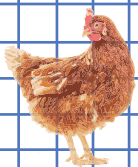
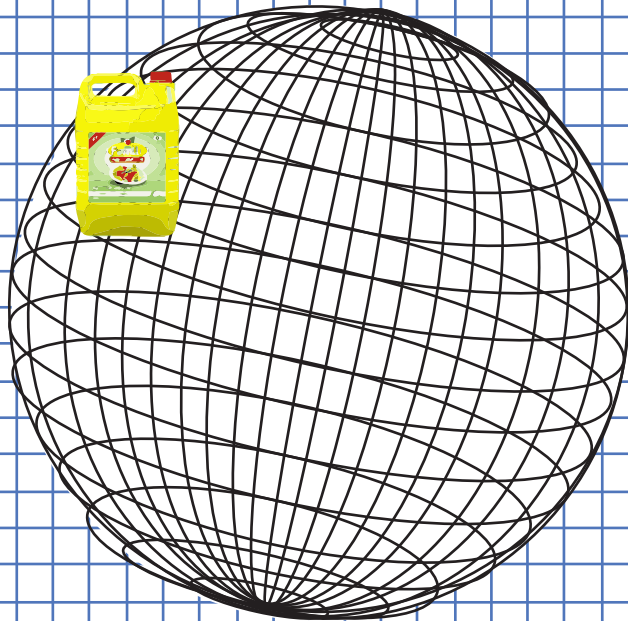


# The Object Catalog | enhancing UNDP's system and portfolio approach for development



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May 2023 - Februari 2024

## PREFACE

This report marks the end of the last phase for the master Design for Interaction and will seal my time at the TU Delft university.

The last few months I have spent my time navigating between the design field and the global development field and its strategies. It has been a complex journey, but I have learned a lot along the way. Engaging with the UNDP's development context and the SIU portfolio strategy, I discovered not only new knowledge but also a deeper understanding of my personal aspirations as a designer. The initial project brief didn't exactly match my background, but with the support of my mentors and everyone else I met in this project I was able to weave my interests and inspiration into the research. I was able to follow my own path in this complex project.

I got into contact with the subject of portfolio approaches while I was searching for a project about mangrove forests, a rather ambitious project direction looking to combine local regulatory strategies and the community conservation efforts. I was fascinated by the apparent contradictions between community initiatives and high-level policy impacts, and the absence of an effective intermediary. Which was one of the conclusions drawn from a project that I did at the university and research center in Wageningen about mangrove conservation. I was hooked on the idea of finding the overlap with design and what industrial design could mean in this context. How design could become the bridge between lived experiences and visible/tangible elements of complexity and the higher level intangible elements like legislation or governance. I found the same drive in the UNDP portfolio approaches, the innovative perspective on development. The collaboration left me overwhelmed. By meeting and being involved in the active teams of this global organization I saw how the small mechanisms functioned propelling its dynamic and continuously evolving nature. And I saw their struggle in making their way into reality and the atonement with the complexity of it all. Therefore it was an interesting and layered experience.

## WITH SPECIAL THANKS

Through my chair for this project, Peter Lloyd, I met Simone Uriartt, a former student at the TU Delft Industrial Engineering faculty. A super ambitious designer who inspired me and pushed me to find my own formulations. I want to thank her for the amount of time she spent with me pondering about the project and her dedication to fuel the research with new interviews and considering all possibilities; For always being enthusiastic about the new philosophies and papers I suggested. Peter Lloyd I want to thank for his critical eye and asking me the questions I needed to hear and reminded me of the research question that I tended to drift away from so now and then. And I want to thank Sine Celik, for always sharing her knowledge on systemic design, which was a rather new subject for me and her enthusiasm during the coach meetings. This was an amazing team!

I want to thank everyone that had collaborated on the tests and interviews. I was astonished by the drive to learn and experiment from everyone that I had met during this project. Especially the CO team in Sarajevo, putting a lot of effort in the preparation of the workshop and with an amazing and fun afternoon as a result. I also want to thank the CO Ethiopia team, for letting me be part of their online meetings as a fly on the wall.

I want to thank my friends who always inspire me and have dared me to look at the field of design through so many interesting point of views. I can't wait to see more of their work and am curious what we will create together!

## ABSTRACT

The challenges of today's world don't restrict to borders, specific industries or fields of expertise as linear development models may suggest. In order for development to react in a synchronized manner to capture the complexity of these crises, a transition has been initiated within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the way of doing development, called the portfolio approach. An approach that agrees with the statement Rittel en Webber (1973) that finding the solution to a problem is similar to understanding the nature of the issue. The goal of the new approach, developed by the Strategic Innovation Unit (SIU) of the UNDP is to move from linear project planning to a more systemic and holistic way of working within the discipline.

This report follows the online journey of an UNDP team into this new way of doing and discussing development. The journey did not go without hurdles, both external factors, political dynamics and organization hierarchy, and internal factors, adjusting to a new mindset and communication manner, influenced the learning process of the team.

Observations of these dynamics has led to an intervention in the domain of communication within the portfolio realm in order to socialize the principles of systemic approaches and bring the team closer to the challenge of concern by discussing its subjective stories. The powers of the universal and context dependent characteristics of physical objects is taken as a starting point. They functioned as a boundary object, a concept that facilitates collaboration between different groups and stakeholders adjusted to different social worlds (Star & Griesemer, 1989) and steers conversation to facilitate connection in the domain of complexity.

Experiments with a variety of UNDP members explored the possibilities of the objects. The unusual objects found during this research have proven to spark new information streams and offer specific insights on the subject matter. The project's accumulated in an elaborate workshop designed to guide CO teams to explore tangible objects in their domain. The objects collected by the team in the workshop serve as valuable tools for the team's internal collaborations and externalizing perspectives. Utilizing physical objects to achieve this, aims to accelerate engagement, foster recognition and enable context-specific conversations, reinforcing the statements of both the necessity of a portfolio approach and its systemic nature.

The project aims to provide fresh perspectives on the transition to a portfolio approach and its communication strategies, contributing to the research on effective implementation and integration of the portfolio approach within UNDP teams. The report presents a practical and an alternative conversation starter on the systemic aspects of the approach in order to facilitate engagement with the approach and emphasize a deeper (personal) involvement of the participants.

*"Every object, if it can be recognised or has a name or a definition, is a political work, we see things differently. We are products of given conditions – our practice, our ability, even our knowledge or definition of ourselves. And so it's really the reaction of a given condition." - Ai Wei Wei (Englefield, 2023)*



Figure 1: In the sunflower piece Ai Wei Wei uses one object to convey a message. Art can transcend linguistic, cultural, and social boundaries. This makes it a powerful medium for sharing lived experiences and embodying the essence of what boundary objects can mean in other fields. (Sunflower Seeds, 2010 by Ai Weiwei: History, Analysis & Facts, n.d.)

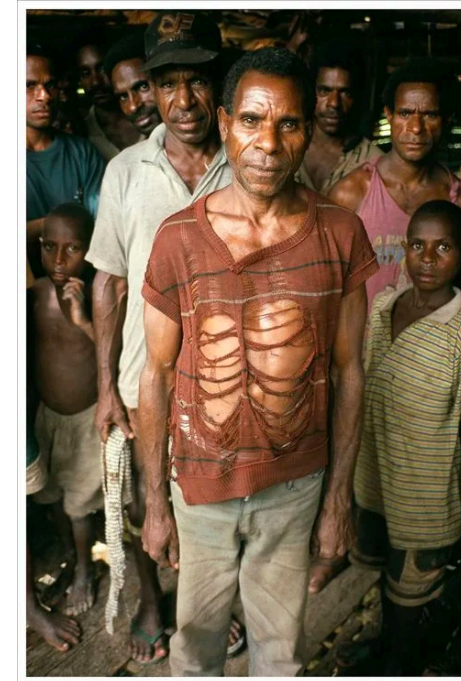


Figure 2: The man is from Papua, from a group called Asmat. This group considered clothes and t-shirts as valuable (Villevoye 2000). The shirts represent an external and modern artifact, but are taken into the culture of the Asmat by personalizing them, ripping the clothes. The picture shows a reaction and value of a culture to external elements, in which a distinct object translates for these values.

## GLOSSARY

Throughout the report some terminology is used, that sometimes needs extra clarification. Here are the most frequently used concepts listed for inquiry. Some concepts have different wording depending on context and conversation partner.

