



## **2 - Social Change**

The concept of change is approached in the scientific literature as a **multidimensional phenomenon** influenced by multiple factors and theories (e.g. E. Kofi Agorsah, *Social Change and Development: Modernization, Dependency, and World-System Theories*; C. Lindholm "Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic"). Some dimensions of change that appear in scientific literature are so detailed:

**1. Individual change:** it concerns transformations that occur at the personal level, in people's beliefs, behaviors and attitudes. Individual change can be triggered by personal experiences, education, social interactions and cultural influences.

**2. Social change:** it refers to changes in the structure, organization and relationships of society. This dimension may include changes in social institutions, cultural norms, shared values and group dynamics.

**3. Economic change:** it refers more specifically to transformations in the economic system of a society, such as economic fluctuations, market trends, production and resource distribution patterns.

**4. Political change:** it refers to transformations in the political system of a society, such as changes in governments, decision-making processes, public policies and civil rights.

**5. Cultural change:** it refers to transformations in the values, beliefs, traditions and cultural identity of a society. Cultural change can profoundly influence the way people see the world and relate to others.

These dimensions of change are often interrelated and overlapping. 'Social change' is often used as a general term (see the sociological tradition of authors such as Weber, Durkheim, Foucault, Habermas) that also encompasses the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of a given social context/group. Here we will use the term in this broader sense as it is used by the social innovation perspective.

**According to the social innovation perspective, the concept of 'change' is central and closely linked to the creation and implementation of innovative solutions to social and environmental challenges.**



Although the definition of social innovation may vary depending on the context and theoretical approach, however, some **key common elements** (e.g. "The Power of Social Innovation: How Civic Entrepreneurs Ignite Community Networks for Good" by Stephen Goldsmith; "Social Innovation: An Exploration of the Literature" by Alex Nicholls; "Social Innovation: A Decade of Changes" di European Commission - DG Research & Innovation 2015) in the definition include:

- 1) Responding to social challenges:** Social innovation is geared towards solving or addressing existing social challenges, such as poverty, social exclusion, access to services, climate change, inequality, community well-being and more.
- 2) People-centered approach:** Social innovation is focused on the needs, expectations and aspirations of the people and communities involved. Innovative solutions are developed in collaboration with stakeholders, promoting inclusion and empowerment.
- 3) Systemic change:** Social innovation aims to bring about change at the systemic and structural level, not just at the individual level. This may include changes in public policies, social norms, institutions and organizational practices.
- 4) Sustainability:** Social innovation is concerned with the long-term impact and sustainability of proposed solutions, seeking to create lasting and positive changes in society.
- 5) Collaboration and partnership:** Social innovation often develops through collaboration between different stakeholders, such as governments, non-profit organizations, businesses, local communities, academics and other entities.
- 6) Focus on different sectors:** Social innovation can be applied in various sectors, such as welfare, health, environment, education, employment, economy, urban planning and many others.

**In the social innovation perspective, change is thus driven by the search for new and creative solutions to address social problems and is characterized by a participatory, sustainable and people-centered approach.**

According to that, different authors (Susan B. Silverstein e Heather L. McCabe "The Power of Community Engagement: Mobilizing for Health, Equity, and Justice" Jenny Phillimore "Community Engagement, Participation and Social Capital: Theory, Evidence and Policy Implications"; Jeremy Brecher e Brendan Smith "Community Engagement and Social Transformation: Introduction to the Special Issue") demonstrate and make explicit the specific role of community engagement in designing social change.

**The theory of change, this toolkit will introduce and explain, is focused precisely on examining and understanding how situations and conditions can be intentionally transformed and how to manage such transformations effectively and consciously within the engagement of all community members and stakeholders.**

## **3 - The Theory of Change**

## 2.1 What is Theory of Change?

The **Theory of Change** - hereafter shortened to **Toc** - is an approach to **strategic design**.

The ToC is a **comprehensive description and illustration of the motivations and ways in which the desired change will manifest in a given context**. It represents the ideal point of conjunction between what the initiative produces (its activities) and the reasons that will enable the achievement of the objectives: for this reason, the ToC process begins from the ideal point of arrival, with the identification of the **long-term impact objective**, then proceeding backwards to recognize all the **necessary preconditions** that must be in place and how they relate in a **"if-then" causal perspective** (e.g., "if this output will be produced, then this outcome will be realized; if this activity will be implemented, then this output will be produced").

The ToC is an approach to strategic planning that is based on the **construction of a shared collective vision**.

According to Rick Davies<sup>1</sup>, it is the description of a **sequence of events** that is thought to lead to achieving a well-defined goal. For Patricia Rogers<sup>2</sup>, it is the **articulation of multiple assumptions** about how change occurs in a program: it includes ideas, conditions, and hypotheses about how situations change, how people and organizations act, and how political systems or ecosystems function.

