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Providing operational economic appraisal methods  
and practices for decision-making on climate and  
environmental policies

## Steps to Implement Participatory Approach and Theory of Change

Deliverable 5.5



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Author(s)	Claudia Ledderucci, Dario Padovan
Primary Contact and Email	<a href="mailto:claudia.ledgerucci@unito.it">claudia.ledgerucci@unito.it</a>
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This document provides practical guidelines for implementing a participatory approach, specifically when drafting and refining Theories of Change (ToCs), within the context of the PATTERN project. These guidelines are designed to support the evaluation and design of climate and biodiversity policies by incorporating interdisciplinary and socially responsive insights. The main objective is to provide a comprehensive framework for integrating the voices of diverse stakeholders, ranging from policymakers to local communities, ensuring that the ToCs reflect both the social and environmental dimensions of the policies under consideration. Furthermore, the insights and methodologies outlined in this deliverable will contribute to the One Stop Shop, serving as a valuable resource for policymakers and practitioners seeking to enhance participatory and evidence-based decision-making.

A participatory approach actively involves stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and local communities in decision-making processes, ensuring that their knowledge, perspectives, and needs shape policy development and evaluation. Recognizing that effective policy evaluation requires a deep understanding of the real-world contexts in which these policies operate, this approach ensures that ToCs are not only scientifically rigorous but also contextually relevant and socially inclusive.

By engaging key stakeholders in the development of ToCs, this process strengthens their validity by grounding them in lived experiences, practical knowledge, and diverse perspectives. This collaborative approach ensures that assumptions underlying ToCs are tested and refined based on real-world insights, increasing their relevance and applicability to policy evaluation.

These guidelines build on insights gained from previous tasks and deliverables within the PATTERN project, such as Task 2.2, which focused on deriving ToCs based on key actors' assumptions, and Task 2.3, which assessed the social impacts of climate and biodiversity policies. However, the primary aim here is forward-looking: to provide concrete steps for refining and implementing participatory processes that will improve policy outcomes in real-world contexts.

This document serves as a hands-on resource, offering structured methodologies for designing and facilitating participatory processes. It includes specific techniques for stakeholder engagement, practical tools for incorporating diverse inputs into ToCs, and step-by-step recommendations to ensure that policies are co-developed in an inclusive and transparent manner. Through this approach, the PATTERN project aims to ensure that climate and biodiversity policies are not only ecologically effective but also socially just, inclusive, and aligned with the lived realities of affected communities.

## 2. OBJECTIVE

The objective of these guidelines is to provide a clear, actionable framework for designing participatory Theories of Change. By integrating stakeholder insights, these guidelines aim to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of climate and biodiversity policies, ensuring they align with both ecological targets and the social realities of affected communities.

These guidelines are specifically designed to:

- ➔ **Facilitate participatory and inclusive policy design:** Support the co-development of Theories of Change by providing structured approaches that integrate diverse stakeholder perspectives, ensuring both social and environmental impacts are considered in policy design and evaluation.
- ➔ **Ensure adaptability and responsiveness:** Equip teams with tools to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of policies in real-world contexts, ensuring flexibility in response to emerging challenges and shifting socio-ecological dynamics.

These guidelines aim to strengthen the participatory process by making it actionable and adaptable to the specific needs of each case study, while ensuring that the resulting ToCs are robust, contextually relevant, and practically implementable. Building on these insights and lessons learned from diverse case studies (Deliverable 5.6), they provide a structured yet flexible approach that supports the design of Theory of Change models, allowing practitioners to tailor ToCs to their specific contexts while maintaining coherence and effectiveness.

### 3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ToC DESIGN

The development of Theory of Change (ToC) models should be guided by core principles that ensure their relevance, coherence, and adaptability. These principles reflect the interdisciplinary and participatory approach emphasized throughout the PATTERN project, ensuring that ToCs are both scientifically sound and socially meaningful.

