Deliverable Proof – "Other document" - EIT-BP2020

Name of KIC project the report results from that contributed to/ resulted in the deliverable	Building a Methodology and Community of Practice for Catalyzing Transformative Change through System Innovation (MOTION)
Name of report	Blog: MOTION capacity building: How to develop a theory of change for systems transformation? Our training session at the International Sustainability Transitions Conference (IST) 2020 (DEL 200255-08)
Summary/brief description of report	This document contains a blogpost that will offer some insights into the training and capacity building activity MOTION organised on 18 August 2020. The purpose of this narrative is to be published on the TIPC website. As such, it is written for a non-academic audience.
Date of report	10 December 2020

Climate-KIC is supported by the EIT, a body of the European Union

MOTION capacity building: How to develop a theory of change for systems transformation?

Our training session at the International Sustainability Transitions Conference (IST) 2020

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URL: http://www.tipconsortium.net/motion-capacity-building-how-to-develop-a-theory-of-change-for-systems-transformation-our-training-session-at-the-international-sustainability-transitions-conference-ist-2020/

One of the key goals of the MOTION project is to develop a community of practice and enhance capacity building in relation to monitoring, learning and evaluation (MEL) for transformative change.

With that goal in mind, we implemented an online training session focused on sharing some of the key learnings of the MOTION project during the International Sustainability Transitions Conference (IST) 2020. The main aim of this session was to introduce participants, who were mainly project managers from EIT Climate-KIC and regional governments across Europe, to the Theory of Change methodology for a MEL framework – an approach that can help their organization develop interventions aimed at transformative systems change. The second goal was to allow participants to get to know people and organizations also interested in understanding how research and innovation initiatives can tackle sustainability issues through systems change.

We focussed the session on introducing the process of developing a Theory of Change for system transformation because it is one of the key elements of MOTION and applicable to the work of IST participants. Through co-constructing a Theory of Change with each of the MOTION project partners we help them define their long-term transformative goals and how to reach them – so-called pathways and transformative outcomes.

Through an interactive exercise, we engaged IST participants to co-develop (parts of) a Theory of Change with at least two pathways, relatable to specific transformative outcomes within the context of a specific project or intervention. Before we dive deeper into the exercise itself, let's take a look at the basic terms we're referring to.

- A **Theory of Change** is commonly used to understand the strategy and approach of an intervention. As the name indicates, it is a "theory", so it is based on some assumptions about how the world works which can be theoretically-based or based on particular experiences or worldviews. In this case, the theory describes how and why change happens in a particular context. A Theory of Change can be general (about a general issue, for example, how innovations are adopted) or it can be specific (for example, how a new transport solution can be adopted in a given local and temporal context). In the case of the MOTION project, we are developing specific theories of change based on a guiding theory called the multi-level perspective, which explains how change emerges in systems from the "niches" (areas of novelty) to change the dominant way of doing things (the "regime").

- One feature of a Theory of Change is that it makes (causal) connections between different elements: inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes are the most common. For example, an "input" can be the financial resources put into a project; an "activity" can be a workshop or a study, which requires these resources to be conducted; the "output" is a workshop or study report, which describes what happened and the key learnings; the "outcome" is what you've learned from the activity, it is the intangible but very relevant aspect of a project. The MOTION approach to Theory of Change focuses on the processes that these elements represent, and how these processes can be assessed, evaluated and revised in the context of new evidence and learnings about how a project evolves. This is what we call **Pathways**. Each Theory of Change includes one or more pathways of change, which can at the same time be interconnected.

- A third, key element of our methodology are **Transformative Outcomes**. These are leverage points in the change process identified from sustainability transitions theory. The transformative outcomes are not the same as the general outcomes in a Theory of Change, they are transversal processes that need to be activated for system change to occur. For example, learning, networking and circulation (of learnings, ideas, technologies) are transformative outcomes, but also de-stabilizing dominant practices and structures (such as a fossil fuel-based economy) so these can be replaced with novel and more sustainable practices. In MOTION we are working to understand how to better use the transformative outcomes in the context of a Theory of Change that can be used for monitoring, learning and evaluating (MEL) an initiative.

With these concepts in mind, let us explain how the IST training was set up and what we learned from it. We were working with four groups in total. Since we wanted to show that the Theory of Change development is happening through co-construction, we asked our MOTION partners from the SuSMo and SATURN projects to participate and act as "problem owners" in two of the four examples used for the online training. The other two examples were a project from the Deep Demonstrations program of EIT Climate-KIC, and an external project from the Municipality of Lleida in Catalonia. The main target audience of this session was EIT Climate-KIC partners and program managers. We had an excellent attendance of more than 30 people.

