



# EVIDENCE TO ACTION FRAMEWORK

A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH  
TO ACTION LEARNING

SUMMARY GUIDE

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## CONTENTS

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Introduction	03
Part 1: The E2A Framework	05
Part 2: Operationalising the E2A Framework	09

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E2A  
Framework  
Summary  
Guide

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Evidence to Action (E2A) Framework is the product of a collaboration between the University of Melbourne's Connected Cities Lab and Fondation Botnar, a Swiss philanthropic foundation, committed to improving the health and wellbeing of young people in urban environments. Fondation Botnar recognises the value of *learning* in driving systemic change, and is committed to cultivating and nurturing learning both within and outside of the organisation to promote further action. The Framework presents a meta-learning and research strategy for mobilising evidence to action about 'what works' (or what does not work) across the organisation's "Cities" portfolio, to support young people's wellbeing in secondary cities.

The Framework is written in two parts: **Part 1** presents key concepts, theories, and case studies which have informed the Framework. It concludes with key learning questions which can guide program evaluations and progress the Foundation's learning agenda, as outlined in its refined organisational strategy. **Part 2** offers guidelines for operationalising the Framework, offering practical tools and examples for adopting a Participatory Action Research approach to evidence building to inform action.

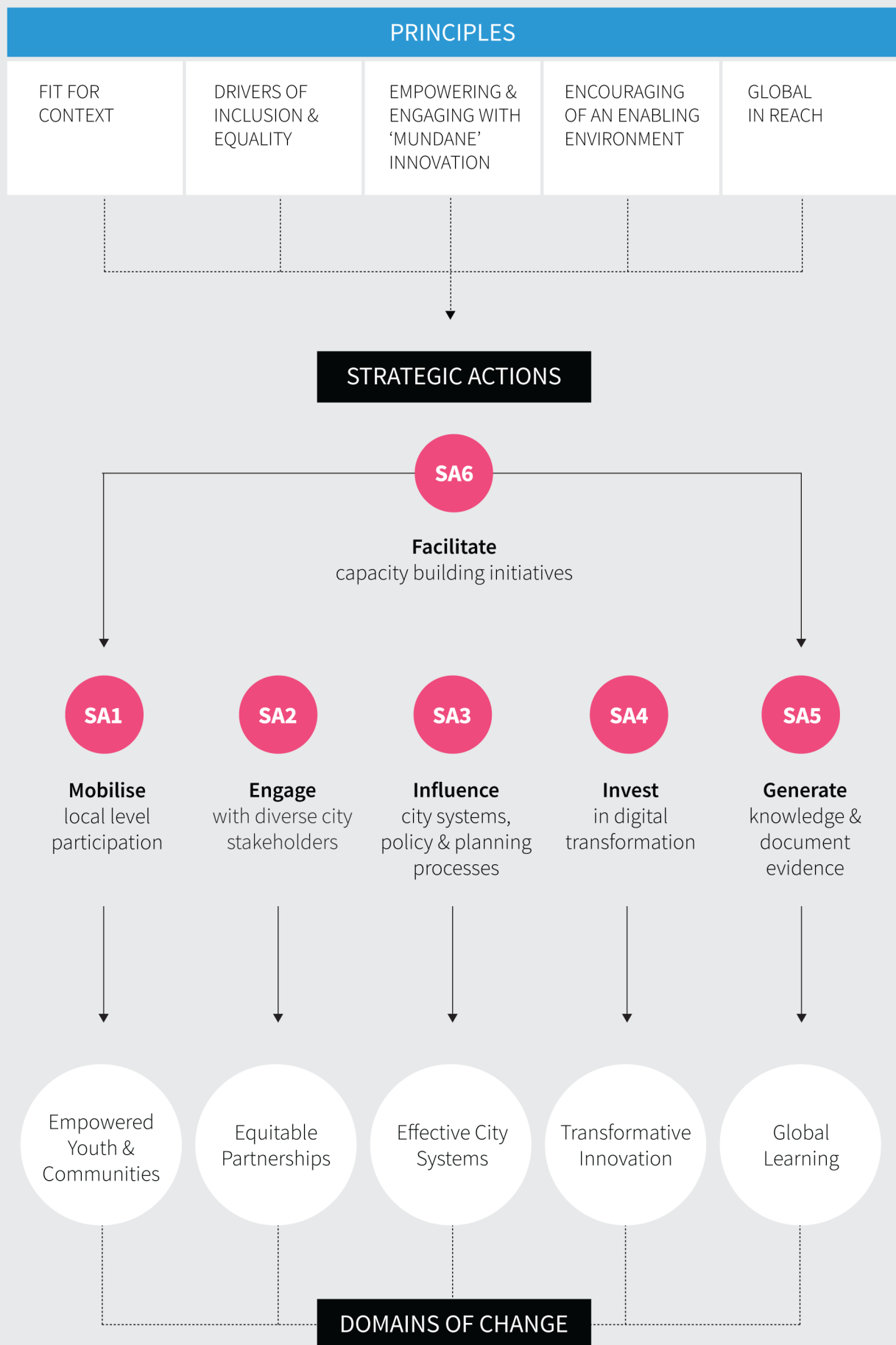
This summary document outlines the major elements of the E2A framework. The E2A approach proposes *principles*, essential for inclusive and sustainable development to achieve Botnar's strategic objective of '*cities fit for young people*', outlines a set of *strategic actions* to launch a learning agenda at the project level, as well as recommends key *domains of change* to serve as a common instrument for monitoring and evaluation across all programs, to measure the achievement of Botnar goals and objectives.

