

3.2. Needs analysis and identification of activities

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Needs analysis

Needs analysis is essential to identify problems, shortcomings, areas for improvement, causes of discomfort, but also to find possible opportunities on which to intervene with a project, an intervention, or a policy.

Needs analysis can also be a fundamental tool for identifying motivations, expectations, and useful guidelines to guide human behavior.

It is a complex activity because the concept of need is not always clear and shared by participants in the analysis activity.



Different interpretations of the concept of need

- According to some, the term need denotes a lack of certain material or non-material resources, objectively or subjectively necessary for a certain subject (individual or collective) to achieve a state of greater well-being or efficiency or functionality than the current state. This lack can be felt or ascertained by the same person or by others on his behalf.
- According to others, however, it must refer to a problem felt by individuals or groups which can be addressed in a different way and not necessarily by "filling a void".



Different interpretations of the concept of need

- Many different disciplines have grappled with this theme, helping to generate an extraordinary number of variants of meaning that are sometimes interchanged or confused. It is important, however, that needs are considered direct or indirect causes of social action, performing a motivational function that pushes one to act.
- From these meanings emerge a series of well-known dichotomies that oppose primary and secondary, essential and inessential, real and fictitious, avoidable and inevitable, recognized and unrecognized, conscious and unconscious. These contrasts are not very useful, but they make us reflect on who may be the actors entitled to define needs: experts, researchers, politicians, civil society organizations, companies, public administrations, citizens, consumers?



Ambiguity of the context

- The needs analysis is carried out in an ambiguous context.
- In different sectors (social services, training, health, etc.) needs analysis has taken on very different connotations that are well expressed in the terms commonly used by the professional communities of reference: needs assessment, analysis of social needs, assessment of training needs, assessment of the needs of the territory, analysis of the problems of a community or a territory, assessment of health needs, diagnostic verification, etc.
- Each specific context has its own experts, techniques, methods which often refer to some specific theory.



Changing perceptions

- The way in which a need is perceived in a community varies over time and differs for different cultures and social environments. The ways and strategies that are considered most suitable for dealing with a given type of need can also vary, as well as the descriptions of urgency or severity of the same.
- Finally, it is also important to consider the mechanisms that generate new needs, the functioning of the organizations that deal with these needs, and the relationships between the actors involved (organizations, individuals, families, communities, etc.).



Dimensions of needs analysis

It is a dynamic process that must take into account at least two dimensions:

Diachronic (temporal flow): it allows us to distinguish interpretations of the past from scenarios concerning the future, historical trends from ruptures;

Synchronic (the current state): shows the severity and extent of needs as they are currently interpreted.

Needs analysis requires the availability of **quantitative data** to describe the social, economic, demographic, etc. framework, and **qualitative data** that allow to identify problematic situations and understand the expectations, prejudices and perceptions of individuals, groups and communities regarding needs.



Strategy

- The interaction between the different dimensions makes it possible to build a complex picture of the situation and to graft learning mechanisms capable of addressing needs in an innovative way.
- Some rules and strategies can be used to work in a systematic, objective and transparent way on the processes of recognition of needs.



The collection and processing of direct data – WHAT METHODS TO USE?

Three distinct,
but closely
interconnected,
issues that
depend on

Political/ideological
reasons



Share design choices
and/or responsibilities

Practical/operational
reasons



Achieve goals and/or
gain consensus



Direct data: too much information, no information (Umberto Eco)



What information do I need?
Who "owns" them (inside
and outside the local
context)?

INFORMATION OVERLOAD is the result of exposing individuals to more information than they can process, affecting attention, comprehension and decision making.



METHODS FOR COLLECTING INFORMATION



Given the objective (Social farming), the how is more important than the what....