Accelerator Labs (AccLabs)	The UNDP knowledge sharing network. Learning and sharing by experimenting with new approaches on social and environmental challenges and creating new capabilities for decision makers in the field.	Issues:	The problems, obstacles, or complexities that hinder progress or effectiveness in achieving development goals within a specific challenge domain.
Beneficiaries:	The specific targeted group or community gaining from the portfolio efforts. It can refer to a diversity of stakeholders like communities, organizations, marginalized and vulnerable groups or government institutes.	Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)	The document encompassing the country's climate action plan to cut and adapt to climate impact (UNDP & EFC Ethiopia, 2021)
Boundary objects	The boundary objects bring two community of practices (group of people who share a common interest or profession) together and enables them to transfer knowledge (Fischer, 2000).	Resident Representative (RR):	The role of an RR consists of representing, leading and taking up responsibility for leveraging and directing the scope of the UNDP capacities aligned with its funds and programs.
Challenges:	The challenge of the portfolio is referred to when speaking of the specific portfolio subject. For instance: political instability, limited resources, bureaucratic hurdles, environmental concerns. The case study in this report is about the challenge of Gender Equality. A challenge is mostly described based on its issues.	Unstuck:	The website provided by the SIU to promote the portfolio and distribute its knowledge and stories.
Country priorities	A country specific goals and focus that are identified as crucial for its sustainable development. Described mostly in the Country Programme Document (CPD)		
Country Office leadership:	The RR and the DRR make up the CO leadership, together taking care of the strategic direction and managerial overview to UNDP operations within the country.		
Deputy Resident Representative:	Provides strategic leadership and managerial support to the Resident Representative.		
Donors:	These are the individuals, governments, intergovernmental organizations, foundations, corporations, and other entities that provide financial contributions to the UNDP efforts.		
Ecosystem:	The network of stakeholders within a certain portfolio subject, complimenting or continuing on one another's work.		
Entry points:	The visible and accessible starting points for improving a challenge and considered to be strategic venues through which interventions or initiatives can be introduced on a specific degree.		

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## INTRODUCTION

*In the heart of Panama city, the waste problem affected various stakeholders. Local businesses, especially restaurants, suffered from the waste piles. Many institutions were unaware of the issue, while the waste collection authority knew but had difficulties to address it. An unusual yet practical solution emerged to deal with the persistent waste problem. Garbage collectors used a large bed sheet to collect the waste. With shovels, they scooped it up and piled it onto the sheet to transfer it into the truck. The use of the sheet as a tool for waste management demonstrated that waste disposal was not a matter of apathy or displaced feelings of responsibility but rather a matter of immediate needs and concerns.*

This story is a short version of what this particular object can explore about the waste management issue present in Panama City. The bedsheet explores how objects are able to tell the story of a systemic challenge and its reciprocity in various levels of the community. It enables engagement as it is universal and recognizable. This shortened version is one of the object stories that this research looks for in line with an UNDP introduced development approach, the portfolio approach.

The portfolio is a set of interconnected interventions striving for transformation in the community and reducing the risk of putting all money into one static development project in order to avoid working alongside the lines of pre-defined objectives (Portfolios: Unstuck By UNDP, 2022).

The framework sounds like a systemic dream and is already implemented in over 50 countries ("UNDP Compendium of Portfolio Country Cases", 2022). However there are challenges faced during the implementation of the approach. On an individual level the teams are required to make a major change in their embedded way of working, stagnating the transition and increasing the work stress individuals are under. On an organizational level, the UNDP faces limited resources and personnel for a successful and integrated systemic transition, which results in sometimes a narrowed and volatile expression of the efforts due to incomprehension of the intentions of its approach.

For the UNDP teams the portfolio approach is meant as a learning instrument, dynamically learning and reacting to the complexity of the challenge, almost synchronizing with its tendencies. These teams have to comply with unpredictability, iterative experimentations, collaboration with an ecosystem with a wide variety of stakeholders. For them the shift to a portfolio approach means a new way of looking at the challenge and development through a systemic lens. But how do you formulate the effort of a portfolio approach through the vocabulary of linear planning?

This research focuses on the deployment of the new approach within these teams, analyzing their interaction with it, with an eye on facilitating a smoother transition. By finding new creative ways to start the communication around portfolio design, internally and externally, through the use of boundary objects, bringing together different social worlds (Star & Griesemer, 1989). Therefore the research question is stated as follows:

How does the use of boundary objects facilitate the communication around the portfolio approach in CO team, internal and external?

Something ordinary, like the object, was found to be the symptom of a system through which stories of experience could be told, highlighting the diverse aspects of the challenge and its reciprocal issues. The research specifically focuses on bridging the gap between team and development context. Although significant efforts, like new methods and close collaboration with grass root organizations, are attempting to bridge this gap, its effects are limited as there are not always the right resources available. Requiring a low resource method to achieve this. The objects in this report explain how they ignite a long term and deep impact within the teams when changing to a portfolio way of thinking.

*'experience how people who are different from you live - just looking at differences does not teach us anything. It's only when we let go and live by their rules, eat what they eat, that we really understand. New languages, new foods and new people all enrich us, and that diversity is what it means to be human.'* - Daniel Everett (linguist and Author) (Unstuck)

## 1. FRAMING THE PROJECT

### 1.1 IN COLLABORATION WITH

#### United Nations Development Programme

The UNDP is the United Nations (UN) leading agency on development on a global scale. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is active in 170 countries and territories to help (local) governance and organizations progress with their development goals. With three focus areas on sustainable development, democratic governance and peace building, and climate and disaster resilience (About us, z.d.). Besides providing relevant parties with a knowledge network, one of their main jobs is acquiring funding for development (Murphy & Browne, 2014). In a broader picture this report is within the domain of this organization. But leaves it out of the specific scope.

#### UNDP Portfolio Approach

There are many organizations and individuals working on improving development work and devoting resources to the world's complex challenges. Portfolio management is a method that has evolved to form an answer to what is called coordinated strategies (UNDP, 2022). There are different portfolio methods working with similar mindsets and principles. The UNDP Portfolio Approach is one of those strategic and operational methods for managing a collection of projects, programs, or initiatives. This approach focuses on achieving synergies between different initiatives, ensuring alignment with broader strategic goals (like the Sustainable Development Goals), and efficiently utilizing resources. Important is that the portfolio is flexible, accommodating learnings and failures, in order to spread the risk of focusing on only one side of the story (Portfolios: Unstuck By UNDP, 2022). This project examines the implementation of the approach in a specific context.

#### The strategic Innovation Unit

This project is set up in collaboration with the The Strategic Innovation Unit (SIU) of the UNDP. The SIU is under supervision of the UNDP bureau for policy and programme support and manages the Innovation Facility (IF) to which they report back and receive funding from the Danish Government (S. Uriartt, personal communication, 13 December 2023). This unit is focused on steering system transformation within the network of the UNDP. The SIU is responsible for internal and external learnings with members of the UNDP and its partners to articulate the principles of the portfolio approach through workshops and collective learning.

Through the extended network of the SIU, the correct and relevant connection could be established. Several online internal events related to dynamic project management and portfolio learning could be attended. And most importantly the contact with the specific case study could be established. Furthermore, enthusiastic UNDP members were approached in order to arrange an offline workshop.

*'The country specific strategic plan coming from global and local context. It functions as a base to articulate citizens' needs, and governance needs to be aligned with the UN framework and of the UN agencies (like UN women). From this document references are taken to prioritize the portfolio subjects and directions.'* - Interview 1

*'The design of the portfolio approach emerged from the work in multiple regions and CO's with multiple external partners, the role of SIU is to extract insights and document a meta model that can be used by all CO. In the CO's there is contextualization needed, to make it fit the ecosystem (organization, problem, people, finance etc) the principle is the same, the form is different.'* - Interview 1

#### The UNDP Country Offices

The activities initiated by the UNDP operate from the country offices (CO). The CO's have individual programmes that are designed for the specific development needs of that country. The CO leads the development and the management of the multi-year UNDP country programme. It also functions as the conciliator checking whether the programs are in line with the UN strategic plan and the national priorities.

In the CO's 3 major parties are considered influencing development:

- The UNDP country office: One of the main functions of the office is to develop and manage the program to be in line with the UNDP organizational strategy and standards. Besides that it is important that the program conforms to the national development priorities by mobilizing resources and effective use. The UNDP is mostly not the one implementing the projects, but is part of the partner selection procedure.
- The government focuses on the alignment with the national strategy as stated in the Country Program Document (CPD).
- The implementing partner is the manager of the projects and is responsible to deliver the outcomes. This can be the government, Civil Society Organization, an Intergovernmental Organization, another UN agency, or UNDP itself.

