

11. Change, as told, interpreted, implemented and strategized

Patrycja Kaszynska and Adam Thorpe

INTRODUCTION

Theory of Change (ToC) has been traditionally considered a tool to make explicit the ‘logic’ of how an intervention is expected to produce results (Dhillon & Vaca, 2018). As such, this concept is well entrenched in evaluation practice (Coryn et al., 2011; Donaldson & Lipsey, 2006). Several decades of work across the fields of policy evaluation (Weiss, 1980) and theory-based evaluation, coupled with the more recent developments related to systems-thinking evaluation (Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2010), have made apparent that ToC is not a representation of ‘real’ change from some neutral point of view. In other words, ToCs are not scientific accounts capturing causal connections – they are neither models nor representations for how change unfolds through projects. This raises questions: what are they? What do they do? And what are they for?

ToC can serve several functions: from the more traditional employment in evaluation to help determine what needs to be measured (and what does not); through supporting both internal and external communication and partnership building and stakeholder engagement; to strategy formation, articulation and implementation (see Kaszynska, 2021; also Stein & Valters, 2012). This chapter presents an argument that cuts across these functions by looking at MAKE @ Story Garden – a public space for creative collaboration in Somers Town and St Pancras in central London and an example of an infrastructuring project (Hillgren, et al., 2011; La Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013; see the next section for more details).

Answering the questions: *what are ToCs?, what do ToCs do?, and what are ToCs for?* – this chapter argues that the ToC for MAKE was used to lock in the commitments from the delivery teams, to get ‘buy in’ from the partners and to mobilize stakeholders by opening up interpretative spaces, and in this way, supporting the development of strategy-as-practice (Knight, et al., 2020). Specifically, the chapter shows that ToC was used implicitly to

support asset-based ways of working in a situation where the configuration of the assets in question – be they people with specific skills or resources serving certain functions – could not be pre-defined, and was necessarily and intentionally left open-ended. Crucial to this was a discursive understanding of the ToC: rather than a ‘structured framework’ (Simeone, 2019), the ToC was used in MAKE as a discursive, boundary object (see the section below) supporting the activities of ongoing framing, sense-making and articulating (Zurlo & Cautela, 2014; but also, Czarniawska, 2004). In this sense, the ToC supported the development of the project’s programme and pathways through a process of emergent strategizing (Liedtka, 1998; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Mintzberg, 1994). In contrast to the deliberate strategy approach (Porter, 1985; see also Huggins & Izushi, 2011), the emergent approach sees the pattern of action unfold not just through the set intent and a hypothesis-driven approach, but also and crucially, acting in time and material circumstances and by responding to the changing realities of implementation (Mintzberg, 1994). Emergent strategizing could thus be linked to an ability to be ‘intelligently opportunistic’ (Liedtka, 1998). This was certainly the case with MAKE.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

MAKE @ Story Garden is a public space for creative collaboration in Somers Town and St Pancras in Central London. Located within The Story Garden – a temporary garden run by the charity, Global Generation, on a site owned by the British Library – the space has a prominent location in Somers Town, between the British Library and the Francis Crick Institute within the heart of King’s Cross. The aim of the space and the programme of activities it enabled between July 2019 and January 2021 was to bring together people that live and work locally, art school students and staff, and other organizations interested in using the space, to participate in arts and design activities to address local goals and challenges and develop new skills. As a partnership between the Somers Town Community Association (STCA)/The Living Centre, Camden Council (London Borough of Camden), Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London (UAL) and the developer Lendlease – MAKE was also a testbed for collaborative ways of working between organizations across different sectors.