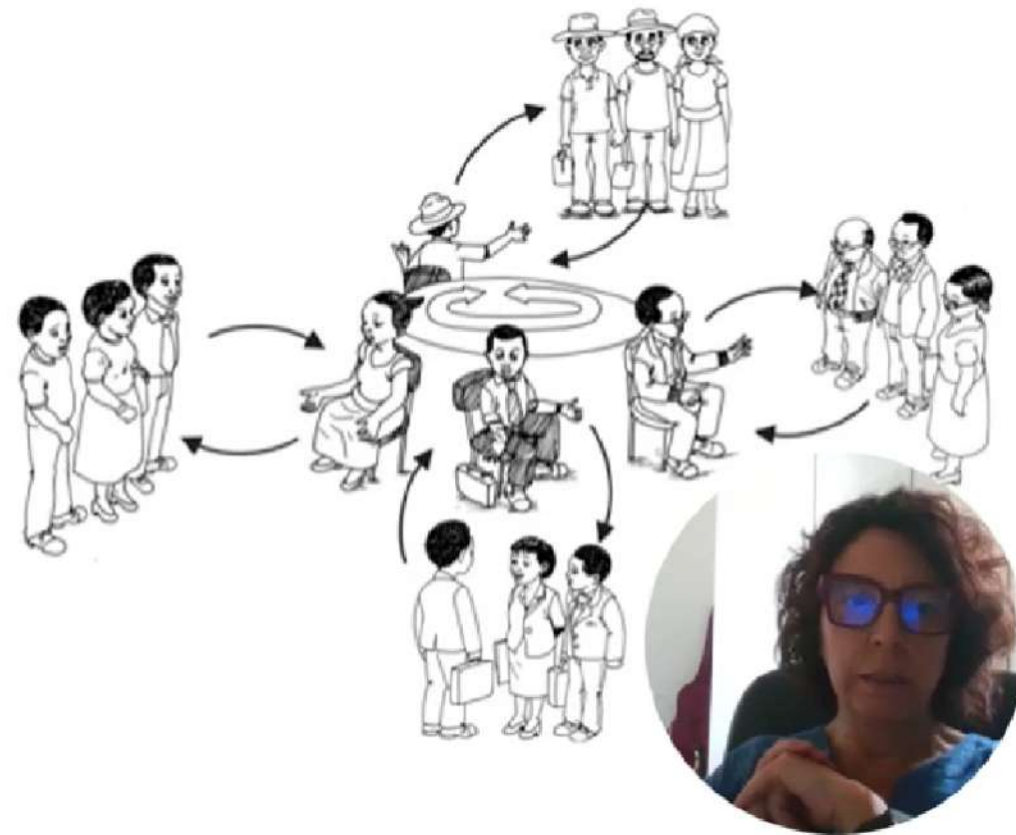
CHOOSING THE RIGHT TOOLS

That allows:

- The full participation of the entire community throughout the analysis (and design) process
- The involvement of all groups of people who are powerless.
- A better awareness of resources and their mobilization with a view to endogenous development and empowerment.

These methods are considered more scientific than those of traditional research, as community participation facilitates a more precise and more authentic analysis of social reality.

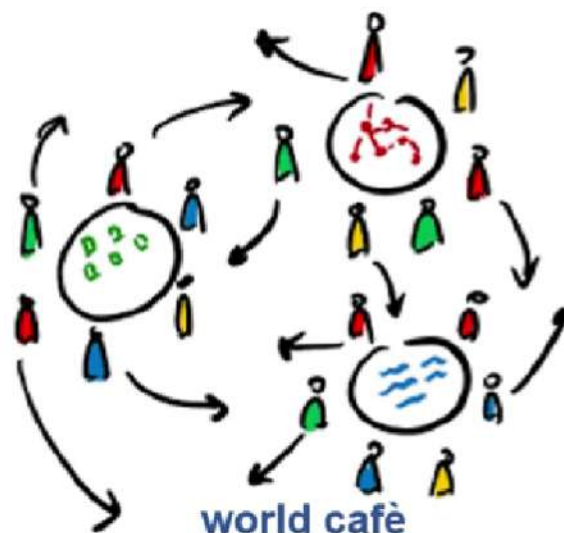
To collect information that is indicative of the reality of that territory shared by the community (or groups) useful for the knowledges