The country office in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, is taken as the case study for this research, which will be discussed later in the report.



## 1.2 THE PROJECT SCOPE

The scope of this project intends to focus on the transition developments on Country Office level. These teams are the country level of the UNDP organizational structure researching the development challenges within their country and therefore specialized in that context. The teams are the main interaction points with the portfolio approach introduced in this report. They are therefore the intended user of the UNDP portfolio approach, but also the test group in action. Learning while developing. This research is focused on these teams: the users, students, experts and developers of the approach.

As mentioned earlier, a specific case study will revolve around the CO team Ethiopia researching Gender Equality within the country. In collaboration with Simone Uriartt (external supervisor) the CO Ethiopia was considered to be most suited for this research as it starts its journey into the portfolio approach with a sufficient understanding of the challenge, because of previous research and interaction with the portfolio approach. Thereby, the first cycle of the portfolio approach was finished within the timespan of this research and thus formed a rounded up case study with clear beginning and ending. Additionally the team will show the transition to a new approach, because their earlier efforts in the domain were executed according to another approach. This has shown a strong tendency towards elements of the theory of change.

Although the observations are limited to this team and their subject, the research will be taken to a broader perspective by including interviews with team members from other CO's and other disciplines within the UNDP, namely Panama, Thailand, Egypt, Sweden, Guinea Bissau and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The interviews and observations will be leading to an approach that is strategy wide and not confined merely to the CO Ethiopia. Due to this fact attention should be paid to the implementation of the concept across borders and within different cultures and contexts.

Besides the specific, though broad target group, a time span for the intervention of this report has been decided upon immediate implementation. The intervention is intended to be suitable for direct use, because of the fast pace in which the approach is developing and spreading the intervention needed to create direct impact in order to facilitate this process. However at the end of this report some more speculative and future focused developments of the intervention are discussed.

### The Project Challenge

In collaboration with the external supervisor, Simone Uriartt, strategic design consultant for the SIU, the brief of this report was set up. The research focuses on the shift in development approach among the CO teams and their experience of the shift. The goal is to intervene in the process of the shift in order to facilitate it. It was decided to take a rather creative route by attempting to approach the issue via a new lens including new theories and alternative point of views for communicating complexity within the domain of development. The alternative approaches on complexity varied between disciplines, fueling the weekly meetings with Simone with interesting conversation topics.

Previous attempts of introducing (tangible) conversation starters and interactive workshops in order to foster engagement with the portfolio approach have shown positive effects in the UNDP teams (see page 34). Hence the challenge of this research is set on introducing alternative socialization and sensitizing the teams with the principles connected to a systemic approach on development. In line with the principles of the portfolio approach this research focuses on 'data' derived from soft sciences rather than hard data. Looking at alternatives to explore the justification of the approach and its potential outcomes for the teams.

*'It is about building capacity to work with the complex portfolio [referring to a complex issue, by using a portfolio of interconnected interventions], use cases to experiment and build internal chance for change' - Interview 1*

## 1.3 METHODOLOGY

### Project aim

Building sufficient knowledge of the context of the intervention of this project, first a portfolio procedure is visualized with the hurdles of the team and the experiment is evaluated on the factors of complexity approaches. The aim can be described as follows:

The aim of the project is to research how and if thinking through boundary objects can facilitate the Country Office teams working with the portfolio approach to grasp the systemic character of the approach, increase internal/external communication and share the specific narratives.

### Research question

Resulting in the following research question and subquestions:

- How does the use of boundary objects facilitate the communication around the portfolio approach in CO team, internal and external?
  - What are the current shifting qualities of the transition to a portfolio approach?
  - What are the steps undertaken to implement the portfolio approach in the Ethiopian Country Office team on gender equality compared to the general steps designed by the SIU?
  - What are the most prominent difficulties of the Ethiopia CO team on gender equality in relation to the implementation of the portfolio approach and the relevant needs?
  - What kind of insights does the boundary object tool provide UNDP members with in relation to their portfolio subjects?
  - How can the insights of the physical boundary object be used to increase internal/external communication?

Different practices, theoretical frameworks and methods have been used in line with the project aim. In this section the key methods and frameworks are introduced in relation with the specific research questions. An overview is provided on where in the project the methods are used and with what intention.

### An approach on Systemic Design

Systemic design finds its origin in the synthesis of systems thinking and design thinking (Ryan, 2014), respectively combining the powers of finding interconnectedness and dynamic relationships with human-centered problem solving and the corresponding innovations. The approach shows a great overlap with the portfolio approach described in this report. This approach combines different methods for applying the systemic lens in development work, allowing for taking on and appreciating a development challenge from different perspectives. The systematic design approach pushes the set boundaries and suggests a reframe of the challenges. This research combines the ingredients suitable for the systematic design approach, analyzing the multitude of layers that are present in the multi dimensional challenges of contemporary development. With the reciprocal influences between different parts of a system as a relic of the quest. They formulate the interdependencies between the system and its environment (Ryan, 2014), a bridge that underlines the presence of complexity in reality and human lived experiences.

But this distinction is not necessarily dominating the field of systemic design, as Vink (2023) argues. Systemic design should not only consider abstract concepts and theoretical frameworks but also integrate lived experiences and bodily engagement in the design process (Vink, 2023). This research follows Vink's argumentation and provokes a designerly and more experimental approach on the systemic course of the portfolio approach. Additionally accentuating the responsibility of the designer (me) and the teams working with the portfolio approach to include oneself in the design process and the analyses, following the philosophy of the systemic self, including oneself in the scope of the system playing an active role, be influenced and influence the system elements (Vink et al., 2021). Thereby rethinking the boundaries opposed on every element of the system, ourselves, the human and non-human included.

## Desk research

Literature was consulted to get a better understanding of the ongoing shift in approaching complex challenges and the aspects that were relevant for this research were distilled. Specific literature was inquired on organizational transitions and change, to provide the project with insights on psychological aspects of the strategic shift. Additional research had to be done on the subjects of the portfolio's that were investigated in the interviews, tests and the observation in order to have sufficient background information on the specific directions.

## Qualitative interviews and event

Some semi-structured interviews were done with relevant members of the UNDP and researchers for the UNDP in order to get a better picture of the context, where and how the portfolio approach was being implemented, how the team had dealt with the change and what it had initiated for the challenge in the country. Throughout the report the quotes can be found. Where possible some online events were joined in order to learn more and to get the perspective of external parties in combination with Simone's invitation to attend meetings. An overview of the interviews can be found in the Appendix D.

## Participatory observation

The CO Ethiopia team on gender equality was observed to study the theory of the portfolio approach in practice. The insights gathered from the observations were used to map the sequential steps that were executed by the team, in order to empathize with the process of the team getting accustomed to a new way of working and to get a better understanding of the context, the procedure and the approach. 20 meetings have been analyzed in total, both through recordings or by being present in the online meetings. All meetings and the outcomes of the conversations were archived in Miro. The data of the observations has been analyzed and interpreted to verbalize the tensions between the team and the approach. The structure in which the observations are analyzed is explained in the following section, page 22.

## Prototyping and Testing

The intervention proposed in this report was tested several times with members of UNDP CO teams. Developing the method that worked best and effectively to get to intended results. Together with the test participants the test was discussed based on probability of succeeding, value, insights and approach. These tests were mostly done online and offline with students providing feedback on the effectiveness and experience. At the end of the report the last version was tested with the CO team in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the full version was tested in an offline setting.

Figure 3 shows the project overview, including its methods and on what level the information applies, organization, portfolio, CO team, experiments and intervention. Figure 4 explains the different chapters as a little reader's guide.

The report starts by explaining the portfolio approach, laying extra focus on the reframing process, that does not only concern the development challenges but also the activities and culture within the teams. Ultimately showing how these changes show in alternative methods of expressing the portfolio intentions.

The middle part of the report concerns a deeper layer, that of the experience with the portfolio approach within a specific case study. The experiences of the team result in 7 observed needs that explain the possible improvements for a smoother integration of the portfolio approach on team level.

The last chapter of the report introduces an intervention that reacts to the observed needs and considers a workshop that introduces thinking through objects as a valuable solution to making the complexity of portfolio approach manageable through the engaging powers of objects. Reflecting on it with the observed needs.