### IN-DEPTH BOX ANALYSIS:

“ The Theory of Change is a **rigorous and participatory process** in which **various stakeholders articulate their long-term objectives** [impact] during planning and identify the **conditions** they believe must unfold [pre-conditions] in order for these objectives to be achieved. These conditions are outlined in the **changes** [outcomes] (and the effects of these changes) that are intended to be achieved and are graphically organized in a causal structure [results chain].

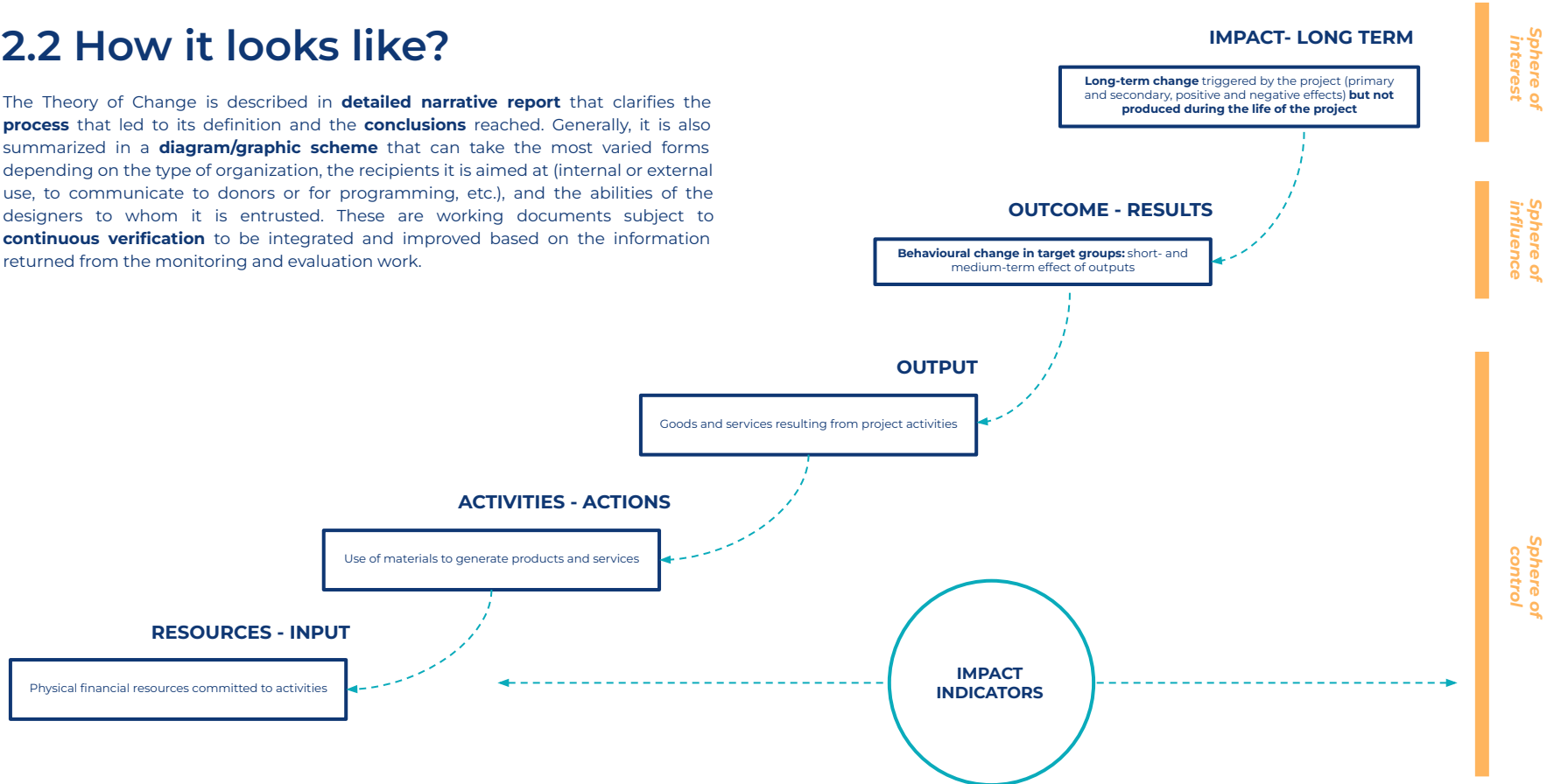
Taplin, D. H., Clark, H. (2013)<sup>3</sup>

“ Building a Theory of Change is like **drawing a map** that indicates the possible paths that must be followed to generate the desired change. It helps us **understand if our work is contributing to achieving the impact anticipated** by our vision or if there is another path to follow. In this way, it **contributes to the debate among stakeholders**, where various options can be analyzed, explored, and discussed.