- ➔ **Stakeholder Inclusivity:** The effectiveness of ToCs relies on the active engagement of diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, local communities, and marginalized groups. A participatory approach ensures that different perspectives, knowledge systems, and lived experiences are incorporated into the design, strengthening the legitimacy and applicability of ToCs. This can be achieved through workshops, focus groups, and consultations, fostering co-creation and shared decision-making.
- ➔ **Contextual Relevance:** Each policy context presents unique socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors that shape its outcomes. ToCs must be tailored to specific case studies, incorporating locally relevant indicators and measures to ensure their applicability. Policies and interventions should be locally owned, recognizing the agency of communities in shaping solutions.
- ➔ **Clarity and Coherence:** A well-structured ToC should clearly map out the relationships between interventions, expected outputs, and broader impacts. This transparency enhances the credibility and usability of the model for both policymakers and stakeholders.
- ➔ **Balancing Flexibility and Structure:** While ToCs should follow a structured framework, they must also allow for adaptation in response to emerging challenges and new insights. Climate and biodiversity policies operate in complex, evolving contexts, requiring ToCs to be dynamic and iterative rather than static models. For example, if new scientific data or

stakeholder feedback reveals unforeseen barriers to an intervention's success, the ToC should be adjusted to reflect revised causal pathways and assumptions, ensuring it remains relevant and actionable.

- ➔ **Integration of Multi-Scalar Perspectives:** Policies addressing climate and biodiversity challenges often function across multiple levels, from local to global. Effective ToCs should account for these interactions, ensuring that localized interventions contribute to broader systemic changes and align with multi-level policy frameworks and international objectives.
- ➔ **Anticipating Unintended Consequences:** Policy interventions may generate unintended social, economic, or environmental effects. ToCs should incorporate mechanisms for identifying and mitigating these risks, such as scenario analyses and feedback loops. Proactively addressing potential unintended consequences strengthens the resilience of policy design and implementation, leading to more sustainable outcomes.
- ➔ **Integration of Participatory Insights:** The participatory approach should not only inform the initial design of the ToC but also be embedded throughout its development, implementation, and evaluation phases. Stakeholder contributions can refine causal assumptions, validate impacts pathways, and highlight unforeseen consequences of policy interventions (as shown in Deliverables 2.2 and 2.3).

By embedding these principles, ToCs become powerful tools for understanding policy impacts and fostering collaborative policy design. The following section outlines a structured yet flexible approach for designing ToCs in alignment with these guiding principles.

## 5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN PARTICIPATORY TOCS

A participatory approach is effective only when stakeholders are meaningfully engaged in the process. This section provides practical guidance on identifying key stakeholders, selecting appropriate engagement methods, and addressing common barriers to participation.

- ➔ **Stakeholders Analysis:** To develop a ToC that accurately reflects social and environmental realities, it is essential to involve a diverse range of stakeholders, including:
  - ▶ policymakers and government representatives;
  - ▶ local communities;
  - ▶ practitioners and implementers;
  - ▶ researchers and technical experts;
  - ▶ private sector actors.
- ➔ **Stakeholder Engagement:** Various participatory tools can be used to facilitate stakeholders involvement in the ToC process. These include:
  - ▶ Focus groups: Useful for gathering in-depth qualitative insights from a small, diverse group (used in the PATTERN Traffic Case Study in Lappeenranta, Finland).

- ▶ Scenario planning: Effective for exploring potential future policy impacts and uncertainties.
- ▶ Participatory mapping: Best suited for spatial analysis and visualizing stakeholder perspectives on graphic aspects of a policy.
- ▶ Workshops: Ideal for fostering collaboration, co-creation, and consensus-building among multiple stakeholders (e.g., workshops were organized in a preliminary phase of PATTERN, see Deliverable 2.1) .

Selecting the right method depends on the context, the type of policy being assessed, and the resources available. A combination of tools is often most effective in capturing diverse perspectives.

- ➔ **Addressing Barriers to Participation:** Ensuring meaningful engagement requires overcoming potential challenges, such as:
  - ▶ power imbalances;
  - ▶ language and communication barriers;
  - ▶ logistical constraints.

By proactively addressing these barriers, participatory ToCs become more inclusive and representative of diverse perspectives, ultimately strengthening policy design and evaluation.

## 6. STEPS TO IMPLEMENT TOC

This section outlines a structured yet adaptable approach to designing Theories of Change (ToCs), ensuring that they are contextually relevant and informed by stakeholders perspectives. The process integrates interdisciplinary insights and participatory engagement at each stage, enhancing the legitimacy and applicability of the resulting ToCs. By engaging stakeholders and considering socio-political and environmental factors, the process aims to create robust, real-world solutions that are adaptable to changing contexts and ensure long-term impact.