Figure 3: Project overview

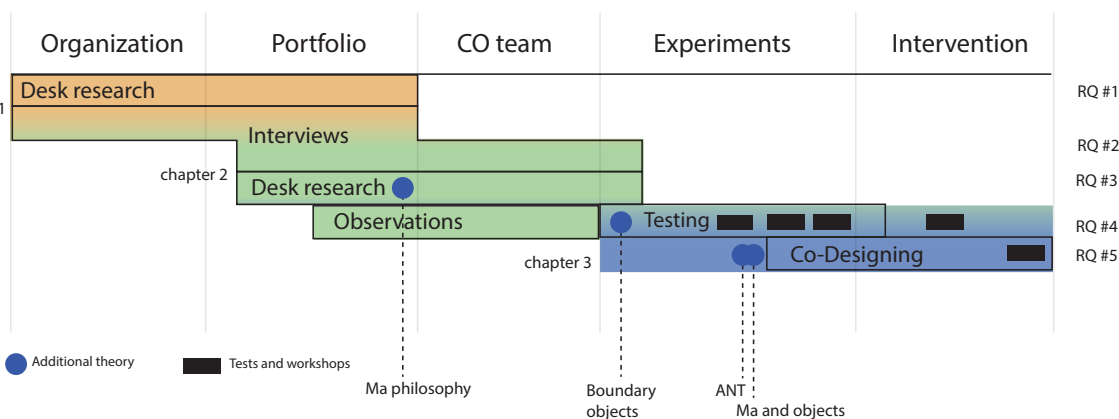


Figure 4: A little readers guide

## 1.4 THE PROJECT BUILD UP

Observations of the online meetings of the CO Ethiopia were possible for the full length of this project. In this section is explained how the observations were gathered and interpreted, leading to the formulation of the difficulties expressed by the team in regards to the portfolio approach.

### The meetings

At moments there were weekly meetings, bi-weekly meetings and sometimes due to work pressure once a month, adding up to 21 meetings of on average 2 hours. All meetings observed were done online, because the moderator, the portfolio expert, was not based in the CO location. The team itself was based in the UNDP office in Addis Ababa, but were joining through separate channels. The medium used to archive the process of the team was Miro, which facilitated individual work at times, but most of the work was done during the sessions. Both Miro and the recordings of the meeting were accessible for this research.

### The team

The set up of a portfolio team is based on professional background and expertise. The teams consist partly of members of the regional AcCLabs and partly of the CO members. The AcCLab compliments the team with a head of solutions, head of experiments and head of exploration. Respectively responsible for bottom up solutions and embedding innovation across projects of the CO, instituting rapid learning about emerging challenges and discovery and sensemaking of emerging trends within the portfolio subject. In appendix C an overview can be found on the different roles in the team. During the observations there is no distinction made between the different members.

### The observation strategy

The observations of the meetings were mainly focused on collecting insights through quotes and conversations that in team context explore the principles of the approach and the tensions between team and approach. Quotes that were collected in this study were categorized under the following subjects: the portfolio approach, gender equality in Ethiopia, the organization UNDP and its stakeholders, the context and political background of the country. The clusters can be found in appendix A. The categorization facilitates the interpretations of the quote and its impact on the experience of the approach. While quotes could fit into multiple categories, they typically align best with one specific question. The placement of quotes into categories often relied on intuition. A quote was designated as context-related when the context directly influenced a change in the challenge.

*Here [Ethiopia] is just a high level political commitment, that opens high level engagement for women in the political system.*

But a quote would be part of the challenge, gender equality, when it was directly relatable to an aspect of the challenge and exceeded the contextual background:

*About Rwanda, we said there was a high level political commitment that paved the way for women to come to the political activities of that country. But this one [intervention] is focusing on the women themselves, because I think sometimes we assume women are interested or women have this key or women are having all the truth and information about their rights to participate in the political arena.*

## 2.1 THE UNDP PORTFOLIO APPROACH

The UNDP portfolio approach is a combination of various methods in the field of managing and implementing development projects and programs on a global level. The method explores the possibility of reframing specific challenges in order to explore deeper layers and casualties behind its effects. What is called active learning in the context of portfolio approach is constantly revisiting this reframing statement (Portfolios: Unstuck By UNDP, 2022) and asking the question, are we still asking the right questions?

## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH

### - A REFRAMING CHALLENGE

The first part of the research further explains the portfolio approach by exploring one of its main goals, reframing the challenge, and why this goal is crucial for the overall organizational shift the approach sets in motion (Figure 5). This is done by in depth research and listening to relevant stakeholders in the field. This section can be read as a context of the observational study described in the follow up chapter. It substantiates the challenge of this project, zooming in on communication possibilities of the changing organizational environment. Answering research question a: What are the current shifting qualities of the transition to a portfolio approach?

- The UNDP portfolio approach
- The transitional qualities
- The momentum of change in the messy middle
- Side story on the messy middle - the Ma philosophy
- The anti-corruption diner
- Summary of understanding the portfolio approach

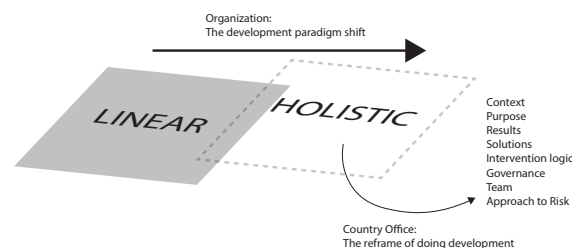


Figure 5: From paradigm shift to reframe. This chapter focuses on the reframing activities that result from the organizational paradigm shift on development.

### Initiation of a portfolio approach

Different reasons propose the start of a systematic portfolio approach within CO's. For instance when current development programmes and specific projects do not seem to ignite the long term change, but are merely focused on the realization of short term objectives within the domain. Another argument is mainstreaming development, when project implementation works across various sectors and is not treated as standalone issues. Like the period of Covid has shown, reactions to the challenge of Covid mainstreamed the challenge of for instance gender equality in Ethiopia as well (Derbali, 2023).

The portfolio on gender equality in Ethiopia started with a thorough analysis of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), the document encompassing the country's climate action plan to cut and adapt to climate impact (UNDP & EFC Ethiopia, 2021). A gender analysis was initiated because of an increase in awareness about the gender inequalities in the domain of climate mitigation plans. And a nation wide awareness on the role and knowledge of women in this area. The goal of employing a portfolio approach here is to identify the underlying dynamics and the structural driving forces and issues that hinder change from happening. Another document that leads the actions and focus of the UNDP is the Country Programme Document (CPD) that encompasses a country's policy and procedure for development stating its priorities (Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme et al., 2020).

*Why are we stuck? I think 1 critical issue is because we are experiencing a crisis, right, human made and natural disasters, you know, conflicts, climate change, COVID. All those things are pulling back the achievements made specifically on gender equality and women empowerment. - team member CO Ethiopia*

*As you know, we have some Nationally determined contribution for Ethiopia, as per the Paris Agreement, and we made extensive gender analysis. For each of the interventions in the national determined contribution, what is the implication of gender, be it in agriculture or the sea industry, sea transport, infrastructure, Urban Development, you name it. We made it very much clear how gender should be incorporated in each of the national determined contribution sectors, sector by sector. - team member CO Ethiopia*

## The portfolio - a reframing process

Reframing the challenge of concern is a central activity within the system transformation portfolio of the UN. Existing and dominant development frames bind point of views and prevent development from going to the root causes.

In previous approaches, these starting points for change were called 'entry points' (Pereverza, 2022). These entry points are described as the visible issues defined as problematic, bound by the system of the challenge yet not strong enough to create a long term change. They form the starting point of a reframing process, as the inequality of women in a country is caused by the lack of agency under women.

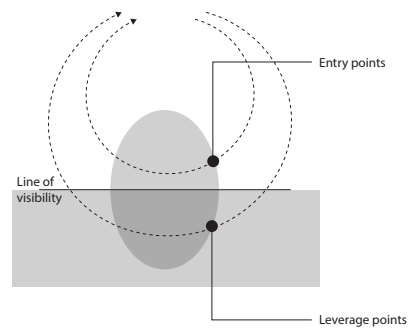


Figure 6: Inspired by the iceberg framework showing the visibility line, the division between leverage points and entry points for igniting change

## Resistance for change

In systems analysis the concept of leverage points refers to the places in a system where change can cascade to the majority of everything and its effect echoes through the system of concern (Figure 6). The reframing process of the portfolio approach is steering the UNDP closer to the grass root causes and challenges. Reframing processes are important to avoid counterintuitive effects of the improvement development strives to achieve. Meadows explores the counterintuitivity of leverage points, previously been interpreted as intuitively solvable, systemically worsening complex situations (Wright & Meadows, 2008). In this situation the presumed solution of a difficulty, becomes a downwards spiral, as Forrest (Forrester, 1971) proclaims, in which the difficulty becomes worse. Or in some cases may even cascade throughout the whole system in a rippling effect (Figure 7).