MAKE was a design project led by Professor Adam Thorpe – a co-author of this article. Crucially, the central design approach used for MAKE was that of infrastructuring. Infrastructuring, as an approach, rests on the idea of creating enabling conditions for (social) innovations from which outcomes can emerge rather than creating outcomes directly. In the words of La Dantec and DiSalvo, infrastructuring is ‘the work of creating socio-technical resources that intentionally enable adoption and appropriation beyond the initial scope of the design, a process that might include participants not present during the

initial design’ (La Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013, p. 247). Here, the infrastructuring process means creating lasting structures to enable people who were not part of the initial set up of MAKE and its programme of activities. Related to this are the ideas of ‘continuing design’ (Karasti et al., 2010), ‘design in use’ and ‘designing for design in use’ (Bannon & Ehn, 2012).

In general, the notion of infrastructure is considered a multifaceted concept that refers to interrelated technical, social and organizational arrangements (Star & Ruhleder, 1996). The key point is that ‘the human’ and ‘the social’ are not separate from ‘the material’ or ‘the technical’. This means that what is at issue for infrastructuring are constant alignments between complex, multi-scale systems characterized by emergence and unpredictable behaviour. This is particularly apparent in MAKE because of its asset-based ways of working (Manzini, 2015; Mulgan, 2019), thus the constant need to capitalize on whatever contributions become available and viable given the changes to socio-technical configurations. Here is, however, a significant crux: the configurations of these assets cannot be predicted in advance, nor can their ‘activations’ in the system be mapped out prior to their becoming available.

It follows that infrastructuring requires diverse constellations of interrelated practices offering different emphases and outcomes. Co-ordinating these by establishing spatial arrangements and ‘temporal architectures’ is challenging. Indeed, as the MAKE (e)valuation Report lays out, MAKE is a good example of the continuous re-adjustment and negotiation of the alignments between people, resources and policies (Kaszynska et al., 2022). This is the aspect that makes the emergent approach to strategy most apparent: with MAKE, planning had to respond to the changing reality, as different configurations of people, resources, and policies or the socio-technical arrangements became viable at any given time. This way of working was supported by the implicit and discursively constructed ToC.

THE IMPLICIT UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHANGE

MAKE – as a project involving multiple partners and part funded under Section 106 (a legal agreement between an applicant seeking planning permission and the local planning authority, used to mitigate the impact of proposed development on local communities and infrastructure) – was underpinned by a set of objectives. These centred on shared endeavour, employment and skills training, community resilience, social cohesion and well-being, and the delivery of the Camden STEAM agenda. Specifically, MAKE set out to achieve the following:

- Support local communities to address the complex societal challenges we face, such as overcrowded living, rough sleeping, social isolation and

loneliness through challenge-driven action learning projects that co-define, co-design and co-deliver social innovations that may be sustained as social enterprises.

- Improve social cohesion and well-being; reducing social isolation and loneliness by connecting people through collaborative creative activities that offer opportunities for shared experiences and meaningful encounters with others.
- Increase employability and entrepreneurship through skills development, training and networking – both formal and informal – linked to challenge-driven learning and creative collaborations that provide and support opportunities for residents to work with businesses and local organizations in order to develop skills and experiences that help them towards employment and stimulate social enterprise.
- Support delivery of Camden's STEAM agenda by providing a digital making space as a prototype STEAM hub providing facilities and resources that are accessible to schools and the wider community so they may gain access to digital tools and develop digital skills.
- Support inclusive development of the local area by providing the physical and relational infrastructure required to directly involve local communities affected by re-development in shaping the public realm via creative engagement and co-visioning of future scenarios.
- Widen access to arts and culture through an inclusive programme of collaborative creative activities.

These objectives – agreed by MAKE's Steering Group which comprised the partners – reflected, to a large extent, the objectives of the partnering organizations. The expectation these objectives could be achieved was grounded in long-standing collaboration between Central Saint Martin's, Camden Council and the Somers Town Community Association, two of MAKE's founding partners.

These pre-existing collaborations were primarily established through the Public Collaboration Lab (PCL), a collaborative design initiative and action research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, exploring the potential and value of strategic collaborations between design education and local government to service, policy and social innovation. Since 2015, the PCL has delivered over 30 individual projects. It was the PCL's understanding of change and its outline ToC that informed the development of MAKE (Box 11.1).