The purpose of the E2A Framework is to provide clear guidelines to establish an evidence building and learning process across all Botnar funded city initiatives to enable systemic change in urban environments. The E2A Framework is a resource for Fondation Botnar staff to make informed decisions on project funding

allocations, monitoring and reassessing projects, as well as a tool for development practitioners, research and policy staff at local level to drive an evidence building agenda in cities.

Development of the E2A Framework involved three research methods: a ***case study scan, academic literature review, and primary interviews***. These methods sought to draw lessons from leading urban development practitioners and existing approaches to knowledge and evidence building for action, across a range of cities in the Global South.

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## PART 1: THE E2A FRAMEWORK

### KEY THEMES

A number of key themes emerged from the research process, which have shaped the understanding of the core pillars of the E2A Framework. These themes include: **health and wellbeing** (central to the mandate of Fondation Botnar, wellbeing needs to be understood as multi-dimensional and impacted by factors such as access to resources and opportunities); **inclusion and equity** (fair and just distribution of opportunities is needed to ensure young people's wellbeing, regardless of physical ability, gender, religion, sexuality, age or any other critical aspects of identity); **voice and participation** (investing in opportunities for voice and participation, particularly of young people, is key to producing the evidence needed to enhance their wellbeing); **city systems** (effectively translating evidence into action in urban environments requires a systems approach and a deep understanding of local governance, cultural and power systems and structures that shape the city); **partnerships** (establishing meaningful collaborations among diverse stakeholders for collective action to promote sustained change); **capacity building** (important for all stakeholders, to understand what evidence is needed to help drive change as well as how to access and apply evidence); and **digital technologies and innovation** (innovative digital technologies can empower marginalised populations, facilitate community participation in planning, influencing decision-making, and speed up the processes that create *cities fit for young people*).

### THE E2A FRAMEWORK: PRINCIPLES, STRATEGIC ACTIONS, AND DOMAINS OF CHANGE

#### PRINCIPLES

**Five principles** provide the framing of the E2A Framework which guides strategic and programmatic decision-making across Botnar Cities programs. They operate as reinforcing concepts that work in synergy to build towards sustained change. Each is expanded further below.

**Fit for Context:** This principle refers to the importance of developing evidence and interventions that are grounded in the issues and voices of local communities, with particular attention to marginal, vulnerable, or excluded groups. By applying this principle to projects, practitioners ensure they are learning about the critical issues affecting the local city context and are seeking solutions that resonate with partner groups.