The deeper the interventions seek to go, the more resistance of the system will prevail (Wright & Meadows, 2008). It poses a certain resistance that differs per context and level on which the leverage point is situated. Meadows demonstrate the amount of resistance of a system to change by introducing a hierarchy of 9 levels for leverage, the numbers referring to the increase of resistance of the system. One of the leverage points with the highest and deepest effect in the system is leverage point 1: The mindset or paradigm out of which the goals, rules, feedback structures (the system) arise (Wright & Meadows, 2008). Similar to what the portfolio reframing process is doing in order to avoid the negative counter effects.

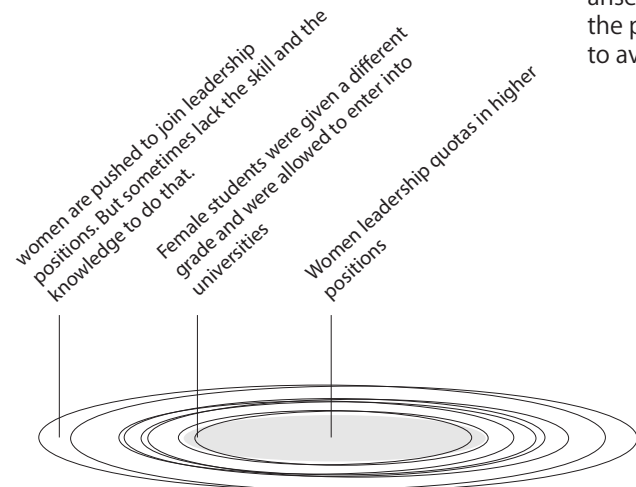


Figure 7: The rippling effect explained by the quote from the case study on the counterintuitive effect on women leadership improvement

## The learning cycle

The reframing process can be seen as the start of learning from the challenge of concern (Pereverza, 2022). This learning process continues in managing the intended change, understanding how the challenge might shift with the interventions in action. The change then explores how the challenge is formed and reframed over time. How change occurs and can be measured reveals insights about the structure and character of the challenge and concludes in a viable set of learnings. These learnings are assumed to encourage to revisit the reframe of the challenge again and again, making this a central point of conclusion and experimentation. Capturing learnings is one of the difficulties of the portfolio and its teams as there is no format and network in place that facilitates managing these systematically.

*It's quite difficult for many organisations to learn from experiments because there are a lot of different barriers, on organisational and individual level, which often prevent what is learned and done in experiments and take it beyond the experiments. It is not easy for those people involved in the experiments to spread those learnings or to scale experiments or to somehow mainstream learnings from experiments - Interview 2*

## The transformative portfolio approach

Interview 1 explained that the name of the portfolio is inconveniently chosen, because of its variety of interpretations. She prefers to call the method a transformative portfolio approach, as it ignites systemic transformation of the challenges. The meaning of transformation in social sciences is referred to as the shift in the functioning of societal structures (Pereverza, 2022).

*When I write about the portfolio approach, I'm using the transformative approach. The word portfolio is well known. It's not that UNDP came up with something which no one knew before and the portfolio is established in quite many fields, such as finance, project management, and design. In investments and in project management it's very close to this idea of some sort of set or a combination of projects. I think we can have diversity between fields, but here [in the context of UNDP] it should be transformative. - interview 2*

## Challenges of the reframing processes

One of the issues that comes with an approach that preaches for the search of reframing challenges, is that it creates insecurity amongst team members embarking on the challenge. Reframing is not considered as a 'step', but as a skill, which some teams assume not specifically to possess (Pereverza, 2022). The deeper systemic barriers associated with the initial challenge became prominent after reframing and required different skills in order to address them (Pereverza, 2022). Which made embarking on reframing as an approach risky to individuals of the CO teams.

Introducing new frames of a challenge often disrupts the established organizational cultures, processes, and structures that are tailored to support traditional problem-solving approaches. It can question the organizational boundaries, necessitating the formation of a new network of organizations and individuals (Dorst et al., 2020). The reframing process is carried out on organizational level of the UNDP, within the teams, in the challenges and additionally requires the partnering organization to revisit their boundaries and formation within the reframed challenge domain as well (UNDP Strategic Innovation Unit, 2023).

## Facilitating the framing process

Pereverza (2022) distills a few factors that help steer the reframing process. The notion of inclusivity (community listening), landscape factors (like Covid-19 and its impact on system-oriented framing) and dominant framing (influenced by funding priorities) guide or stagnate the process into another formulation of the challenge. Capturing and avoiding these forms can be in different ways, for instance finding synergy between framings can have a positive outcome (Pereverza, 2022). Using these framing challenges as leverages and not as hinders (Figure 8). The UNDP aims to collect bottom-up perspectives on the challenge in order to accelerate the reframing process.

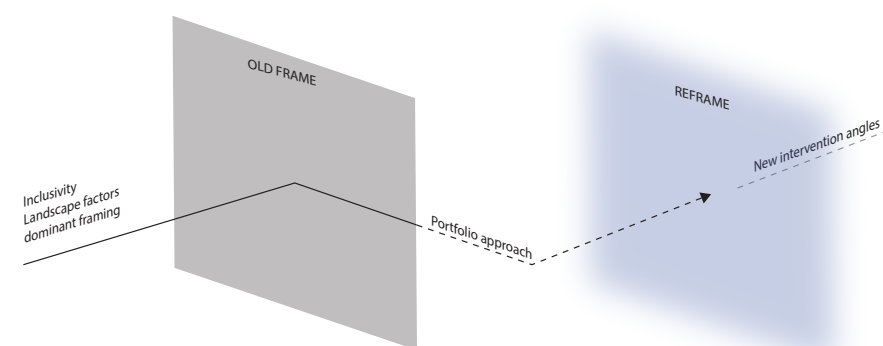
## Community listening - Deep Listening

Agirre - community transformation

An organization connected to the portfolio process that is devoted to this last activity is Agirre Lehendakaria Center (ALC). They have been co-designing the platform that helps local policy makers better understand community needs and how to react to them. One of the tools used in their approach is 'Deep Listening', referred to many times in UNDP's research and work. The goal of deep listening is to unravel community's narratives, detailing the needs and opportunities. The narratives contribute to the idea of successfully setting change in motion on a community level, ultimately making one of its main goals to make teams take into account the context in which the programme takes place (Agirre Lehendakaria Center & United Nations Development Programme, 2023).

## Wicked problems

The challenges that the UNDP teams work with are inherently 'wicked'. In the words of Rittel and Webber (1973), what distinguishes a wicked problem from other problems is that wicked problems don't end up in specific outcomes or that are definable in a predefined problem statement. Making it difficult to pinpoint a clear beginning and end point of the process of engaging in a wicked problem. They are profoundly unique: Every wicked problem will, despite its similarities, have an important differentiating property (Rittel and Webber, 1973). What this previous section has elaborated on is that the explanation of the issue determines the nature of its outcomes. In the follow up section is described how the portfolio approach has embraced the nature of the wicked problems.



The reframing process goes beyond the scope of development work within the UNDP. It necessitates not only a new perspective on the challenges but also a reorganization of the work itself, which puts the structure of the UNDP in a reframe.

Figure 8: The UNDP reframing process on development

## 2.2 THE TRANSITIONAL QUALITIES

This renewed global presence of the organization brings a new internal and external culture (UNDP Strategic Innovation, 2022) on organizational level and on development team level. The following points roughly discuss some of the main transitional characteristics that accompany the shift to a transformative and system portfolio approach. These characteristics are briefly touched upon in this project to sketch the background of the transition and is relevant for understanding in what mindsets the change is taking place and how this relates to the portfolio principles.

### Changed global presence

Implementor → Mediator

The UNDP is focusing on grassroots organizations to foster a knowledge and ecosystem network creating interconnections, positioning itself as a development mediator through these entities. Expanding its already existing network requires reformulating the ownerships of endeavors. The portfolio is transferred to the assigned implementing partners.

### New funding relations

Short projects → Long portfolios

The UNDP funding relies on project-based finance. (Trogemann, 2022). This requires a new form of pitching the outcomes of development, not through clear cut project steps, but through a monitored evaluation of learnings. In return the funders present themselves as frontrunners in a new development paradigm and join in the process of learning and risk-managed development.