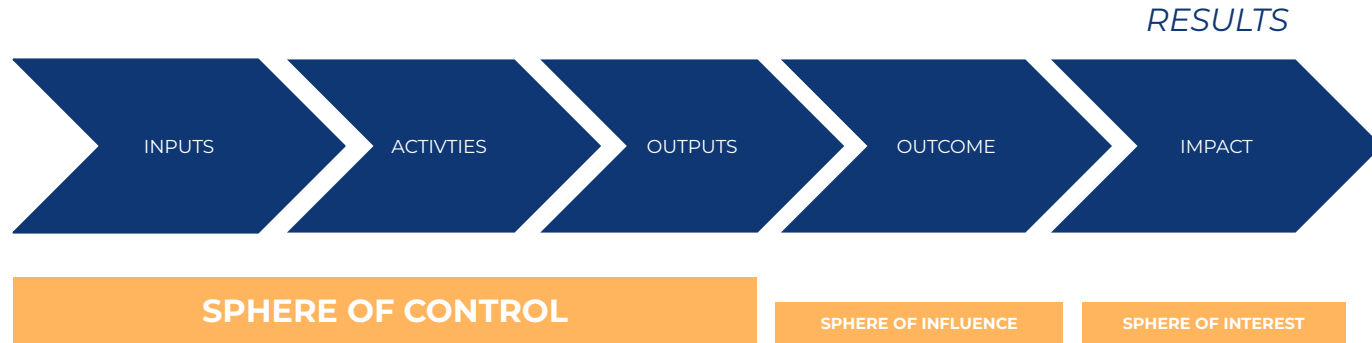
Elevati, C. (2019)<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2 How it looks like?

The Theory of Change is described in **detailed narrative report** that clarifies the **process** that led to its definition and the **conclusions** reached. Generally, it is also summarized in a **diagram/graphic scheme** that can take the most varied forms depending on the type of organization, the recipients it is aimed at (internal or external use, to communicate to donors or for programming, etc.), and the abilities of the designers to whom it is entrusted. These are working documents subject to **continuous verification** to be integrated and improved based on the information returned from the monitoring and evaluation work.



## Causal structure



## The key concepts of change

### **IMPACT (long-term objective):**

The long-term and wide-ranging changes at the social, economic, environmental, and civil society level of a program/project, achieved after its conclusion. It can be positive, negative, or null, anticipated or unforeseen. Unlike activities, outputs, and outcomes, it does not depend solely or primarily on the activity of a single organization, but also on the role of other entities, partners, stakeholders, and specific contextual conditions.

### **OUTCOME - RESULTS:**

The expected and measurable changes that the beneficiaries of the project's services undergo; typically these are changes in behaviors, knowledge, skills, attitudes, social or personal status that are not present at the start of the program and should have manifested by its conclusion. They represent the necessary preconditions to achieve the impact objective. They need specific outputs to be realized and contribute to achieving the impact.

### **OUTPUT:**

The products, infrastructure, and services generated, provided, and/or managed (courses delivered, schools built, microcredits granted, etc.) and that require specific resources (inputs). They help the organization to achieve the desired outcomes. They are the means to achieve the end (the change), not the end itself.

### **ACTIVITIES - ACTIONS:**

The actions and services that the organization creates, develops, and manages within a project or program. They are directly under the organization's control.

### **RESOURCES - INPUTS:**

The resources that are made available and used in a program/project, including personnel, time, skills, materials, spaces, funding, equipment, and volunteer work.

### **IMPACT INDICATORS:**

It expresses the qualitative or quantitative variable capable of providing clear and measurable evidence of the achievement of results. Qualitative indicators, particularly useful for evaluating outcomes, are usually supplemented by narrative descriptors, beyond the mere numerical value, which is nonetheless necessary to measure progress from the baseline. Impact assessments use a balanced mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators. They must be specified for each level of the "results chain" output-outcome-impact (see the entry results chain). They require specific verification sources and tools.

## 2.3 An “*impact-oriented*” process vs “*output-oriented*”

The ToC allows for the development of strategies capable of **focusing on outcomes** (changes in behaviors, processes, or economic, political, social systems...) **rather than on output/deliverables**. The latter remain essential to the process only to the extent that they can generate short- or medium-term effects at the outcome level.

**Example:** *Opening the best community clinics will have been in vain if no one uses them because they don't trust them, or if those managing them do so dishonestly, or if they have costs that can't be sustained after the project's conclusion (in short, if the clinics are not regarded by the community as a shared and communal asset and if they are not sustainable).*

When the output-outcome chain works, then the outcomes - concrete and measurable - can in turn contribute (together with other factors and under certain conditions) to achieving **long-term impact**.