**Drivers of Inclusion and Urban Equality:** This principle refers to the importance of empowering young people, with attention to aspects such as gender, ability, sexual orientation, class, or other important identity markers. Keeping in mind the concerns of intersectionality, or the ways in which identities overlap to generate distinct social experiences, this means investing in technologies, capacity building, and programming which especially aims to empower young urban dwellers who might be marginalised or excluded within their contexts.

**Empowering and Engaging with 'Mundane' Innovation:** This principle refers to the importance of identifying, building on and scaling up of everyday or 'mundane' innovations, rather than a focus on 'technology transfer'. Investing in technologies that facilitate data collection and analysis by excluded communities or groups (such as youth) can contribute towards broader aims of meaningful participation. Supporting communities to access technologies which can be used in daily life, and which can help address the critical urban questions that matter most to these groups, is key to supporting transformative outcomes.

**Encouraging of an Enabling Environment:** This principle refers to the importance of understanding the levers and contextual realities in each city, that shape the opportunity context for interventions. This entails recognising that there is no one solution that works for every city. This principle also refers to the importance of establishing platforms, partnerships, or policy changes, which can enable systematic and structural change.

**Global in Reach:** This principle refers to the fundamental importance of establishing programs which aim to generate change through a coherent global effort. While recognising the necessity of remaining grounded in a local context, and driven by the priorities of local communities, this principle indicates the value of knowledge sharing across cities to facilitate global reach and enhance local capacity. Investing in local and global knowledge partners and establishing durable platforms for knowledge exchange allows for a multiplication effect, through which lessons can be shared and scaled out across the city and beyond.

#### STRATEGIC ACTIONS

The **six strategic actions**, recommended for Botnar city initiatives represent good development practices that can enable learning, co-creation and knowledge development. Any of these strategic actions might be considered as entry points for city programs to launch an action and learning agenda.

**SA1 Mobilise local level participation especially young people, to ensure projects are co-led with empowered local communities for sustainability.** Ensuring participation of local partners and grassroots groups in diagnosing city priorities, building evidence, and designing strategies for action is critical. The objective is to ensure local knowledge and information, as well as locally generated solutions, that are fit for context, inform the program design.

**SA2 Engage with diverse city stakeholders to build equitable partnerships generating knowledge and a shared vision of the desired sustained change.** Large-scale transformation needed to support sustainable city-wide development requires collaboration between diverse stakeholders including young people and marginalised groups, and the formation of citywide networks, which can unite around shared goals to enhance wellbeing.

**SA3 Influence city systems, policy and planning processes to promote equity, social inclusion and strengthen accountability.** Advocating for policy change to ensure more responsive, pro-poor, inclusive and accountable governance processes for all urban residents is integral to launching long-term, sustainable programs for citywide impact.

**SA4 Invest in digital transformation to enable democratisation of technology resulting in access, innovation and scale.** Investing in strategies that are built on ‘mundane’ technologies, ensuring equitable access to technology, and enabling innovations that emerge out of lived experience is key to achieving the democratization of technology and innovation.

**SA5 Generate knowledge and document evidence to advocate for justice, equity and rights of young people thereby shaping a global ‘inclusion’ agenda.** Investing in systems of knowledge exchange within and across cities can generate powerful global lessons, as well as build capacity locally. This requires working with knowledge partners to engage in an ongoing process of data gathering, documentation, and dissemination and facilitate global learning across a range of cities and conditions.

**SA6 Facilitate capacity building initiatives to support young people, decision-makers, and knowledge partners to act collaboratively as catalysts for change, and to share learning locally and globally.** A key requirement for long term sustainability is to build capacity of communities and stakeholders to identify development priorities, participate in development activities, generate the evidence needed to drive change, support advocacy, and share lessons locally and globally. Facilitating capacity building initiatives is a cross-cutting action and outcome.

## DOMAINS OF CHANGE

The E2A Framework includes *five domains of change* which represent key desired outcomes, that can help deliver on Fondation Botnar’s strategic objectives, actions and goals to create *cities fit for young people*. It is expected that monitoring and evaluation guided by these domains can generate a reflexive learning process for Fondation Botnar and its partners, on the strategies, processes, and outcomes that have been most successful in generating sustained change.