### Rethinking collaboration

Silod → Pushing scopes

Fragmentation in challenges can make it difficult to extrapolate what the value of a country office is for its partners (UNDP Strategic Innovation, 2022). Within country offices working in silos is risky, but also the potential partners work in silos and are limited by their organizational scope. Most new interventions leveraging existing resources of partnering organizations, push the internal scopes. Intervention owners need to agree in order to continue the momentum.

### New data collection

Numerical → Experimental

There is no clear problem statement the collection of numerical data is too specific and emphasizes specific information within a domain. The portfolio approach requires a more to the ground and alternative formulation of the challenge as a whole. This is why within the portfolio more attention is eventually given to data in the form of stories (Agirre Lehendakaria Center & United Nations Development Programme, 2023) as for instance the description of persona's.

The following factors describe the prominent shifts and changes that appear when changing from the project to the portfolio, based on the SIU (2022) Unstuck. Later in the report they are used to emphasize the hurdles of the observed team in contrast to these portfolio shifts.

Ordered, stable and predictable



Uncertain, dynamic and unpredictable

context

To implement solutions to a clearly defined problem



To learn about a complex issue, discover entry points and engage with the issue

Purpose

Deliver pre-defined objectives. These do not change over time



Not possible to define up front. Start out with a general direction

Result

Known and readily available. Designed and implemented by the project itself



Emerge from exploratory probes in the portfolio and sensemaking of activities in a wider context

Solution

Intervention consisting of pre-defined activities rolled out in a controlled environment



Iterative experimentation (emergence) with a variety of interconnected interventions

Intervention logic

Project board, annual meetings, reporting progress against pre-defined KPIs and assumptions



Frequent discussions with the board, government, funders. Uncertainty is communicated and accepted

Governance

Members operate within their separate areas of expertise under the guidance of a team leader



Convenes, plans and delivers interventions in collaboration with a wide ecosystem of stakeholders

Team

Prediction, quantifiable. Risks to be controlled and removed



Unpredictable. Risk management through rapid adaptation

Approach to risk



## 2.3 THE MOMENTUM OF CHANGE IN THE MESSY MIDDLE

Being in transition from a conventional way of working (linear planning) to a new way of working can be referred to as being in the messy middle. This is the space of ambiguity, confusion and uncertainty. EIT Climate-KIC and Sida launched the Systems Innovation Learning Partnership. These partnering organizations organized the online Systems Innovation Learning Festival, in which people in the field located in the messy middle (amongst which UNDP members) tell their story and experiences. In combination with outcomes of interviews taken with UNDP employees and researchers and attending this online event, factors that affect the momentum for change are derived.

### Change is not only a future matter, but a matter of history as well

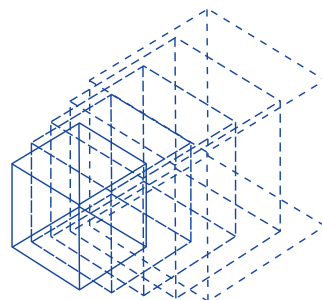
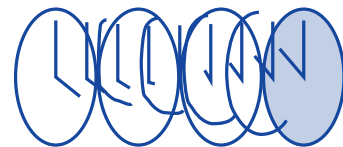
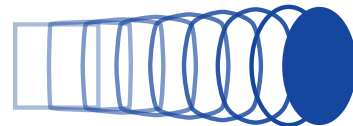
The observations show expressions that explain a transition of an emotional character. There were expressions of the desire for time to 'grieve' an old system, suggesting a sort of ritual to leave behind a known way of working and start engaging with a new way of working. However, this method had generated a sense of repetition amongst participants of the festival. As described by Schön, this could be compared with the idea of the displacement of concepts: the old approach becomes a symbol or a metaphor for the new approach (Adolf et al., 2013)

### Trust is time depended

The time that is needed in order to 'fulfill' change is ambiguous. It implies a certain end point, however according to the philosophy of the portfolio approach the end point is a continuous learning process and requires an almost humble attitude towards an end point. This is one of the reasons within systemic transformation there is no referring to 'problems' and 'solutions', implying a clear beginning and ending.

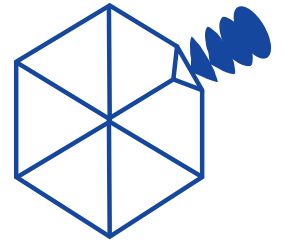
### Trust is space depended

Conveying the effect of the portfolio approach is a delicate matter, as there is not yet concrete proof of the transition that can help convince the most skeptical participants. During the meetings expressions of disbelief are present and rephrase the incentives of the work done by the portfolio approach. Concluding that there is a disbalance between facilitating a safe space, a concept that creates trust and converts this trust into the freedom to learn and to question.



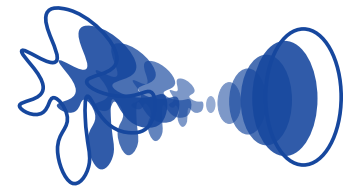
### Room for mistakes

Questions are asked as to where certain feelings of pushing back change come from. Is it really anxiety or is it discomfort? As Taleb (2013) explains: "Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better." It is an interesting new take on vulnerability. And suggests to give vulnerability more credits than the expression of expertise, paving the way for giving room for the unsaid or the mistakes.



### The limits of communication

Language of development has stagnated in the old paradigm of linear planning and stays true to the meaning and thoughts of this paradigm. Both simplicity and complexity is needed to get across the portfolio approach, however this may simplify it to such an extent that it fails to articulate the principles of the portfolio in the correct manner or fails to get it across. Metaphors are expressed as a solution, a way to understand what is talked about, but this mostly refers to the elements already known. One participant at the festival replied that we should imagine and focus on the things we don't yet know.



## SIDE STORY ON THE MESSY MIDDLE - THE MA PHILOSOPHY

In this report the Japanese Ma philosophy is taken as a source of inspiration. Loosely translated, the meaning of Ma refers to 'in betweenness' as a status of transition and suspense, resembling the messy middle of change. As Akama (2015) describes it implies a relational sensitivity, a merging of distinctions, like the grayness between black and white or a little bit more bold, the movement between problem and solution. Ma can be used as a handle for communication analysis representing silence, hesitation or time to think. Within co-designing discipline it can imply 'becoming with' (Akama, 2015). The principles of the philosophy are used to capture the state of transition and reform the observed struggles to points of improvement. To rephrase the inbetween space into a space for creativity and learning.

MA CAN MEAN  
MA CAN MEAN  
READING OR  
A SEARCH  
LISTENING  
FOR WHAT IS  
BETWEEN THE  
INBETWEEN THE  
LINES POINTS

## 2.5 SUMMARY OF UNDERSTANDING THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH

### 2.4 THE ANTI-CORRUPTION DINER

#### A CREATIVE WAY OF COMMUNICATING THE PORTFOLIO

An example of the CO's efforts to embrace the possibilities of the messy middle is described here: An anti-corruption diner. More creative ways of communicating the insights from portfolio research are both convincing as insightful.

The dinner organized on behalf of Jordans food security system was one of the answers to the question on the right. Although there was no specific work done from the UNDP and the CO in Jordan on this topic, food security came out as a link between corruption, social security and cohesion, and climate change in the country (Malhas, 2023). The CO had the possibility to experiment, as the portfolio tools encourage, and find out what UNDP's role could be in a system where it has not yet been introduced.

Food in Jordanian culture is used to mark special occasions (Malhas, 2023). The perfect moment to express the findings of the portfolio approach strengthened by the ALC method deep listening to map the needs within the system. The menu was designed to express these needs and concerns in order for the invitees to reflect on these topics and engage.

I interpreted this as a way to experience the challenge, its issues and possibilities, instead of merely talking about it in formal meeting settings. Making research visible and tangible creates engagement and makes the prominent statements of the research sticky and recognizable, as a diner, a potato and eating soup through a sieve (Figure 9). What I see is a way to embody, quite literally, the possibilities.

*How would we look differently as an organization if we 'saw' the issues from outside vs. through the prism of our internal taxonomies? - Dana Khan Malhas (Innovation Specialist, UNDP Jordan) (Malhas, 2023).*



Figure 9: The soup was eaten with a sieve to contemplate the effects of corruption. Mystery Soup, Photo courtesy of Jasmine House.