In summary, an effective ToC **provides a roadmap for the change we are working** towards. It helps to:

- **guide the organization's operations**, determining in a shared, clear, and testable way the logic and methods with which the initiative will be carried out.
- **position the initiative** immediately with internal stakeholders (e.g. staff) and external ones (e.g. beneficiaries, partners, donors), fostering accountability, the birth of new collaborations, and reducing the risk of self-referentiality.
- **lay the groundwork for impact assessment**, defining an essential reference point (i.e., the concept of "success" and the means to achieve it) and arranging from the start for the collection of robust and appropriate data - avoiding complex ex-post research that usually results in cost escalation and a decrease in the reliability of the study.

## Dynamic instrument

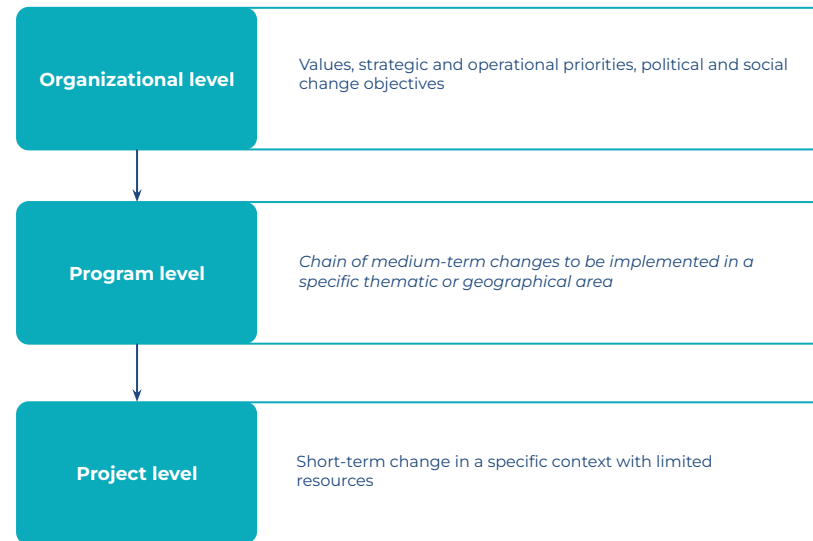
The ToC as a dynamic tool: The organization should consider the ToC as a **model of continuous learning that can and must change over time** based on new information and results identified during monitoring and evaluation. This **iterative and dynamic approach** is one of the main elements and innovations of the model, which must be periodically reviewed by the organization to **increase project effectiveness and foster the spread of a culture of results - and failures**. If the goal of every social operator is to show how a problem might be solved, **failure is as useful a result as success**: demonstrating the ineffectiveness of certain interventions is as valuable as highlighting effective cases because it helps avoid repeating techniques, tools, models that do not achieve the set objectives.

## What should the theory include?

- a clear **explanation of the assumptions** underlying our strategic choices: why do we expect that, in a specific context and within the planned time frame, certain interventions better than others will trigger real and lasting changes?
- the **articulation of a path that shows how**, change after change, through causal chains, **we expect to achieve long-term impacts**; this path will then materialize through the development of coherent programs and projects, specific organizational structures and competencies, and the procurement of the relative human and economic resources;
- a **system for managing and evaluating the changes generated** that can test both the hypotheses underlying our strategies (assumptions) and the tools implemented in itinere and ex post.

Without a **clear, reasoned (evidence-based), and detailed explanation** of the reasons why we expect the desired change to occur, it would be impossible to either

## Different levels of application



Different levels of application of Change Theory. Taken from: Elevati, C. (2019). *Progettare con la Teoria del Cambiamento. Una guida per il mondo della cooperazione internazionale*.

## 4 - Stakeholder mapping

## 4.1 The role of stakeholder

The entire ToC is predicated on a **dialogue and fluid communication among stakeholders**, that is, those entities interested in the change the program aims to trigger.

**Active participation spans all different stages of the project cycle:** from the analysis of the context, to the **identification of the desired long-term change**, as well as the formulation of **hypotheses** about how such change might occur and the definition of the sequence of events that would enable its achievement, the **identification of available resources, the selection of the most suitable activities** and methodologies, the definition and **measurement of indicators**, the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of both the change and the project itself. Finally, active participation serves to guarantee and enhance the accountability of the entire process.

