


The background of the slide is a dark grey surface covered with numerous pushpins. Most of the pushpins have black heads, but one pushpin in the center has a distinct orange head, making it stand out. The pushpins are scattered across the surface, some pointing towards the viewer and others away from it.

# A brief introduction to the Theory of Change

A solid orange arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the slide, partially overlapping the text area.

Prof. Elisabetta De Giorgi – University of Trieste in Gorizia

A.A. 2020-21



## The origin

- ✓ Experts of PM outlined that some tools and techniques of the discipline are no longer appropriate to deal with complex situations
- ✓ Some methodologies used so far, such as the Logical Framework, have demonstrated some limits in some specific areas such as the humanitarian aid sector
- ✓ Therefore, new approaches were introduced, such as the **Theory of Change** (ToC), in order to help enhancing the efficiency of projects in complex contexts



## The LogFrame in the cooperation sector

The Logical Framework is still very much employed in the Project Cycle Management among NGOs

While other typical instruments of the PCM (such as the Gantt Chart, the WBS, the CPM) are not commonly used in the non-profit sector, the LogFrame still represents the essential planning tool

It is considered an analytical process which helps the project team in analysing the work to do, including objectives and related activities



## ... and its limits

Considering only four levels of intervention (goals, outputs, outcomes, activities), the LogFrame does not help the team to focus on what is more important: the final goal

The Logical Framework indeed does not focus on the value of the impact; it is more focused on the activities and on the connection among them

The matrix does not take into account the interconnection among all the elements, thus considering them only in a linear way

Furthermore, it is unable to understand the complexity of some situations

Due to the rigidity of the tool, experts of the cooperation sector have outlined a sort of evolution of the LogFrame, which is called **Theory of Change**



## Some history

- ▶ The origin of this new theory is dated back to the mid-1990s, applied in social sciences
- ▶ Scholars realised that to change a community it was firstly necessary to identify what kind of change was needed and, based on that, define the activities to undertake
- ▶ In particular, the Aspen Institute underlines the need to concentrate first on the **mid-term changes** in order to reach **longer-term ones** in a second moment



# Definition

The Aspen Institute defines the Theory of Change as follows:

“Theory of Change is a rigorous yet participatory process whereby groups and stakeholders identify the conditions they believe have to unfold for their long-term goals to be met. These conditions are modelled as outcomes or, more precisely, desired outcomes, arranged graphically in a causal framework. The framework provides a working model against which to test hypotheses and assumptions about what actions will best bring about the outcomes in the model”  
(<https://www.actknowledge.org/services/theory-of-change/>)

## Why in the cooperation and non-profit sector?

- ▶ Given its social scope, the Theory of Change began to be used in the non-profit sector
- ▶ Both international organisations and important NGOs began to employ the Theory of Change as they realised its importance in demonstrating how to impact in fragile and conflict-affected regions of the world
- ▶ By using the ToC, organisations can show and represent the change they want to drive (The Asia Foundation, 2012)





## Still on the reasons why...

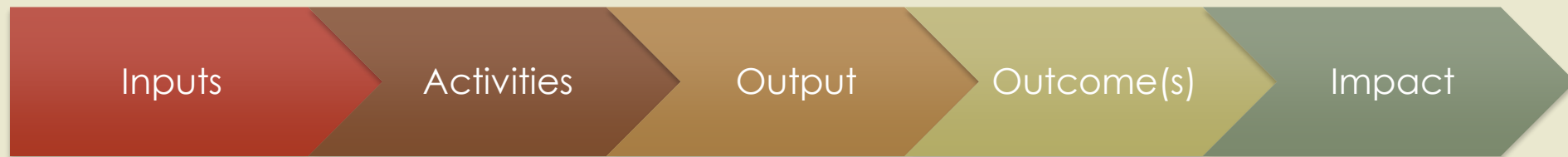
- ▶ The new Theory is especially used in the humanitarian and cooperation field since it captures the real complexity of the contextual environment and of the variables which are often outside of the project's control
- ▶ Since the non-profit sector deals with complex contexts - poverty, marginalisation and injustice - characterised by tough and evolving problems, the Theory of Change allows NGOs to face those issues in a more efficient way
- ▶ It contributes to understand if resources are having the desired effect and it shows those specific areas where the project team may intervene with mid-course corrections



# New terminology

- ▶ **Assumption:** according to its definition, it is *something you accept as true, without question or proof*. In the ToC field, it represents the situation outside the organizational control that influence the outcome, the condition necessary for the success of the project. It is already in place and it does not need to be brought about
- ▶ **Output:** it represents the immediate effect of a project, or the direct product and contributes to the achievement of the final outcome
- ▶ **Outcome:** it is a change in state or condition that derives from a cause-effect relationship. It represents change in the institutional and behavioural capacities or development conditions that occur between the completion of output and the achievement of impact. **It expresses the most significant change expected**
- ▶ **Indicators:** they represent the measurable evidence of meeting a goal

# The process of the Theory of Change



- ✓ Thanks to the use of the chosen inputs, the organisation can implement the expected activities. Through their development, the outputs can be produced. Their production can lead to the realisation of the outcome; all the outcomes will lead to the final impact of the project
- ✓ So, if activities are conducted as planned, the beneficiary will probably experience a significant **change** both in their behaviour and in their competences; this kind of change will lead to a **social change** which is again the **final aim** of the Theory of Change.

# Some references

- ▶ Vogel I. (2012) Review of the use of 'Theory of Change' in international development, for the UK Department of International Development
- ▶ Elevati C. (2017) *La Theory of Change per la cooperazione internazionale: una guida introduttiva*, Info-Cooperazione
- ▶ <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>