Experience the challenge

Make research visible

Sticky and recognizable insights

This chapter has described how the portfolio approach is by default a reframing process for which systemic thinking paves the way of shedding light on the different aspects of the challenge space in order to define an holistic formulation on the subject. These challenges mostly show counterintuitive solutions, which are replied to by linear projects management. The reframing process is therefore a necessary step in order to avoid the rippling effect of single-point projects. But the reframing process seeps through the organizational structures and asks for a reframe of doing development of the individual members, whose skill package does not always comply with this new way of approaching development. They find themselves in what is called the messy middle, where new rules occur on transformations.

Therefore the set of shifting qualities of doing development within the UNDP and its CO's are being analyzed in this report. In order to fully grasp the difficulties the team members experience with the portfolio approach and with the internal shift. They describe their previous way of working in comparison to the portfolio approach as working within themes, a narrowed cause and effect analysis and a lack of integrated tools. The latter one is of concern in this report. As the UNDP is already zooming in on this topic and finds creative ways of integrating new tools encouraging the reframing process. These new formulas are already showing that the unsaid can be embraced, that new formats for communication can lead to better engagement and recognition of the challenge's reframe by partners and are more sticky and that are not necessarily focused on expertise but on inclusive thinking.

### 3. UNDERSTANDING THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH IN PRACTICE

#### - A CASE STUDY

In this part of the research the theory of the portfolio is discussed. The 5 phases of the portfolio design spiral are explained and connected to the sequential steps taken by the case study of this research, the portfolio design phase of the CO Ethiopia with the team on gender equality. The goal of this chapter is to identify the hurdles that come with meeting the theory in practice and answer the research question: What are the steps undertaken to implement the portfolio approach in the Ethiopian Country Office team on gender equality compared to the general steps designed by the SIU? What are the most prominent difficulties of the Ethiopia CO team on gender equality in relation to the implementation of the portfolio approach?

- The theory of the portfolio approach in practice
- The journey of Ethiopia gender equality
- The teams expectations of the new approach
- Concluding difficulties of the design phase in the team of CO Ethiopia
- Summary of the observations

Figure 10: Both questions and spiral are based on the image designed by the SIU (2022) in the Portfolio Primer, explaining the steps of every cycle.

### 3.1 THE THEORY OF THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH IN PRACTICE

In this part the general portfolio steps with associated tools and objectives are listed. The steps are accompanied by the practice of the case study, Ethiopia CO team on gender equality, and compared to show how the practice can be derived from the theory. This section will end with a compact visualization of the steps taken by the team in the time observed. The steps and images are based on the portfolio primer by the SIU (2022).

#### The Portfolio Design Spiral

This design spiral visually shows how the approach could be considered as a stepwise tool that considered a collection of methods. The spiral emphasizes the continuous character of the cycle. The process can be entered at every stage depending on where in the cycle the research of the Country Office fits best. Figure 10 shows the phases constituted by the SIU, accompanied with relevant questions. On the following page the phases are further explained.

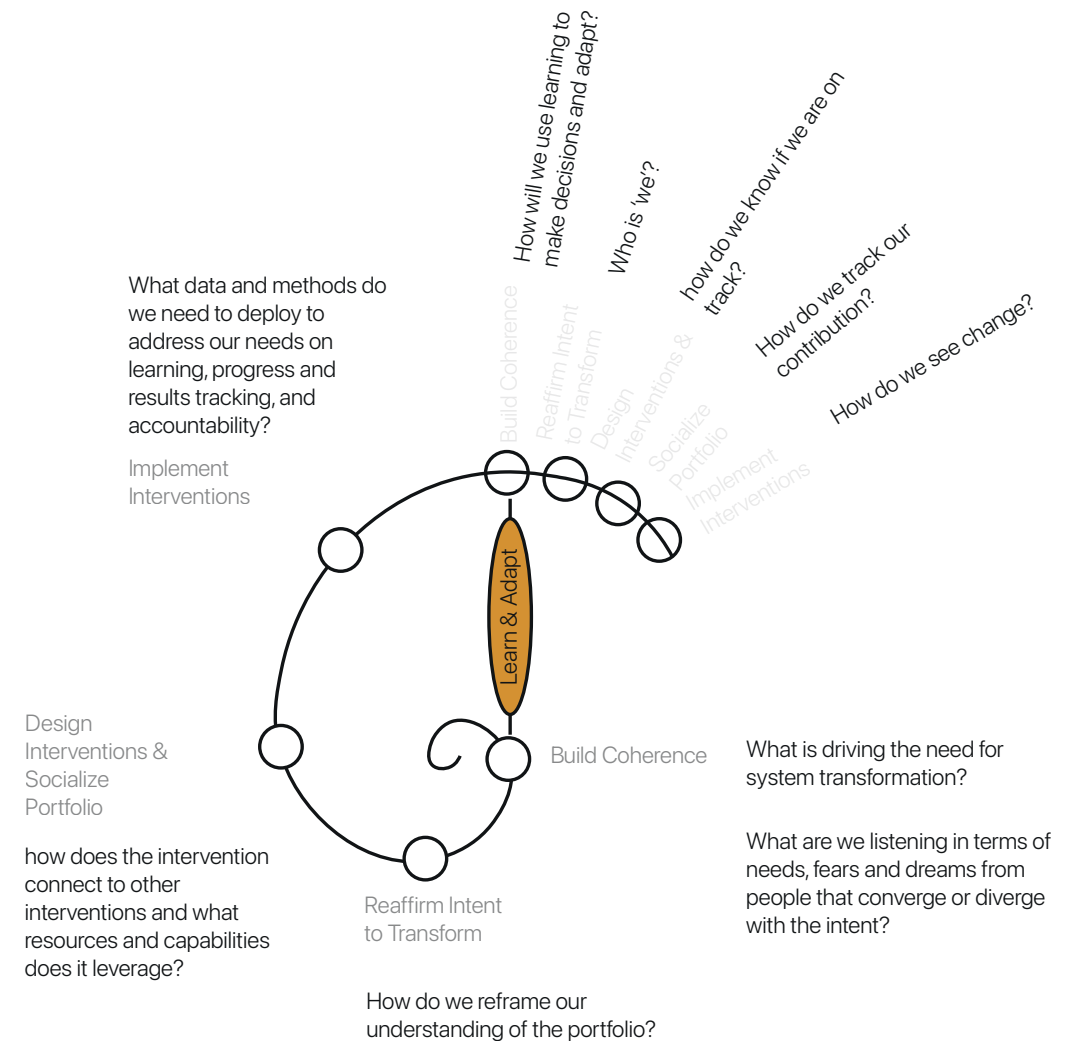
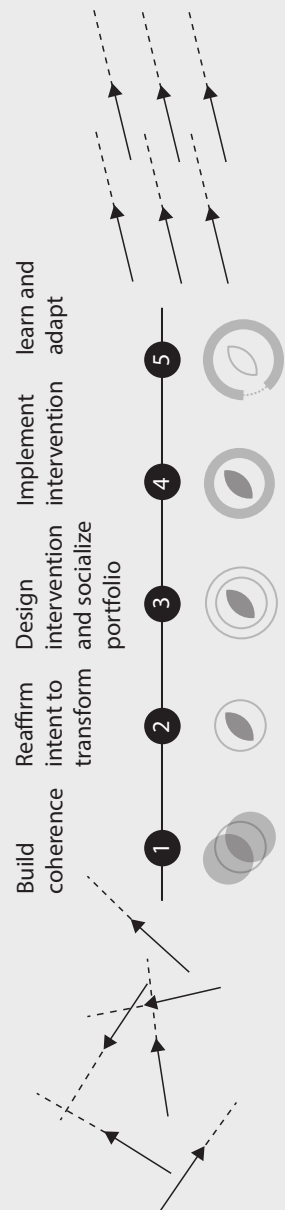


Figure 11: The portfolio approach phases based on the SIU (2022).



**Building coherence**

In this step the strategic direction of the portfolio is established and existing efforts are aligned with this vision. It is important to pinpoint synergy between the portfolio's intent and current initiatives in the country and to identify opportunities for new interventions to be introduced (SIU, 2022).

This step is also referred to as sensemaking and reframing (UNDP, 2022). It is important to understand all aspects of the challenge, map these out and identify the gaps in the map in order to state a position from where the analysis starts. Data collection and context mapping has to be done before getting into contact with relevant stakeholders in the field. In order to have a successful start a sufficient understanding of the lived experience has to be built up from a zoomed out position oriented to citizens and stakeholder data.

**Prominent deliverable per phase**

**The Strategic Statement**  
This is a statement that articulates the objectives set out by the portfolio in terms of learning and the logic behind interventions. It defines the scope of the portfolio and what is exactly being addressed in the development attempts.