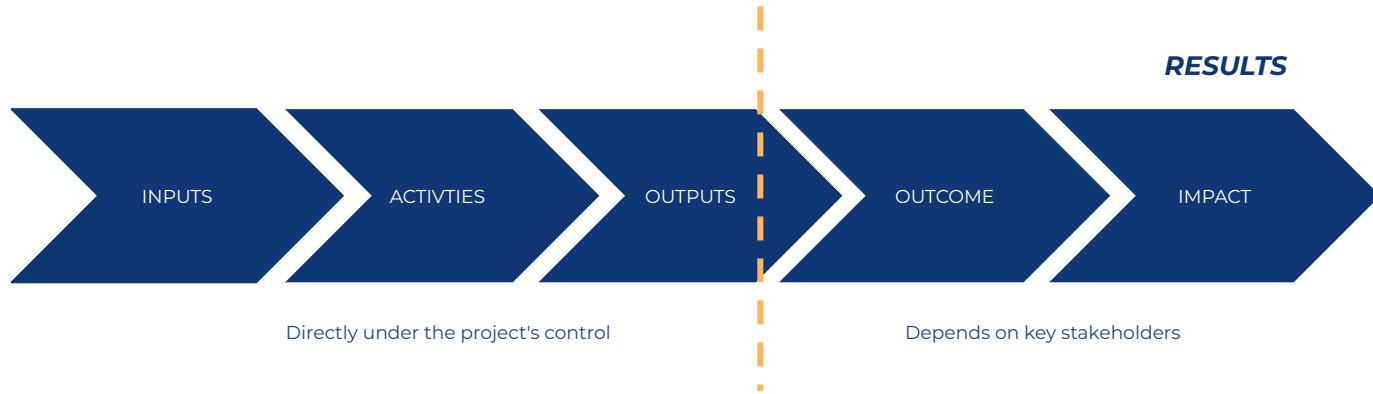
The active participation of stakeholders represents a distinguishing element capable of making a difference in identifying **interventions that are relevant, effective, sustainable, and impactful**. This approach significantly mitigates the risk that project design might become a routine activity or a mere solitary logical exercise, which would result in a ToC with limited effectiveness in the real world.

### The participation of a wide range of stakeholders:

**entails a greater sense of belonging to the process and increases the possibilities of an effective use of the ToC**, which becomes a strategic tool for the project also useful for monitoring, and does not remain a mere annex to the project document nor appears to be "imposed from above."

**allows a more comprehensive and detailed view of the issues involved in the change**, in addition to a greater **understanding of the context and social dynamics**. This is particularly relevant in the case of projects to be implemented in countries other than one's own, considering the cultural differences and the influence these can have on the change process.

True change only occurs at the level of **outcomes** (not outputs), and since achieving these outcomes is not entirely under our control (it necessarily depends on the involvement of key stakeholders), **only a participatory process and a stakeholder engagement strategy can enhance the possibility of obtaining a greater impact.**



## 4.2 Stakeholder mapping

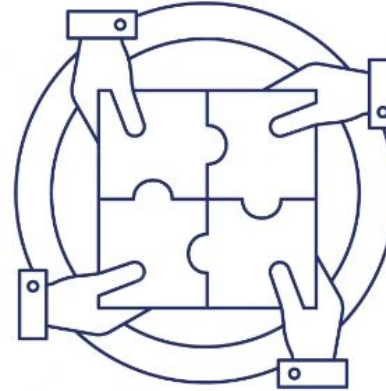
The identification of the main actors to involve in the preparation of a ToC must be based on a **mapping of the various stakeholders** through a **collaborative process of research and analysis** of the configuration of the actors, networks, and alliances. The mapping forms the basis for the definition of the ToC and for the preparation of the stakeholder engagement strategy, with the aim of **achieving agreed results and ensuring accountability** during project implementation.