CHOOSING THE RIGHT TOOLS

Not all methods are interchangeable. The choice depends on

- The goal
- The people to involve
- The time available
- The skills available



THE FOCUS GROUP

It is a survey technique for social research, based on discussion among a small group of people, in the presence of one or more moderators, focused on a topic that one wants to investigate in depth (S. Corrao)

It can be articulated in different ways (participant homogeneity, schedule structuring, light/hard management) and is suitable for involving stakeholders

The statements are not answers to direct questions but emerge from the discussion where different topics are dealt with simultaneously

Full transcription of the FG

Simple and cross-classification and/or identification of recurring elements

Research Report

Integration with other search tools

Computer-assisted analysis possible



THE DELPHI METHOD

It is a long-term forecasting method, based on structured communication. It is based on the detection and analysis of subjective evaluations provided by a group of participants (experts or decision-makers).

It involves remote interaction (texts and online questionnaire), with several rounds that allow you to arrive at a shared result.

It is mainly used for scenario forecasting, but can be adapted for different purposes

Text analysis (first round)

Simple and cross-classification and/or identification of recurring elements to be proposed in propositions for the second round (Lickert scale)

Statistical analysis and preparation for the third round



WORLD CAFÈ

It is a format that allows a large number of people to dialogue together, develop a shared understanding of the situations that are dealt with, and converge towards initiatives that unite... it favors the transmission and evolution of the ideas of the participants who influence each other, feeling part of a whole (cross-pollination).

It gathers a diversity of points of view, encourages their expression and fosters the understanding and acceptance of what cannot be changed and the concentration of energies towards what can be changed for the better.

(Short guide to the WorldCafé).

Simple and intuitive rules

It is suitable for involving all stakeholders

No information on data processing!

Collection of information (post-its, sheets, notes of the animators, etc.)

Simple and cross-classification and/or identification of recurring elements

Research Report

Integration with other search tools



NEIGHBORHOOD WALKS

It is a technique similar to the world café, but structured in the open air, participatory rural appraisal

During the visit to the places of the farms/neighborhood/municipality/area, the issues identified as relevant are discussed

It is suitable for involving all stakeholders

No information on data processing!

Other similar techniques:
workshops, thematic labs,
discussion forums, etc.

Collection of information (post-its, sheets, notes of the animators, etc.)