The activity was structured as follows:

- **Step 1: Understand the system**. Each group was introduced to the project by the "problem owner", using the flourishing multilevel tool to provide a system's description of the issue at stake (socio-technical system, geographical scope, actors, drivers, technologies, goals, etc.). The group discussed this representation, asking questions to the problem owner.
- **Step 2: Review a Theory of Change**. The group was introduced to a template of a Theory of Change for the project, with two pathways, each of which addressed a specific transformative outcome. One of the pathways was already filled in and used to illustrate the activity. For example, in the case of SuSMo, a pathway described how a dynamic and strong network of shared mobility actors was created. The inputs were knowledge, shared needs and motivation; the activities were identifying stakeholders and analysing their needs; the outputs were a stakeholder map, workshops and collaboration models; and the outcomes were alignment of goals and expectations, mutual and shared understanding. They all contributed to the transformative outcome of navigating expectations (see Figure 1).

- **Step 3: Co-design a pathway**. Together, the group co-designed a second pathway which had an explicit transformative outcome. This was presented as a "backcasting" exercise: "if we want to achieve this specific transformative outcome, what does the project need to do to get there, in terms of activities, inputs, outputs, intermediate outcomes, and its relations?" (see Figure 2).

- **Step 4**: **Stretching the Theory of Change.** The group was invited to review the two pathways, asking whether this sufficiently represented the ambitions and goals of the project and if additional elements had to be added.