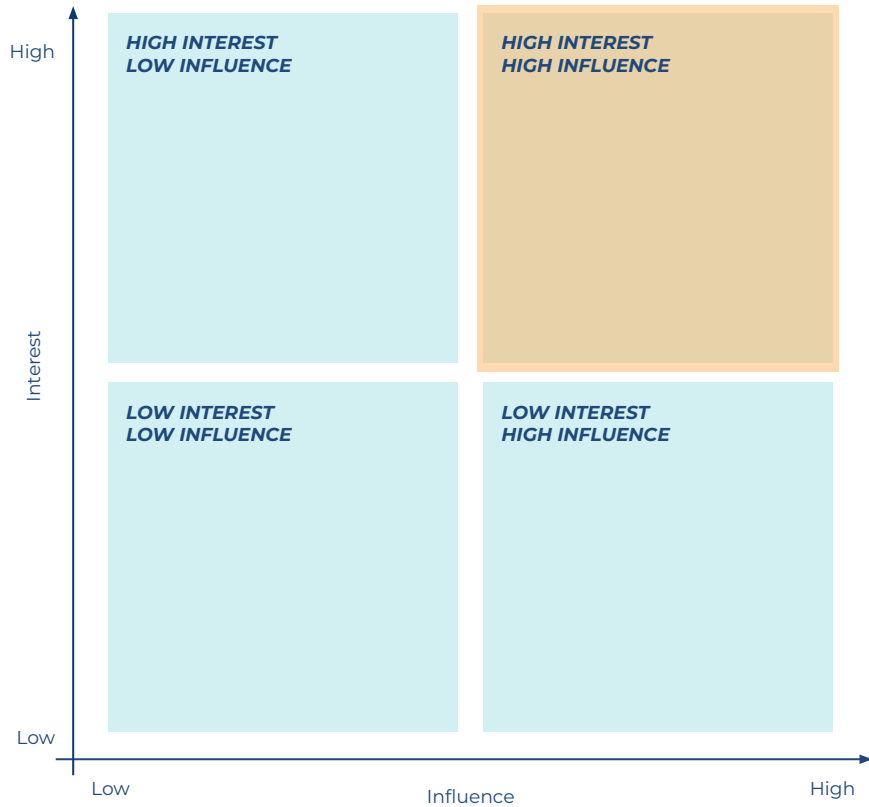
The first step consists of a **brainstorming session with partners and some potential key actors** to create a preliminary list of the main stakeholders divided by type. For this purpose, a pre-structured grid may be useful to detail as much as possible the individual subjects and, if possible, to specify them "by name."

The second step involves to **place the stakeholders into an influence/interest matrix**. The interest/influence matrix is an easy-to-interpret visual tool that helps understand the role that different stakeholders should play in the change intended to be brought about.

Interest: Indicates the degree of interest in the changes identified by the program/project.

Influence: Indicates the ability to resist or positively trigger the change process.

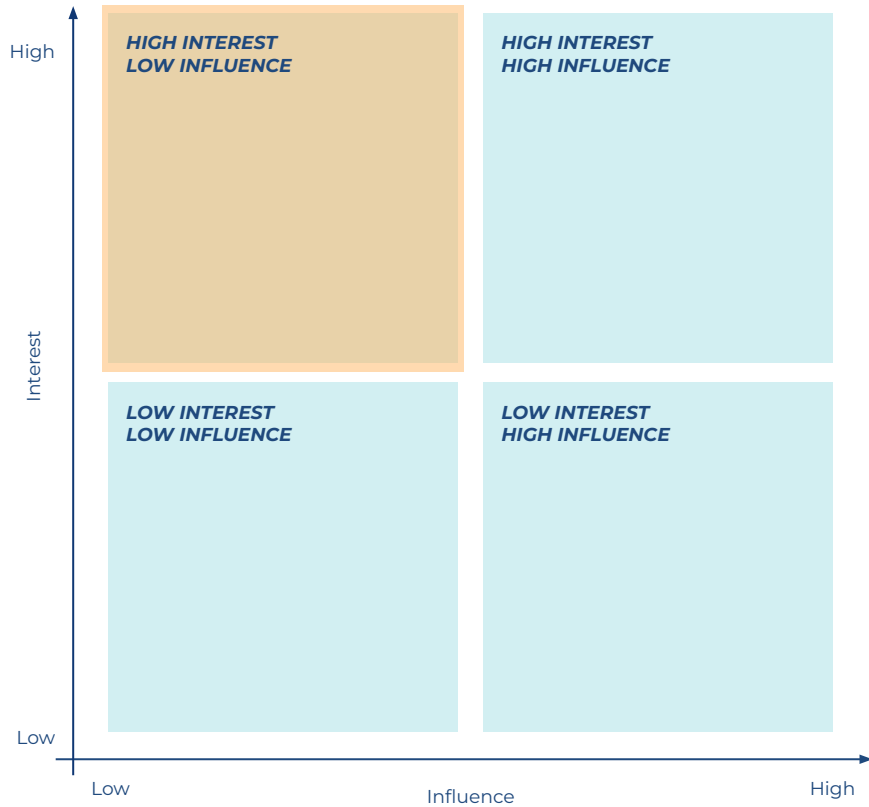




**HIGH INTEREST - HIGH INFLUENCE**

Partners and key stakeholders. These individuals are very interested in the change and particularly capable of doing something about it, by supporting or opposing it.