### 6.1. Problem Definition and Stakeholder Mapping

The first step in designing a Theory of Change (ToC) is to clearly define the public problem that the policy seeks to address. This process should involve identifying the social and environmental challenges the policy is targeting and aligning the problem definition with broader objectives and scientific evidence. In participatory approaches, engaging stakeholders—such as policymakers, practitioners, local communities, NGOs, and researchers—is crucial to ensure diverse perspectives and lived experiences shape the problem definition.

Simultaneously, stakeholder mapping helps identify those directly impacted by the policy, as well as indirect beneficiaries and potential actors who can support or influence the intervention. This includes assessing the interest, power dynamics, and potential contributions of each stakeholder, and establishing participatory mechanisms for continuous dialogue and feedback.

In the PATTERN project, this was done in Deliverable 2.1 using the following tables to assess criteria for identification of potential stakeholders (Table 1), and influence-interest grid (Table 2):

Criteria	Potential questions
Geographical	<p>What actors established in the recipient area are affected by the policy?</p> <p>How can the policy impact on the territory and its natural resources?</p> <p>How can the policy impact on ecosystems?</p>
Implementation	<p>Who has actually the power to decide and directly intervene in the policy?</p> <p>Who are the target groups expected to act (e.g. car drivers )?</p>
	<p>Who are the beneficiaries that will be affected (e.g. residents)?</p> <p>Who are other parties that can be somehow affected (e.g. city users, tourists ...) or that can somehow play a role (e.g. big player of the market, environmental movements...)</p>
Sub-systems	<p>Which economic sectors (and their workers) can be mostly affected?</p> <p>What public/private services are direct or indirect involved (e.g. transport, public health, grocery, retailing, leisure...)?</p>

Table 1 Criteria for identification of potential stakeholders

<b>INFLUENCE</b>	high	<b>CONTEXT SETTERS</b> Keep satisfied	<b>KEY PLAYERS</b> Manage closely	
	medium			
	low	<b>CROWD</b> Monitor	<b>SUBJECT</b> Keep Informed	
		low	medium	high
		<b>INTEREST</b>		

Table 2 Influence-interest grid



## 6.2. Identifying Desired Outcomes, Impact Pathways, and Causal Mechanisms

Once the problem is well-defined, the next step is to determine the desired short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. These outcomes should be articulated as specific changes in behavior, knowledge, or social conditions that the intervention aims to achieve, reflecting social, ecological, and economic dimensions. Participatory workshops can facilitate discussions on how different policy actions are expected to contribute to these outcomes.

To structure the logical flow of the ToC, mapping impact pathways is essential. This step helps visualize the connections between actions, intermediate changes, and final outcomes. Validating outcomes through stakeholder consultations ensures that they are relevant and feasible, with input from those directly impacted by the policy.

In addition, a robust ToC must clearly define the mechanisms through which interventions lead to the desired outcomes. This means identifying key activities and interventions that drive change and mapping the causal links between actions and expected results. Rather than focusing solely on how the project is communicated (see D6.3 on this), this process ensures a rigorous understanding of cause-and-effect relationships. Incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives is crucial to fully capture the complexity of both the problem and the intervention, allowing for a more holistic and adaptive approach.

## 6.3. Developing Causal Assumptions and Risks

To validate the logic of the ToC, it is crucial to identify the underlying assumptions that link activities to expected outcomes. This step requires making explicit the assumptions that support each causal link and critically examining them with stakeholder input to ensure they hold in the specific socio-political and environmental contexts of the policy intervention.

In addition, potential risks and barriers to implementation, such as unintended consequences, resistance from key actors, or external socio-economic factors, should be identified and considered. This includes examining broader socio-political and environmental contexts and developing strategies to mitigate these risks. By doing so, the ToC becomes more robust and adaptable to unforeseen challenges.

## 6.4. Validating and Refining Through Stakeholder Engagement

A participatory approach enhances the robustness of the ToC by incorporating multiple perspectives (see for instance D2.1). This final step involves engaging stakeholders—through workshops, focus groups, or consultations—in a validation process to refine the model. Stakeholders can provide critical insights into local realities, challenge assumptions, and suggest adjustments that improve the feasibility and effectiveness of the ToC.

Additionally, testing the ToC in real-world settings and adapting it as necessary ensures its relevance and practicality. This iterative process helps the ToC remain adaptable and contextually grounded, while ensuring that insights gained from future policymaking processes inform its development.