BOX 11.1 PCL PROGRAMME THEORY OF CHANGE OVERVIEW © ADAM THORPE

PCL Theory of Change Overview

Resources/inputs

External: Funding (Research and Knowledge Exchange), partner priorities, local government (LG) officer time and expertise, LG networks and coms, LG premises, Voluntary and Community Sector organisations' representatives' time and expertise, VCS premises, VCS networks and coms, business staff time and expertise, business premises, business networks and coms, Citizen time and expertise, citizens' personal networks and coms.

Internal: Funding (Higher Education Innovation Fund and Research Centre staffing: 0.2 Full Time Equivalent), Teaching staff time and expertise, Research staff time and expertise, college Innovation & Business staff time and expertise, student time and expertise, college premises and equipment.

Activities

Portfolio of collaborative projects (30) working with Council and Community partners.

- Challenge-driven learning projects (in kind contributions from partners). For example, Future Libraries/Market of Social Value/Overcrowded Living projects.
- Collaborative research (partners funded alongside Research Council funding). For example, PCL, T-Factor projects
- Consultancy (partner funded). For example, Camden Social Isolation and Loneliness project
- Knowledge Exchange (in kind and financial contributions from partners and/or external funding to all partners). For example, MAKE, People's Fruit and Veg stall, Rough Sleeping projects.

Outputs

New course development. New teaching resources. Community assets co-created with local partners and communities (Market Stalls, Community Maker Space). New enterprises. Insights contributing to new services and policies. Tools for Local Government/Higher Education collaboration. Workshop models and resources. Events. Exhibitions. Academic publications. Project reports. Short films. Graduate residences. Internships. Volunteering. Training.

Outcomes

Learning for all participants. Development of shared trust and values between local partners and stakeholders. Development of operational understandings and operational capacity between/among partners and stakeholders. Connections across organizational silos, identification of organizational synergy, alignment of organizational agendas and collectivization of organizational resources. Development of understanding of scope of art and design among partners and stakeholders. Development of understanding of local government and community organizing and support among designers and academics. Increased community involvement in service and policy development. Increased access to arts and design for community groups. New approaches to service and policy development. Pathways to employment for students and project participants.

Impacts

The project has created social impact by contributing to new models of public engagement and participation in service and policy development. Also, by co-delivering community assets that host further impactful activity (e.g. MAKE @ Story Garden) and by creating connections between organizations and individuals. The project has delivered economic impact by bringing external funding to local government and community groups via research funding and by creating employment for residents and students.

Crucially, the above ToC outline was never officially or formally presented or 'ratified' as part of MAKE. Rather, the expectations were set through prior evaluation and analysis (Thorpe, 2019; Thorpe & Rhodes, 2018) and experiential accounts of partners relating to how the previous projects framed by PCL worked and what they achieved. A different way to put this point is that the ToC in MAKE was never explicit at the outset but rather co-defined and linked to the negotiation of funding for the project. Through these negotiations the objectives described above were defined along with a high level outline of the programming that the space would support and the agreement of indicators by which to measure achievement of the agreed objectives. Significant to partners' motivations for MAKE were the numerous stories from the previous projects that provided experiential evidence for the value of the kinds of practice and projects that would be enabled by MAKE. This scenario was perhaps inevitable given that most of the people in the delivery team on MAKE were involved in the PCL projects. This situation was further augmented by the fact that – as described in the next section – a number of alternative framings could be used to describe MAKE, perhaps adding to the sense that the ToC behind MAKE was necessarily open-ended, if not intentionally polysemic.