**Empowered Youth and Communities:** This domain refers to meaningful participation - especially of young people and vulnerable groups - in city wide planning, agenda setting, and decision-making. This domain seeks to capture the strategies, processes, and outcomes through which young people are empowered to act as leaders, through the establishment of city platforms to enhance participation and voice. This domain is informed by the Strategic Action - SA1. This domain seeks to capture the formal and informal methods and promising practices which have promoted the voice and participation of young people and their communities and empowered them as change agents in their cities.

**Equitable Partnerships:** This domain refers to the establishment of consortia and cross-sectoral partnerships - including with young people and vulnerable groups - that operate with mutual respect and on equal terms. This domain seeks to capture strategies, processes, and outcomes for building strong relations and trust across urban stakeholders. It is linked with the Strategic Action – SA2. This domain seeks to capture if and how formal and informal systems have been established to promote equitable relationships, where each voice is valued for their contribution, however big or small.

**Transformative Innovation:** This domain refers to the delivery of evidence-based, scalable and locally grounded strategies to address complex urban problems that shape wellbeing outcomes. This domain seeks to capture the strategies, processes, and outcomes of inclusive access and use of innovative technology, ideas and networks for transformative change. This domain is linked with the Strategic Action – SA3. This domain generates evidence about the availability of technology and the creation of networked smart communities, to ensure knowledge and reach of information is accessible to all, irrespective of citizen status and community.

**Effective City Systems:** This domain refers to the systemic and sustainable transformation of urban policies, planning, and programs to create cities fit for young people. This domain seeks to capture strategies, processes and outcomes linked with achieving healthy, open, prosperous, equal, safe, connected and sustainable (HOPES-CS) cities. This is linked with the Strategic Action – SA4. This domain involves documenting promising

practices that resulted in formal and informal policy and programmatic changes and enabled local authorities to work towards more equitable city-systems.

**Global Learning:** This domain refers to the strengthening of learning and knowledge building processes, which can inform reflection and action at the local and global level. This domain seeks to capture strategies, processes, and outcomes for building knowledge and reflection that can lead to changes in policy, planning, and practice. This is supported by the Strategic Action – SA5. This domain will investigate connections from local to global, including local level action on the SDGs, as well as if and how, capable voices from the grassroots level are sharing global platforms, presenting evidence for policy, and advocating for equity and inclusion.

## STRATEGIC LEARNING QUESTIONS

The E2A paper also recommends strategic learning questions in addition to those that are currently included in the Botnar refined strategy document. These are intended to capture grounded learning across different Botnar cities, to provide insight on ‘what works’ and ‘what does not work’ in facilitating city systems change, and in enhancing the wellbeing of young people. In particular, three key organisational questions are outlined, to support Fondation Botnar in the ongoing refinement of its strategies and approaches:

### Botnar S01: ‘Cities Fit for Young People’ Organisational Learning Questions

How has the collective evidence from grassroots actions embedded in city projects informed:

- Botnar organisational strategy and investments on an ongoing basis?
- Collective learning across Botnar cities to inform programming approaches?
- Botnar’s aim to shape global agendas and promote inclusive cities?

In order to assess the above wider organisational questions and gather evidence on a regular basis, the table below provides learning questions pertaining to each domain of change that can be applied in different localities. These key questions promote learning about key focus areas stated in the Botnar organisational strategy, i.e. evidence, capacity building and the wellbeing of young people across cities<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> These questions are intended as an initial guide. Additional or different learning questions may be included depending on specific city contexts and nature of development interventions.