## 6.5. Operationalizing the ToC for Monitoring and Evaluation

ToCs should include clear mechanisms for assessing progress and adjusting strategies as needed. This step involves defining indicators that track changes and measure impact, ensuring

they align with the intended outcomes and are developed in collaboration with stakeholders to ensure they are meaningful and measurable. In PATTERN, this was done through an ex-ante and ex-post analysis, where initial ToCs were developed at the outset and later revisited based on observed outcomes and stakeholder feedback, allowing for an updated version that better reflected real-world dynamics.

A participatory and inclusive approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is essential. Establishing feedback loops allows for real-time data to inform iterative improvements, ensuring that policies remain responsive to changing social and environmental conditions. A flexible, adaptive framework should be established, allowing the ToC to evolve and maximize its long-term impact.

By following this structured, step-by-step approach, practitioners can develop Theories of Change that are not only theoretically sound but also practical, inclusive, and adaptable to the complexities of real-world issues, such as those addressed in the PATTERN project. This process fosters greater ownership and effectiveness in policy interventions, ensuring that they are both actionable and participatory, with the flexibility to evolve based on ongoing feedback and changing conditions.

## 7. COMMON CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Designing a Theory of Change is an inherently complex process that requires balancing diverse perspectives, ensuring coherence, and adapting to evolving contexts. While ToCs offer a structured framework for understanding policy impacts, practitioners often encounter challenges that can hinder their effectiveness. This section outlines common obstacles in ToC design and proposes strategies to address them.

### 7.1. Defining Clear and Measurable Outcomes

- ➔ **Challenge:** One of the most frequent difficulties in ToC development is articulating outcomes that are both meaningful and measurable. Broad or vague objectives can lead to ToCs that lack practical applicability.
- ➔ **Solution:** A participatory approach helps refine outcomes by engaging stakeholders in co-defining success. Using SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) ensures that outcomes are concrete and trackable.

### 7.2. Aligning Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives

- ➔ **Challenge:** Stakeholders often have different priorities, values, and expectations, which can lead to conflicting views on the causal pathways within a ToC.
- ➔ **Solution:** Facilitate structured dialogue sessions where stakeholders collaboratively map out pathways of change. Visual tools such as participatory mapping and scenario planning can help bridge differing perspectives and create shared understanding.

### 7.3. Addressing Complexity Without Oversimplification

- ➔ **Challenge:** Policies often operate in complex socio-ecological systems, making it difficult to capture the full range of influencing factors without oversimplifying key dynamics.
- ➔ **Solution:** A layered approach to ToC design can help manage complexity. Using nested ToCs, where high-level overarching models are complemented by detailed sub-ToCs, ensures that both systemic and localized aspects of change are captured.

### 7.4. Integrating Social and Contextual Factors

- ➔ **Challenge:** Many ToCs focus primarily on technical and policy-related dimensions, overlooking crucial social, cultural, and political factors that influence implementation.
- ➔ **Solution:** Embedding participatory approaches in the ToC design process ensures that lived experiences and local knowledge are integrated. Techniques such as ethnographic fieldwork, qualitative interviews, and participatory impact assessments can help identify and incorporate these dimensions.

### 7.5. Ensuring Flexibility and Adaptability

- ➔ **Challenge:** Theories of Change are often developed at a fixed point in time, but real-world conditions shift, requiring adjustments to initial assumptions and pathways.
- ➔ **Solution:** ToCs should be treated as evolving frameworks rather than static models. Regular feedback loops, through iterative stakeholder engagement and ongoing monitoring, allow for necessary refinements based on emerging insights and changing circumstances.

### 7.6. Strengthening the Link Between ToCs and Policy Implementation

- ➔ **Challenge:** Even well-designed ToCs may struggle to influence actual policy decisions if they remain theoretical and disconnected from implementation strategies.
- ➔ **Solution:** To bridge this gap, ToCs should be explicitly linked to decision-making processes, providing concrete recommendations for policymakers. Co-developing ToCs with institutions responsible for policy implementation increases their relevance and applicability.

By proactively addressing these challenges, practitioners can develop ToCs that are not only methodologically rigorous but also dynamic, inclusive, and adaptable to real-world complexities.

## 8. CONCLUSION

A well-designed Theory of Change is more than just a planning tool: it is a dynamic framework that bridges scientific knowledge, policy objectives, and the lived experiences of diverse stakeholders. By embedding participatory approaches in ToC development, the PATTERN project ensures that climate and biodiversity policies are not only scientifically sound but also socially equitable and contextually relevant.