OPEN-ENDED INTERPRETATION AND DIFFERENT EXPLANATORY FRAMES

MAKE, as introduced in the original proposal, worked by bringing together different agendas represented by the partners. These included: local residents and community groups, Camden Council staff and service providers, Central Saint Martins at UAL's staff and students, local employers and their employees, including the knowledge institutions, cultural organizations and businesses within the Knowledge Quarter in King's Cross. All these groups came with their specific perspectives. These, to an extent, were 'synthesized' in the set of objectives agreed by the partners, and yet, what is striking about the objectives presented above is that they are deliberately broad. This, one could argue, was necessary for a project such as MAKE where the very design presupposes that the pathways will develop in ways that cannot be predicted at the beginning of the project, and so much depends on 'intelligent opportunism', to use Liedtka's expression.

The approach to programming within MAKE was accordingly open-ended. The programming responded to the resources (skills, equipment and facilities) available, the expertise from the delivery team and the 'appetite' from the various stakeholders, users and participants. (Indeed, out of the total 189 events delivered between July 2019 and January 2021, 63 activities were either community-led or community co-led.) In this sense, the programming was emergent, based on the relationships, networks and expertise of different actors within the local area, along with the development of a number of pre-existing projects initiated as part of the PCL work.

Accordingly, the outcomes named in the implicit ToC were generic. They included: learning for all participants; development of shared trust and values between local partners and stakeholders; development of operational understandings and operational capacity between/among partners and stakeholders; connections across organizational silos, identification of organizational synergy, alignment of organizational agendas and collectivization of organizational resources, etc.

Retrospectively, it is apparent that this interpretation of outcomes is consonant with a number of possible framings. Indeed, as the MAKE (e)valuation Report lays down (Kaszynska et al., 2022), a number of possible interpretative prisms can be applied to MAKE and all were, to an extent, simultaneously valid. The focus can be put on the local council and community connection, emphasizing the space's potential to support participation in addressing complex public service-delivery challenges, not only as a Community Hub (Carr, 2010); MAKE can be interpreted as an instance of community organizing and an embodiment of Urban Commons (Petrescu et al., 2021);

emphasis can be placed on the entrepreneurial and innovation perspectives seeing MAKE as an instance of multiple-helix innovation involving a higher education institution, a business, a public body and citizens. In this sense, MAKE could be claimed a Living Lab (Westerlund et al., 2018) or a form of Community Studio (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015). Lastly, MAKE can be framed as part of the ‘making’ tradition – not only a Makerspace (Smith, 2017) but also a site for so-called collective alternative everyday practices (CAEPs) (Deflorian, 2021). Each framing concept comes from a different discursive tradition and emphasizes a different type of stakeholder, picking out different features of MAKE. Between July 2019 and January 2021, MAKE did in fact change character from the originally intended place of making (dedicated to furniture assemblies) to a community space (social groups formed around creative activities) and, on occasion, taking on certain characteristics of a community hub (in an attempt to create connections with a local ‘job hub’).

Even though MAKE was not consciously moulded to be one or the other, entertaining a number of narrative frames opened up the possibility of realizing a number of different pathways, following different trajectories. And indeed, as captured in the (e)valuation report from MAKE, the participants – be they local residents, facilitators from other organizations or arts and design students – shaped the development of MAKE in ways particular to their interpretations and practices. This ‘trying on of different hats’ is illuminating insofar as it reveals that the asset-based, infrastructuring approach that MAKE embodied required the acceptance that these pathways cannot be predicted in advance, even less can they be fixed.

To the extent that using the implicit and underdefined ToC was part of the strategy underpinning the project – and, in turn, supported strategy articulation – it was necessary for the ToC to be a discursive, boundary object.

THEORY OF CHANGE AS A DISCURSIVE BOUNDARY OBJECT

As discussed in science and technology studies and social sciences more broadly, boundary objects are coordinating mechanisms (Star & Griesemer, 1989). They are points of focus that sustain attention from different viewpoints and perspectives, thereby forming a temporary group. As discussed in the emergent field of transition studies, boundary objects work to support sense-making not despite but because they ‘hold different meanings for those involved’ (Tharchen et al., 2020, p. 9, see also Franco-Torres, 2020). This is in line with the well-established claim that boundary objects simultaneously support coordination and diversity (Star & Griesemer, 1989) and as Tharchen and colleagues put it, ‘the emergence of interactions occurs not despite but because of the diversity of views’ (2020, p. 9).

