Event Details

Title of Event
Who's Afraid of Theory of Change: innovative planning tools for project formulation with sustainable impact

Organization Details
Organization: Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Organization Country: Netherlands

Summary
The Theory of Change (ToC) framework is currently being used widely by donors and funders in project applications. A common mistake is thinking that ToC is simply a methodology for planning and evaluation of projects. In fact, it is a process oriented approach that helps guide critical thinking and strategic action, while allowing for adaptive planning in the context of dynamic and changing contexts. It is a guiding framework for all stages of project planning, which also questions how people think, assume and come to solutions to bring about change. It is a way of thinking, a process and a product. Urban problems, including those in cultural and natural heritage, are complex and multi-dimensional. Making structural change involves understanding the complexity of political, cultural, social, economic and environmental forces, each driven by a diverse network of individuals and organizations (and their interests). This complexity results in actions and outcomes that are hard to predict. Well intentioned interventions to deal with issues and to regenerate urban areas can sometimes have unintentional and negative effects. Projects must be able to deal with this complexity. When conceptualising projects and formulating proposals, it is important for us to understand the context in which the desired interventions and change will occur, as well as different stakeholder perspectives on this. It is important for us to understand, think through and make explicit our beliefs and assumptions, our objectives, targets, expects outcomes and impacts when formulating proposals. And we should be able to measure key values, to the extent that this is possible. Doing this should improve project planning, allow for adaptation, and establish a clear basis for monitoring and evaluation (and learning). Targets and indicators are fundamental to the SDGs; and (cultural heritage) projects play a key role in taking steps to localizing and achieving the SDGs. There is tension here: on one hand, we want to be able to predict and measure outcomes and impacts, to specify all eventualities; on the other hand, change is not a linear process. Planning processes characterised by knowledge, learning and innovation require a certain flexibility and openness to change. And putting together project applications for funding of projects can be daunting and mystifying: applications that ask us to conceptualise and formulate projects to deal with this complexity and put these into a ToC framework. This training de-mystifies the meaning and application of Theory of Change and shows how the approach can build on commonly used planning tools. Using a case study, and innovative as well as commonly used and common-sense tools for
analysis and decision making, the trainers will guide the participants through the application of the tools in the formulation of the case of a cultural and natural heritage project. At the end participants would then understand the relation to current planning tools and be exposed to tools which link to the ToC approach. This training is meant for urban professionals applying for project funding and faced with the daunting tasks of using the theory of change approach.

**Other Organization name**