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The collaborative processes outlined in these guidelines demonstrate that meaningful stakeholder engagement enhances the legitimacy, adaptability, and real-world applicability of policy interventions. By fostering inclusive dialogue and integrating multiple perspectives, ToCs become instruments for co-creating solutions that are both actionable and resilient in the face of evolving environmental and societal challenges.

As we move forward, the success of participatory ToCs will depend on continued commitment to inclusivity, transparency, and adaptability. The insights and methodologies presented here serve as a foundation for designing policies that not only respond to immediate needs but also contribute to long-term sustainability and social justice. Through this approach, the PATTERN project reaffirms its commitment to shaping climate and biodiversity policies that reflect both scientific rigor and human realities—ensuring a future that is not only ecologically sound but also socially just.

## 9. ANNEX - CASE STUDIES OVERVIEW

The information provided in this annex is drawn from D2.2 and D4.4, previously published within the PATTERN project. Selected extracts are presented here as a reference for the guidelines outlined in this deliverable, D5.5.

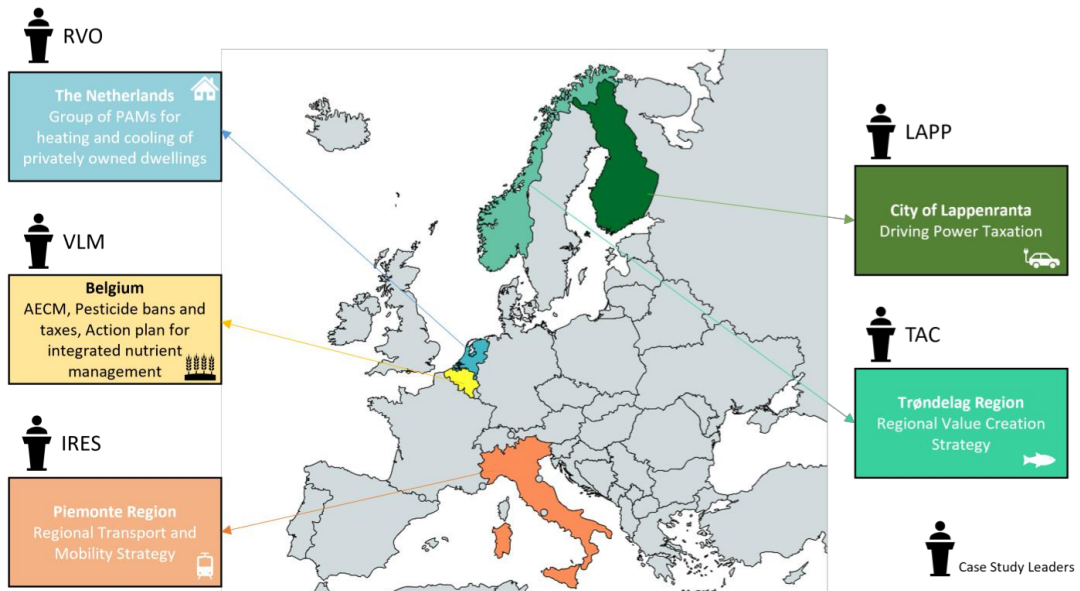


Figure 1 Case Studies' Map

### 9.1. Agriculture Case Study - Belgium

In the Flanders region, policies focus on enhancing environmental sustainability in agriculture through measures such as eco-schemes and Agri-Environment-Climate Measures (AECMs, see Figure 1 and 2). These interventions aim to improve biodiversity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and foster sustainable farming practices. Key challenges include balancing ecological objectives with farmer preferences and economic viability.