DOMAIN	LEARNING PRIORITY	LEARNING QUESTIONS
<b>Empowered Youth &amp; Communities</b>	What works (or does not) in creating spaces and platforms for empowering young people to act as change leaders and enhance their participation and voice in city-wide planning, agenda setting and decision making.	<p>How was organisational and institutional capacity built for delivering participatory and inclusive processes that empower young people and marginalised communities?</p> <p>In what ways were young people empowered to co-produce evidence in collaboration with diverse urban stakeholders?</p> <p>What strategies were most/least effective in building autonomy, relatedness, and competence (ARC) of young people to act as change agents in their communities, and effectively engage with decision-makers to enhance wellbeing?</p>
<b>Equitable Partnerships</b>	What works (or does not) in building trust and strong relations across diverse urban stakeholders towards effective collaborations and collective actions.	<p>How were issues of power, equity, and knowledge biases negotiated through evidence-based partnerships, models and processes?</p> <p>How was institutional capacity built to promote multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships that foster sustainable collaborations and collective actions?</p> <p>What strategies were most/least effective in creating shared vision and commitment among diverse stakeholders to enhance relational wellbeing of young people?</p>
<b>Effective City Systems</b>	What works (or does not) in transforming city systems to be healthy, open, prosperous, equal, safe, connected and sustainable (HOPES-CS).	<p>What processes were most/least effective in engaging city officials to share evidence and influence governance issues to strengthen inclusive policy and planning?</p> <p>What strategies were most/least effective in harnessing the capacity of diverse city governance sectors and service providers to address problems impacting young people?</p> <p>What barriers and facilitators were identified in bringing together formal and informal systems and structures to produce synergy towards enhancing young people's wellbeing?</p>
<b>Transformative Innovation</b>	What works (or does not) in creating inclusive access to and use of innovative technology and ideas that can lead to transformative changes in urban systems.	<p>What strategies were most/least effective in increasing young people's capacity to access and use technology to drive change in urban systems?</p> <p>What new technology focused methodologies were useful in generating evidence and data to influence city planning and policies?</p> <p>What processes were most/least effective in identifying and scaling of mundane innovations across city systems to enhance wellbeing?</p>
<b>Global Learning</b>	What works (or does not) in building knowledge and learning that can influence positive changes in policy, planning, and practice at city, region and global level.	<p>What strategies were most/least effective in scaling of evidence and knowledge from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) local level actions to influence city systems?</li> <li>b) city systems to influence global development and policy agendas?</li> </ul> <p>What capacities were developed among key stakeholders that facilitated the exchange of knowledge and learning across diverse cities?</p> <p>What processes have been effective at applying, monitoring and measuring relational wellbeing in diverse urban settings?</p>



## PART 2: OPERATIONALISING THE E2A FRAMEWORK

Evidence for the E2A Framework is defined as: Knowledge that is systematically gathered about ‘what works’ (or does not work) in a particular context.

Knowledge is embedded in culture and context and can emerge from diverse sources and actors - including from research

processes, organisational or practice-based expertise, or cultural or ‘lived’ experiences. By adopting a principled approach, the E2A presents a conceptual overview of evidence building and action, outlining the overlapping factors which shape how evidence is produced and actioned (see table below).

PRINCIPLES	APPLIED TO A KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION FRAMEWORK
<b>Fit for Context</b>	<p>The ways in which evidence is produced, interpreted and actioned are shaped by local <b>culture context, and values</b>.</p> <p>This calls for locally owned or led participatory approaches to evidence building and action that are appropriate for and grounded in the culture and context of the community.</p>
<b>Driver of Inclusion &amp; Urban Equality</b>	<p>The ways in which evidence is produced, interpreted, and actioned are shaped by the <b>actors</b> involved, and the <b>types of research and knowledge</b> they produce.</p> <p>This calls for rights-based approaches that enhance the capacity and credibility of young people, engage with multiple forms of knowledge, and actors.</p>
<b>Empowering &amp; Engaging with Mundane Innovation</b>	<p>The ways in which evidence is produced, interpreted, and actioned are shaped by the nurturing of <b>innovations that enable and catalyse</b> change.</p> <p>This calls for valuing the innovation that comes from local expertise, but also examining the role of innovations or technology as a disrupter.</p>
<b>Encouraging of an Enabling Environment</b>	<p>The ways in which evidence is produced, interpreted, and actioned are shaped by <b>political systems</b>, and formal and informal structures of decision-making.</p> <p>This calls for approaches which seek points of leverage within the political and institutional contexts.</p>
<b>Global in Reach</b>	<p>Beyond the local and national context, the ways in which evidence is produced, interpreted, and actioned are also shaped by <b>global influence and processes</b>.</p> <p>This calls for reflexive and systematic sharing knowledge within and across communities, from the local to global scale.</p>