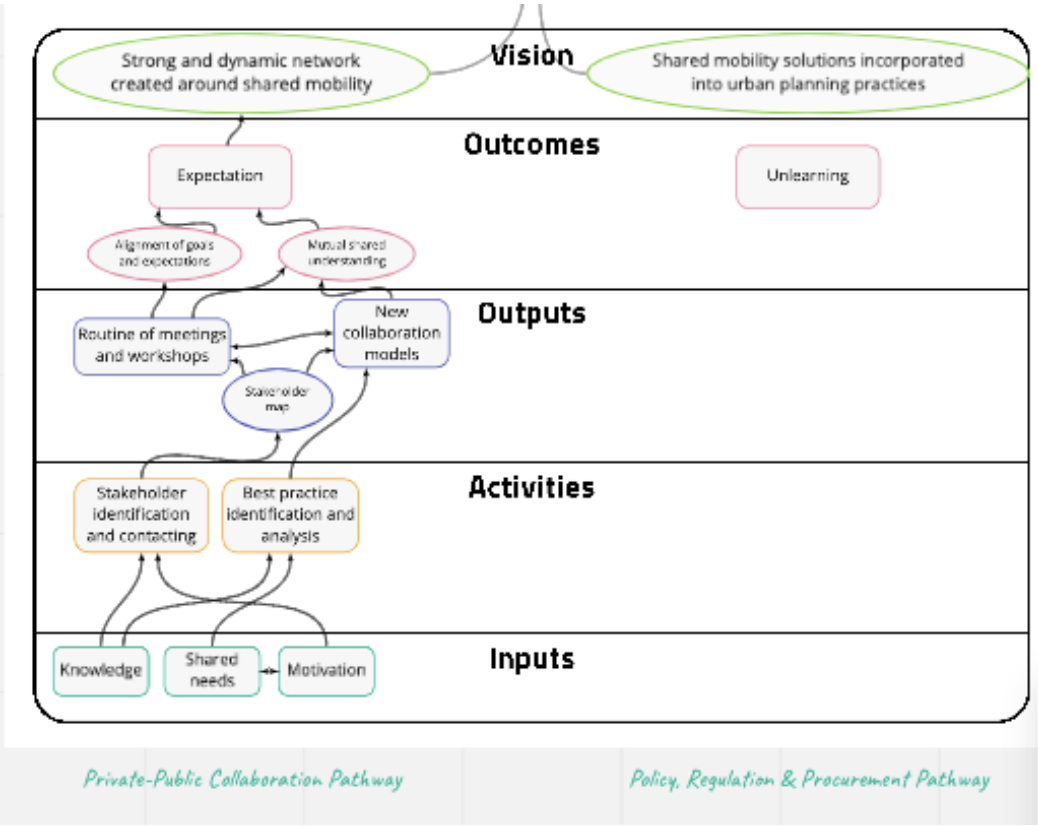

Figure 1. Pathway 1 of the Theory of Change of SuSMo

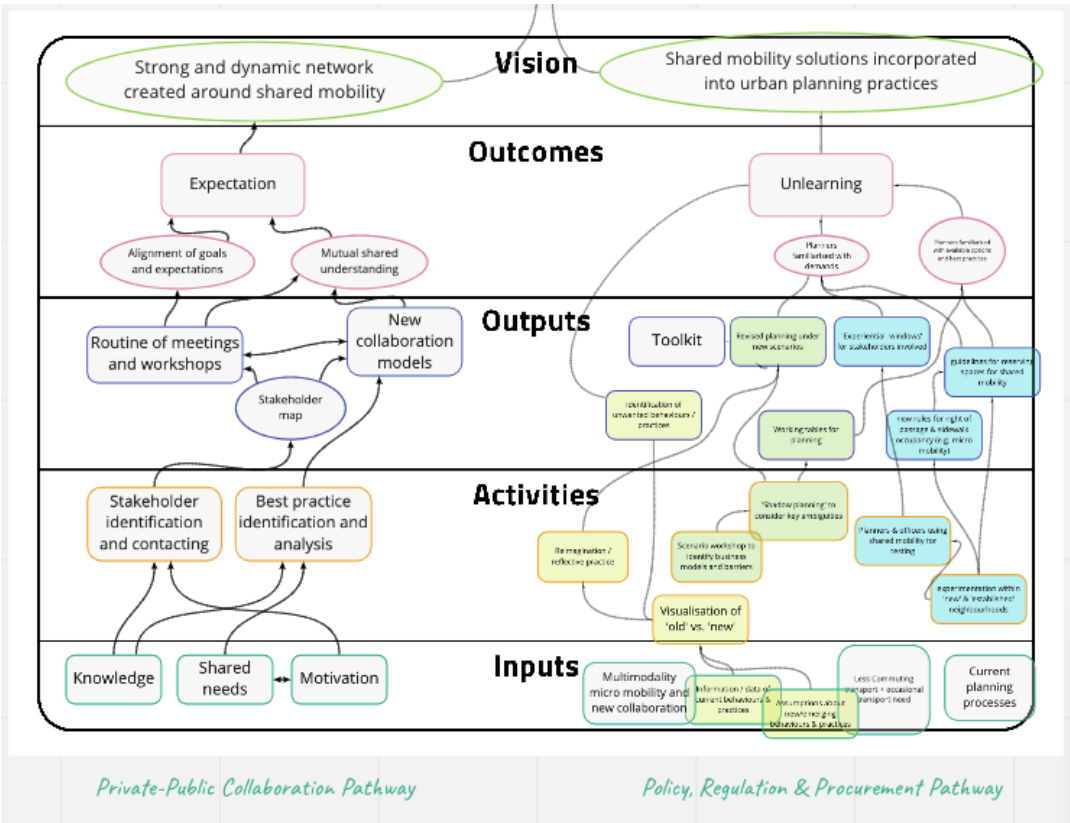

Figure 2. Pathway 2 of the Theory of Change of SuSMo, as completed by the participants

Overall, the participants actively engaged with the concepts and contributed with their ideas to the different projects and to MOTION itself. Some of the key insights provided by the participants related to the challenges of communicating the complex language used in the MOTION project clearly and consistently. Terms such as transformation, niche and regime can be challenging to grasp in a short time. Nevertheless, projects and initiatives need to be able to communicate these clearly and effectively to stakeholders and funders who can help sustain interventions in the long run. Additionally, for some of the participants, the Theory of Change approach came across as "linear" thinking, in contradiction to the nature of complex systems and transition projects. They felt uneasy about pre-defining outputs of a project that was meant to be exploratory and experimental. This was an important remark for the MOTION team. In response to this, we emphasised the dynamic and interconnected nature of the Theory of Change representation which seeks to illustrate links and feedback loops between different elements. A Theory of Change serves as a tool for revising and reflecting upon a project at any given time and in a holistic manner – not in a linear or static one.

In more practical aspects, while the participants liked the interactive parts of the exercise, they would have preferred to have some information beforehand and to allocate more time to conduct interactive activities to understand the context of the project.

This training was a great opportunity to learn about how to conduct more effective and engaging capacity building sessions online. We experienced the challenges of demonstrating the reflexive nature of our Theory of Change approach in a concise way, the different understandings and expectations that practitioners have about transformation, and how to structure a co-creation session with a group of participants that is new to the approach.