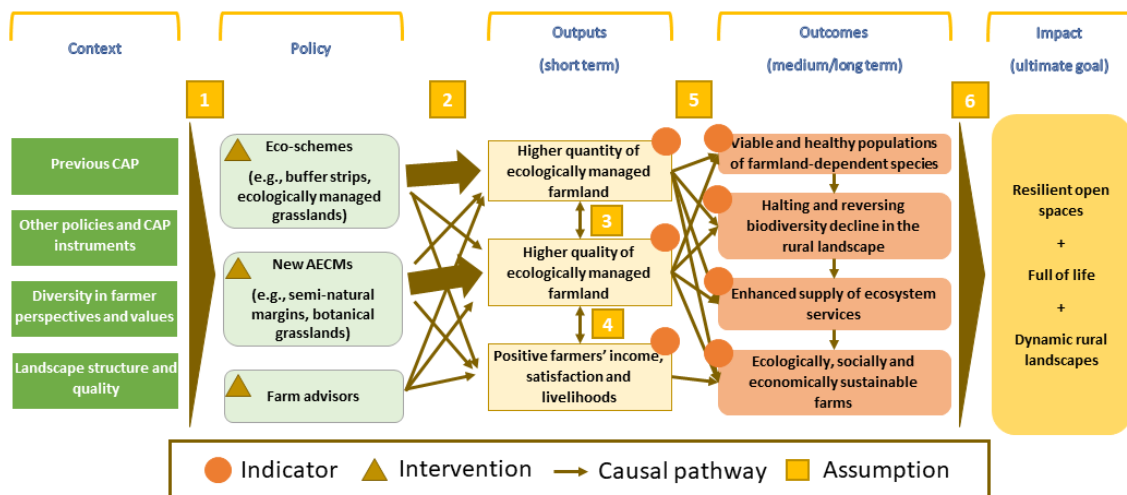


Figure 2 Updated version of the Theory of Change for the agricultural case study (Belgium).

### 9.2. Buildings Case Study - Netherlands

Policies in the Netherlands address the decarbonization of residential buildings by funding small-scale sustainable heating systems and energy efficiency upgrades (see Figure 1). The focus lies on the ISDE subsidy, which aims to reduce emissions, improve energy savings, and enhance living conditions while addressing socio-economic disparities in policy adoption (see Figure 3).

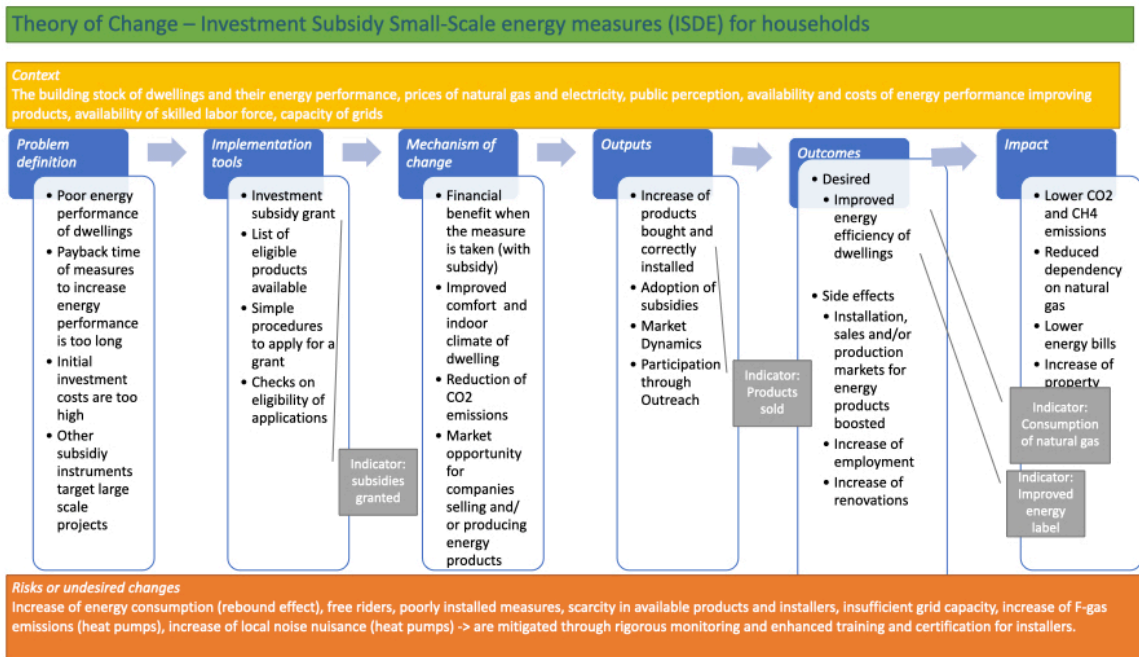
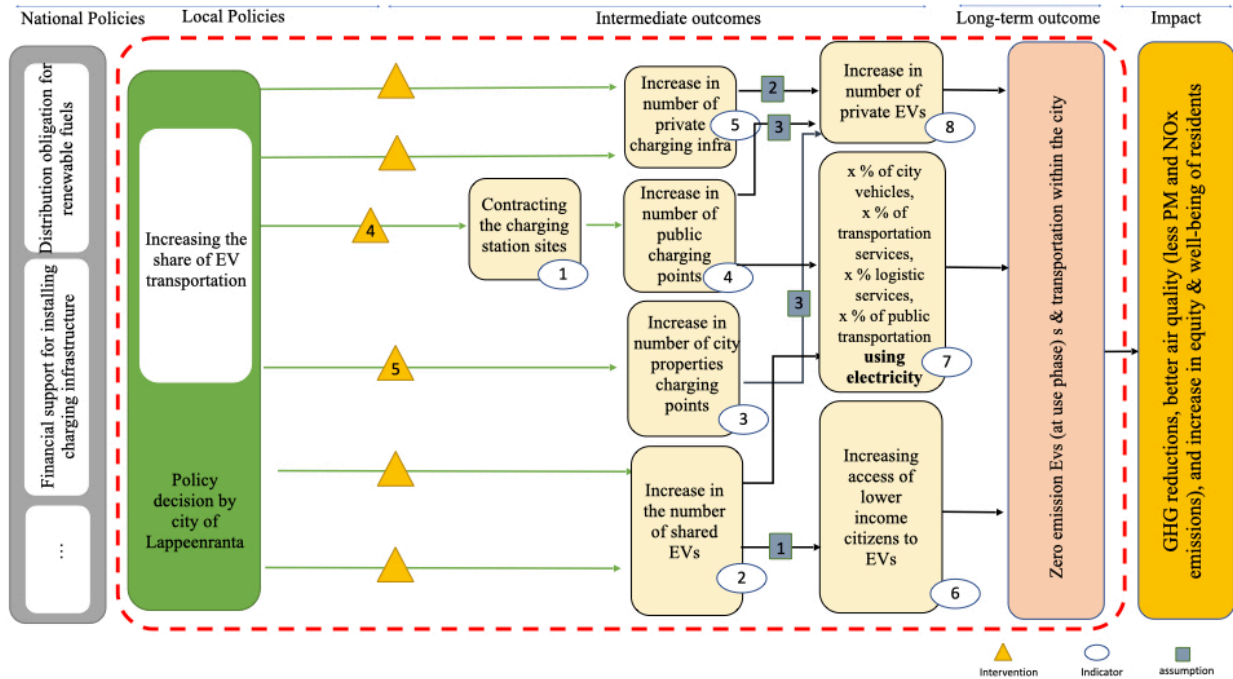