The term ‘discursive object’ is largely associated with Foucault (2002) but the specific sense intended here is more indebted to Bakhtin and Vygotski who both have a broad view of discourse as a form of social interaction where socio-material circumstance interacts with socio-cultural practices in meaning construction (Bakhtin & Dostoevsky, 1984; Vygotski, 1978). While the objects of discourse constitute shared knowledge by the discourse community, they are transformed by the ‘interlocutors’ as they take and express their own perspectives (Fairclough, 1992). The ‘object’ in this sense is the focal point at which the activity is directed that translates into a shared understanding that emerges through the interaction. Notions such as ‘nation’ and ‘justice’ can be used as examples of the objects of discourse – here, a ToC is claimed to be one.

The argument of this chapter is the ToC realized through MAKE was a discursive boundary object. In other words, the ToC was an object of interpretation and sense-making which played a co-ordinating function in project delivery. In this sense, the ToC was ‘realized’ – to use Mintzberg’s terms – as the broad understandings of change carried over from the previous projects, including those of the PCL, were interpreted and anticipated in the context of new socio-material conditions. The actors’ meaning-making efforts were thus guided but not pre-determined by the ToC, with their understanding of possibility supported by the implicit ToC but with the realization of these possibilities set against the constraints of feasibility arising from the availability of ‘assets’. In this sense, there was not one correct ‘script’ for MAKE, rather, the implicit understanding of ToC encouraged a number of interpretations, some but not all of which were realized in the form of emergent strategy.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In the oft-quoted lines from *Lector in Fabula*, Umberto Eco suggested that ‘the text is a lazy machine demanding to the reader a sharp cooperative work to fill the space of what is not said or already said left blank, so the text is only an assumption machine’ (Eco, 2014, p. 7). It is in this spirit that this chapter argues that ToC is not a ‘closed object’ but rather a discursive boundary object fuelling different kinds of interpretative frames and different types of meaning-making from the stakeholders. This is what the design of MAKE required. As argued, it was an initiative relying on infrastructuring and asset-based approaches in design, with ‘building long-term relationships with stakeholders in order to create networks from which design opportunities can emerge’ (Hillgren et al., 2011, p. 169) at the heart of the project.

Because of their long-term relational outlook and the preoccupation with creating wide opportunities rather than actualizing narrow impact, initiatives of this kind do not easily fit the approaches of standard evaluation, as the

MAKE (e)valuation Report makes clear (Kaszynska et al., 2022). This chapter reveals that, relatedly, this approach does not fit easily with the ‘structured framework’ approaches to ToC. The crucial point emphasized is that *situated interpretations* were needed to promote the development of different capabilities in different people, depending on what kind of contribution they were prepared to make, and thus were essential from the point of view of the infrastructuring, asset-based way of working.

In this sense, MAKE shares some of the assumptions behind Social Innovation, notably that ‘people are competent interpreters of their own lives and competent solvers of their own problems’ (Mulgan, 2019, p. 16) but insists that people are networked and co-dependent in ways that make the collective co-creation of value more than the sum of its individual parts. The point can be paraphrased to say that MAKE required a coordinated strategy emergence. In the sense inspired by Henry Mintzberg, emergent strategy is one where the realized outcome and the pattern of implementation respond to both: the strategic intentions set at the outset as well as the constraints of socio-material systems as these intentions unfold through the process (Mintzberg, 1994). This, as management scholars such as Liedtka emphasized, allows for more abductive and dialectical, and less controlling, approaches to planning (Liedtka, 1998). As Knight and colleagues show, this opens up the space for strategy-as-practice perspectives such as those embodied by MAKE.

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