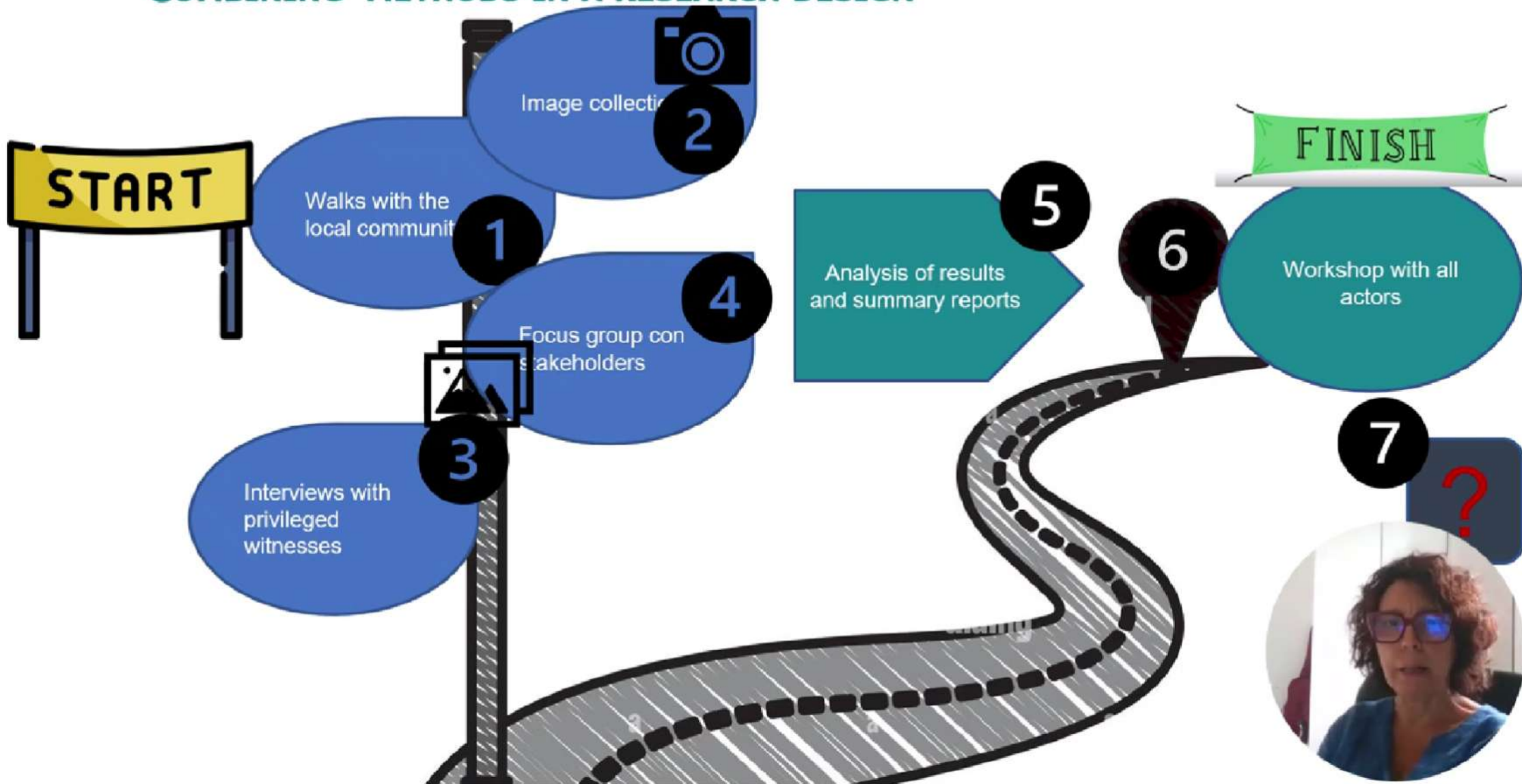
Simple and cross-classification and/or identification of recurring elements

Research Report

Integration with other search to



'COMBINING' METHODS IN A RESEARCH DESIGN



THE TRIANGULATION CRITERION

It allows you to achieve more objective, valid and reliable results. It concerns

- **data:** collection of data relating to the same factors at different times, contexts and situations;
- **the method:** using several survey methods and multiple data collection techniques at the same time or in succession to collect the same data or data that is supposed not to vary;
- **researchers:** several researchers study the same phenomena, using the same methods, the same techniques and the same theoretical framework;
- **theory:** researchers with different theoretical frameworks and points of view examine the same phenomena; If the conclusions they reach are the same, then the theoretical framework of the researcher can be considered



CONCLUDING REMARKS

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- **The tools are not useful in themselves, but only make sense as part of an overall project and are linked to the objectives to be achieved**
 - **It is important to update the data periodically, add new information on aspects not previously considered, share the results with participants, and with people outside the path to improve the needs analysis**

Focus group: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/focus-group/>

World Cafè: <https://theworldcafe.com/>

Neighborhood Walk: <https://actionlab.strongtowns.org/hc/en-us/articles/23113184744468-Walking-Audit-or-Neighborhood-Walk>

Delphi Method:

https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1164961/how_to_conduct_a_delphistudy.pdf

Participatory methods:

<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/spaces/ExactExternalWiki/pages/501067/Participatory+Data+Collection+Tools>