Figure 3 Updated version of the Theory of Change for the Buildings Case Study ISDE (Netherlands)

### 9.3. Traffic Case Study - Finland

In Lappeenranta, transportation policies focus on decarbonization by promoting the electrification of private vehicles and the development of charging infrastructures (see Figure 1). These measures aim to reduce CO2 and fine particles emissions in one of Finland’s most polluted regions, while supporting achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 (see Figure 4).

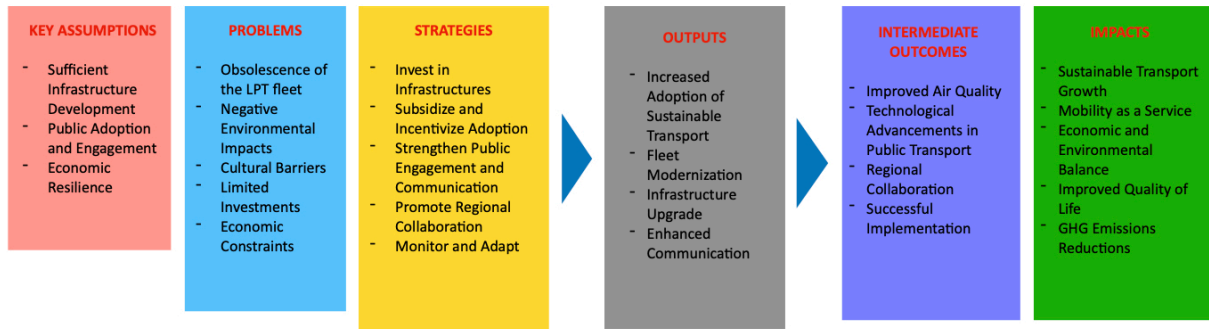


	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Indicator 	Number of sites	Number of the shared EVs	Number of charging points	Number of charging points	Number of charging points	Average income of the citizen with access to EV (private)	Number or Percentage/ %
Intervention 	New guidelines for procuring only clean vehicles for the city	Increasing parking price to be invested in charging infrastructure	Implementation of parking space requirement in new buildings	Mapping of the new charging sites (Criteria: equity)	New guidelines for installing charging point in city owned properties		
Assumption 	The relatively higher price of EV is restricting the number EVs	Lack of private charging stations is a barrier for shift to EVs	Lack of public charging stations is a barrier for shift to EVs				