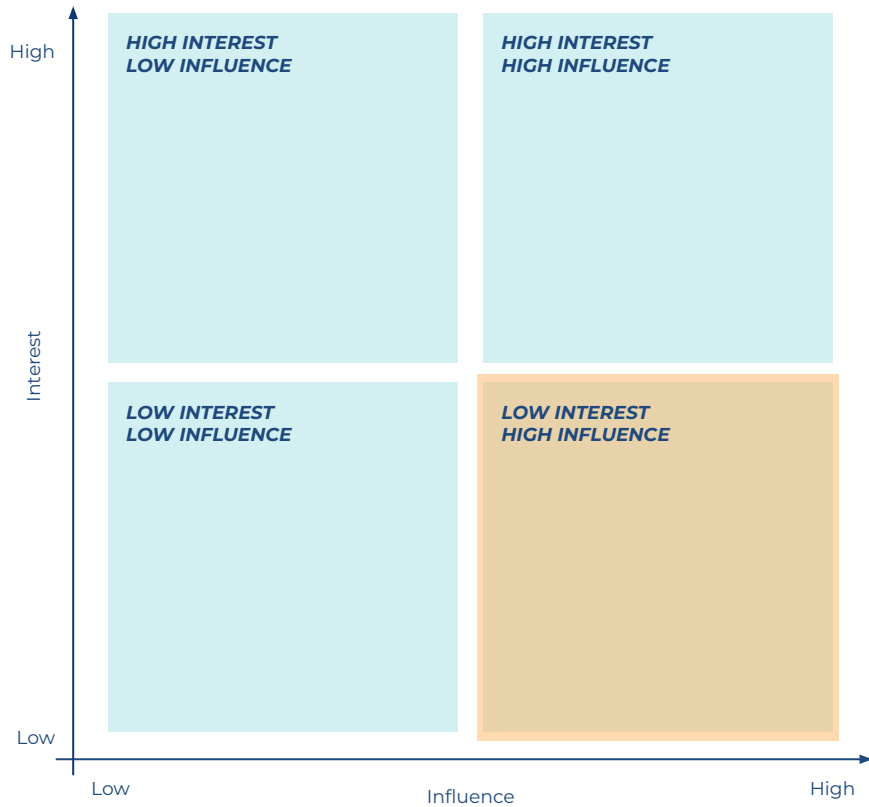
It is important to involve them, ensuring they understand what is happening and instilling in them a sense of belonging.



**HIGH INTEREST - LOW INFLUENCE**

One might consider ignoring these people as they apparently have no influence, but keep in mind that they could gain it or negatively affect the change process, if they were disturbed or scared by it.

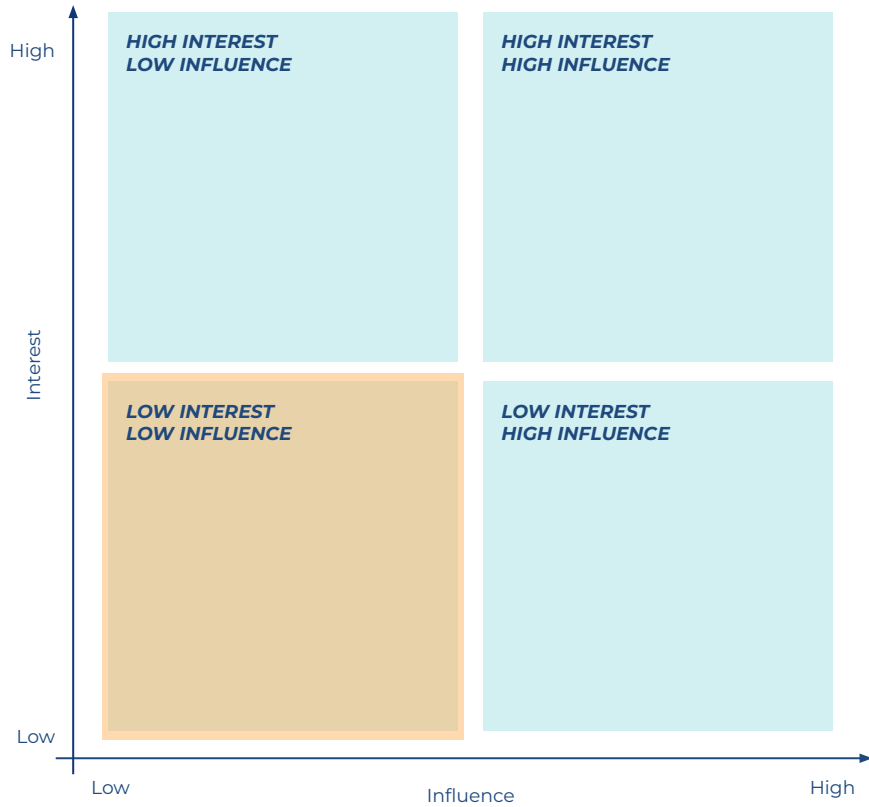
One of the outcomes of a project could be an increase in the positive influence that these people could have on the change, through an empowerment process



#### **LOW INTEREST - HIGH INFLUENCE**

The subjects in this quadrant will not be particularly concerned about what is happening, but it is important to try to involve them, for example, with regular meetings that explain what is happening because:

- a) negatively, they could become a problem, if they were influenced by those opposing the change;
- b) positively, they could become powerful allies.