## E2A GUIDELINES

### EMBEDDING LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING IN THE PROJECT CYCLE

The E2A Framework is grounded within the tradition of Participatory Action Research (PAR) which is a process of research, education, and action through which participants seek to transform their own skills and capacities, as well as challenge social inequalities. A PAR approach emphasises that the process through which evidence is generated is as critical as the evidence itself, in terms of enhancing young people's relational wellbeing. A PAR process requires meaningful and equitable collaboration across (global and local) researchers, practitioners, and local communities and decision-makers.

Engaging in PAR through a continuous and cyclical process means that collaboration, evaluation, and learning is integrated into every step of the program or project cycle. Each step in the evidence cycle should incorporate participatory methods which can capture both objective and subjective realities, and empower community members to systematically use evidence to improve their own wellbeing. (see Figure 2).

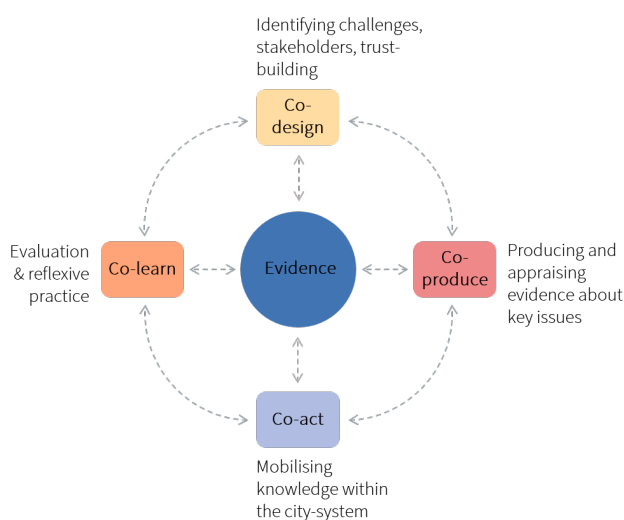


Figure 2: Participatory evidence building cycle

**Co-Design:** This stage involves the mobilisation of diverse urban stakeholders in a given city to identify key issues concerning young people's wellbeing in relation to the five domains of change, shared goals, values, priorities, resources and solutions, as well as forming advisory committees and working groups.

**Co-Produce:** This stage involves devising a plan to program the strategic actions, to produce and appraise evidence about key issues in the city. Creating platforms and networks of engagement that allow partnerships to form and shared visioning to take place, are critical to facilitating co-production.

**Co-Act:** This stage involves collaborating to identify entry points or opportunities to act on issues that emerge from research generation and analysis. This can be facilitated by forming close partnerships across practice, research and policy.

**Co-Evaluate:** This stage involves a process of reflexivity and self-inquiry of researchers and practitioners, to support collective learning on the barriers and enablers associated with the implementation of the strategic actions. Rigorous documentation during this stage is critical to ensure learnings can be shared across contexts.

### APRACTICALAND PHASED APPROACH TO PARTICIPATORY ACTION LEARNING

In order to operationalise an organisational learning agenda via the implementation of the E2A Framework, it is suggested a global E2A team is formed to frame the overall meta-learning strategy and support documentation and learning across the Botnar "Cities Portfolio". The role of the E2A global team is to facilitate action-research processes across Botnar funded programming activities; coordinate meta-learning activities across participating projects; support local research and evaluation activities; and collate, analyse and synthesise evaluation and research data, and produce reports on meta-learning and research findings.

Strong engagement is therefore needed between the global team and local knowledge partners, who are accountable for gathering, analysing and sharing evidence from city projects to inform global learning questions. Together, these local and global teams can analyse evidence, through reflection on the domains of change, and the suggested strategic learning questions. It is recommended that local and global PAR teams should be convened at a minimum of three times at key points of the project cycle: design, interim review and end of project evaluation. The three workshops allow participating projects to go through the action learning cycle twice, to adapt their approach according to emerging findings, and strengthen evidence building approaches through reflection on E2A learning priorities and questions.

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