Figure 4 Updated Theory of Change for the Traffic Case Study (Finland)

### 9.4. Transport Case Study - Italy

In the Piedmont region, efforts to decarbonize local public transport (LPT) focus on fleet renewal and shifting mobility demand from private vehicles to public transport (see figure 1). Targeted investments in power production and distribution infrastructure, couples with incentives and improved communication strategies, aim to modernize the fleet and enhance service quality, addressing both environmental and cultural challenges (see Figure 5).



### 9.5. Aquaculture Case Study - Norway

In Trøndelag, policies focus on sustainable growth in aquaculture, balancing regional economic development with biodiversity conservation (see Figure 1). The Traffic Light System (TLS) regulates salmon and trout farming based on environmental impacts, such as salmon lice and pollution. Stakeholders collaboration and adaptive management are critical to achieve long-term sustainability goals (see Figure 6).

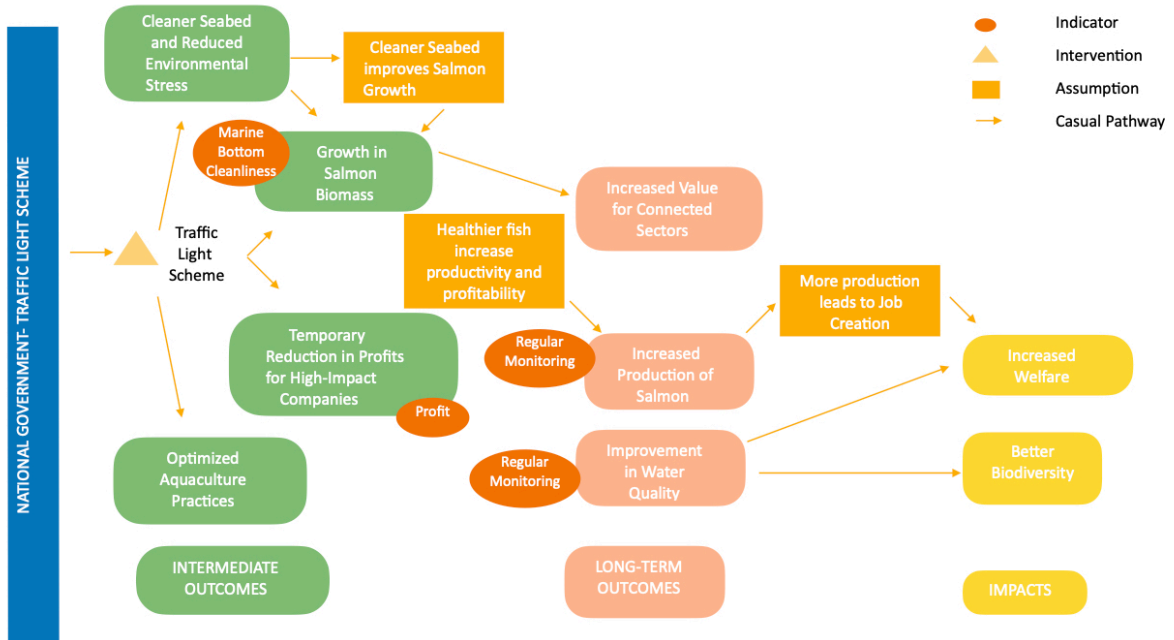


Figure 6 Updated Theory of Change for the Aquaculture Case Study (Norway)





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The PATTERN project aims to improve practitioners' capacity for decision making on climate and environmental policies by developing a One-Stop Shop for the economic appraisal of policies and measures. With this One-Stop Shop and its different components, PATTERN will provide decision-makers, stakeholders, and the public with more realistic ability to systematically assess the options and their consequences. It will provide a basis for improving (i) methodologies, techniques and models for conducting economic appraisal of climate and environmental policies (ii) the broader policy evaluation framework and practices currently used in European countries and their regions and (iii) tailored analysis and engagement strategies structures for participation and co-creation with relevant stakeholders and key actors to enhance operational capacities of economic appraisal methods and improve the impact of European policies on climate and environment.