**LOW INTEREST - LOW INFLUENCE**

These are relatively unimportant actors, but it is a good idea to maintain contact with them, particularly with those subjects who are hoped to be strategically moved into the other 3 quadrants.

## 5 - Conclusion

Community engagement processes, made up of the principles and elements as described in Toolkit 4 - Key Elements for CE , constitute an approach through which the actors of a territory can actively recognise themselves within a new process of value production and social innovation, unleashing their transformative potential in their community.

**Design tools such as that of the theory of change are used to make collaboration concrete and tangible, able to recompose resources, both material and intangible, around common objectives.**

For such a process of involvement and participation to run smoothly, it will be necessary to employ **three enabling factors:**

1- **familiarizing the territory with new approaches and resources** that can be used; (see Bringing together people and points of view in Toolkit 4.3; Capacity building in Toolkit 4.4)

2- **building common sense scenarios**, aligning objectives and strategies; (see Building a common vision in Toolkit 4.3)

3- **activating common experiences of collaborative planning** to recompose resources and arrive at shared solutions responding to criteria of innovation and future sustainability. (See Collaboration, cooperation and co-creation in Toolkit 4.2)

In support of these enabling factors, design tools (Manzini, 2015) can contribute to structuring these processes, that is, creating the conditions of meaning, capacity and operativeness at the basis of a way of **"making things happen"** that is **open, collaborative** and aimed at generating shared solutions, starting from the emergence of needs, and the identification of opportunities. Moreover, in order to activate social innovation processes, it is necessary to design profound actions that intentionally bring about positive change within **an established timeframe**, with **clear reference groups** and through practices that produce collective learning. In order to realize these transformative actions, it is not enough to work in networks; instead, it is necessary to **build systems and ecosystems based on the interdependence of resources and knowledge**. In a system, **actors have specialized, differentiated roles**, however, collective efforts are channeled towards realizing long-term effects in their own territory.

According to HECSOS' multi-case study analysis and the evidence provided, three phases of this process of "making things happen" have been identified, each of them involving a set of essential competencies, resources, requiring roles and efforts:

**Design:** This phase aims at a *deep understanding* of the needs, concerns, and expectations that have to be addressed. In this respect, surveys and structured qualitative interviews need to be supported with research approaches that are able to unveil the deepest, and often not verbalized needs. Then, active listening capabilities and ethnographic research know-how prove relevant, coupled with techniques such as participant observation, diaries, photovoice, and participatory research. The capacity to network with the relevant stakeholders, where creativity and strategic thinking prove essential, in order to comprise creative partnerships, while communication skills prove important to engage stakeholders from the beginning. Competencies to foster social innovation, deploy design thinking and systemic design, together with intercultural communication as well as fundraising, are those that professionals should acquire in tackling social and economic issues from the beginning.

**Implementation:** This phase requires management - self-management - and documentation skills as well as budgeting, fundraising, and social media management. Moderation and conflict management are also needed to be able to address and tackle critical issues within the community and protect its members. This also asks for empathy and member support, in other words being able to promote productive behaviors, motivating and rewarding active members, and promoting community advocacy. Finally, good communication skills are required in all stages but especially in the implementation one.

**Sustainability:** once the community becomes solid – self-sustained –, scalability is better than replication should be considered as a priority. Community managers need to be able to evaluate the impact of the project in terms of forward-thinking and vision of the future, on one hand, while understanding how to ensure sustainability, including business modeling, on the other. That is, once the community becomes self-sustained, it is necessary to understand which strategy to pursue looking ahead, whether to grow in size, becoming attractive to larger audiences, or replicate the "structure" in another context (eg. geographical area) thus keeping the size of the community.

Professionals are called upon to cultivate specific competences and skills to act within these phases as **managers, facilitators, guides, analysts, communicators** and as **third parties** that are able to perform not only a **facilitating function** but a true **enabling function of local relationships**, increasing the awareness and intentionality of collaboration, bringing attention to the challenges that unite the actors involved and that can become new opportunities

## 6 - Bibliography

- 1- Davies, R. (2012). "Criteria for assessing the evaluability of a Theory of Change".
- 2-Rogers, P., (2014). Theory of Change. UNICEF.
- 3-Taplin, D. H., Clark, H. (2013). *Theory of Change basics*. ActKnowledge, New York.
- 4-Elevati, C. (2019). Designing with Theory of Change. A guide for the world of international cooperation. ChangeLab



Erasmus+



HECSOs  
community engagement