**Reaffirm intent to transform**

Reaffirming the organization's commitment for transformation and its strategic intent (SIU, 2022). If needed, this is the moment to adopt alternative team structures and work methodologies to drive the shift towards systemic transformation.

In this step it is important to understand how the portfolio fits the organizational structures. Meaning that a certain management strategy is discussed on how to manage the multitude of interventions and domains. For this 4 scenarios are briefly discussed (Figure 12): interventions are spread over the existing domains of the CO (1), the interventions are nested within an existing domain of the CO (2), the interventions together start a sufficient understanding of the lived experience has to be built up from a zoomed out position oriented to citizens and stakeholder data.

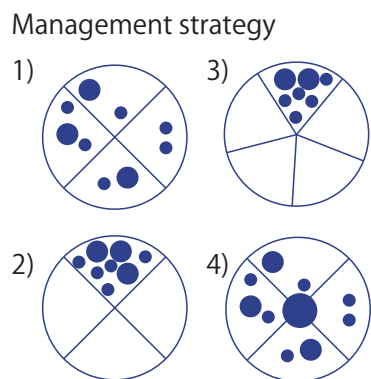


Figure 12: the 4 management strategies based on the SIU (2022).

**Design interventions and socialize portfolio**

Engaging with the current system and positioning within the current system in order to create a portfolio of interconnected interventions (SIU, 2022) to consistently generate a range of options over time. This enables the delivery of strategic development impact while being confronted with the challenge of system transformation.

A popular method of mapping out the system and defining the positions is problem space design. The problem space is being visualized, formulating and representing the key features and the multidimensional character of the complex system (UNDP, 2022). The visualization makes it easier to spot gaps in the system and thus where engagement with the system is possible. These points of engagements are called the portfolio positions.

**The portfolio positions**  
A portfolio has about 3 to 4 positions, which represent an interconnected set of points where in the system there is learning about the system dynamics (how resources flows between actors for instance) that collectively lead to the accomplishment of the intent.

**Building coherence**

This phase is also referred to as the Transformation, as it transitions from assessment and analyzing to designing and implementing the interventions by the system actors (UNDP, 2022). The interventions are designed with the idea of generating learnings and creating impact, not specifically to direct objectives. Furthermore the created impact can be scaled differently according to the portfolio. It is desirable to look at incremental, improving pressing conditions, and transformational change. Thus, interventions can come into existence with different intentions: exploratory, meaning that it is designed to validate information; learning-oriented, to acquire new information or focused on expected impact, a bit more solution focused (UNDP, 2022).

**The portfolio positions**  
These are the direct change makers: They are designed to learn from and continually effect change in the system and thereby continually evolve to maintain coherence with the challenge itself. The interventions are not so much based on achieving clear cut objectives, but are intended to learn and eventually transform the portfolio.

**Learn and adapt**

This phase is to anchor its initiatives in local contexts and adjust its priorities in response to emerging risks and opportunities. This is a short overlapping phase connecting the beginning and ending of the spiral. A popular method to analyze this phase is the Portfolio Sensemaking that enables reflection emphasizing the coherence, impact and effectiveness of the work (SIU, 2022). The sensemaking session requires the team to look at the appropriateness of the set of interventions in time and context, but also look at the emerging trend, now and in the future that may change the dynamic of the portfolio interventions.

**Monitoring and evaluation**  
This is the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) phase of the cycle. The Sandbox is a UNDP initiative to collaboratively explore, design and test M&E approaches that suit the portfolio logic (Haldrup, 2024). Looking at questions like: How do we document / measure change in complex real-world systems?

In this step the Ethiopia CO team conducted an alternative approach that differs from the general steps, including pathways as a way to explore the varied possibility of a portfolio approach present in the research area. The SIU experiments with different methods to explore what fits best in a certain context and learn from different methods. The CO Ethiopia on gender equality differed in the 'Design interventions and socialize portfolio' step.



**Problem space OR Pathway**

Some portfolio's are aided by a visual portfolio (Figure 13). The dimensions that help create a visual 'problem space' are the forms of decision making in the process, the resources in the system and the actors that are engaged, specifically describing the existing initiatives in the problem space. The existing projects are placed within the axes in order to find the gaps. Alternative methods are system mapping (understand the driving factors, relationships and power dynamics in an ecosystem, understand what is already out there in relation to a similar subject) and strategic foresight (anticipating possible futures) (SIU, 2022).

The pathways explain a (future) vision of how to achieve the positions (Figure 14). In this case they are called pathways to emphasize the alternative options that exist and are being proposed for the position to be successfully reached. The pathways clarify multiple entry points to achieve this position and are mostly formulated as a broad activity substantiated by interventions. In contrast with the minimum set of positions, the team now has to focus on resilience. When a pathway is not able to be successfully deployed due to changed circumstances, portfolio resources can be shifted into other pathways to ensure the portfolio achieves its transformations. This requires a certain hierarchy between the pathways and asking for prioritization.

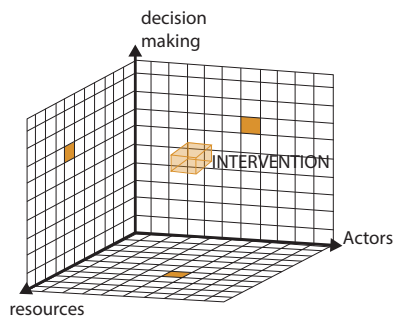


Figure 13: Visual problem space. When all intervention are located the gaps can be found

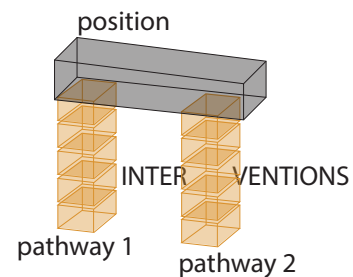


Figure 14: Pathways show how the intervention can build on one another to get to the position

### 3.2 THE JOURNEY OF ETHIOPIA GENDER EQUALITY

Follow the orange dots in the image on the next page and read the portfolio story of Ethiopia CO on gender equality:

- As mentioned earlier in the report the portfolio approach in Ethiopia on gender equality started from a gender analysis on the NDC (Figure 15), launched in 2021, in order to align the sustainable development efforts with the gender equality issue in the country. The barriers of women equality are connected to (a.o.) limited economic prospects, limited impactful positions and high pressure on women and young girls during disasters (Mehary, 2023).
- The team started with sensemaking sessions (read: stakeholder consultation) in December 2022 through which gaps in the system became apart, especially in the domain of addressing social norms in women's leadership.
- Within these domains various topics come to discussion and touch upon a multitude of societal subjects: Ranging from religion as a promoter for change, women themselves as active agency, specific Ethiopian history possibly impacting the status quo negatively or positively. The variety of topics switch from a zoomed out position to a more zoomed in position.
- The specific reframing of the portfolio started from an investigation of gender equality within the country and was formed around the topic of changing women from recipients of aid to agents of change. The portfolio of the CO Ethiopia has laid its focus on three areas that are ought to be interconnected: transforming the structures that disempower women, like institutional barriers, strengthen women's agency, like building leadership skills, and improving gender relations, like targeting social expectations and norms of the community (Mehary, 2023).
- Gender related interventions are mainstreamed into other development programmes. This results in a limiting commitment and responsibility placed on this domain. Consequently giving the responsibility to focal points with a minimal decision-making input. By applying the portfolio approach the team was able to counter force mainstreaming development activities. One of their main conclusions was focusing on a strong network of partners that were located within the communities and strengthening their capacity in order to successfully integrate intervention and receive feedback.
- However due to the national situation, declaring a state of emergency in West-Ethiopia (Amhara-region) in August 2023 due to the increasing armed violence (Derbali, 2023), impacted the developments of the portfolio within the stakeholder network. There was no possibility in sight for a so-called portfolio design week to confirm partners participation and approval of the portfolio design of the team. Through the current designed intervention the team hopes to collect evidence that promotes the portfolio intent and inspire the importance of further collaboration with organizations close to the ground.

We're demonstrating and we're learning how we can create systems change so that it can be expanded or replicated. So many deep demonstrations don't happen nationwide. Because when you're trying to do work at a national scale, often it's about actually delivering that result. And it's very difficult to create a system change at a national scale. So really this point that you folks have made about localizing the work, we're going to bring it in. I want to make sure that we're really thinking about [the portfolio] in local terms, not just necessarily at a high level, [national scale]. - Moderator CO Ethiopia team

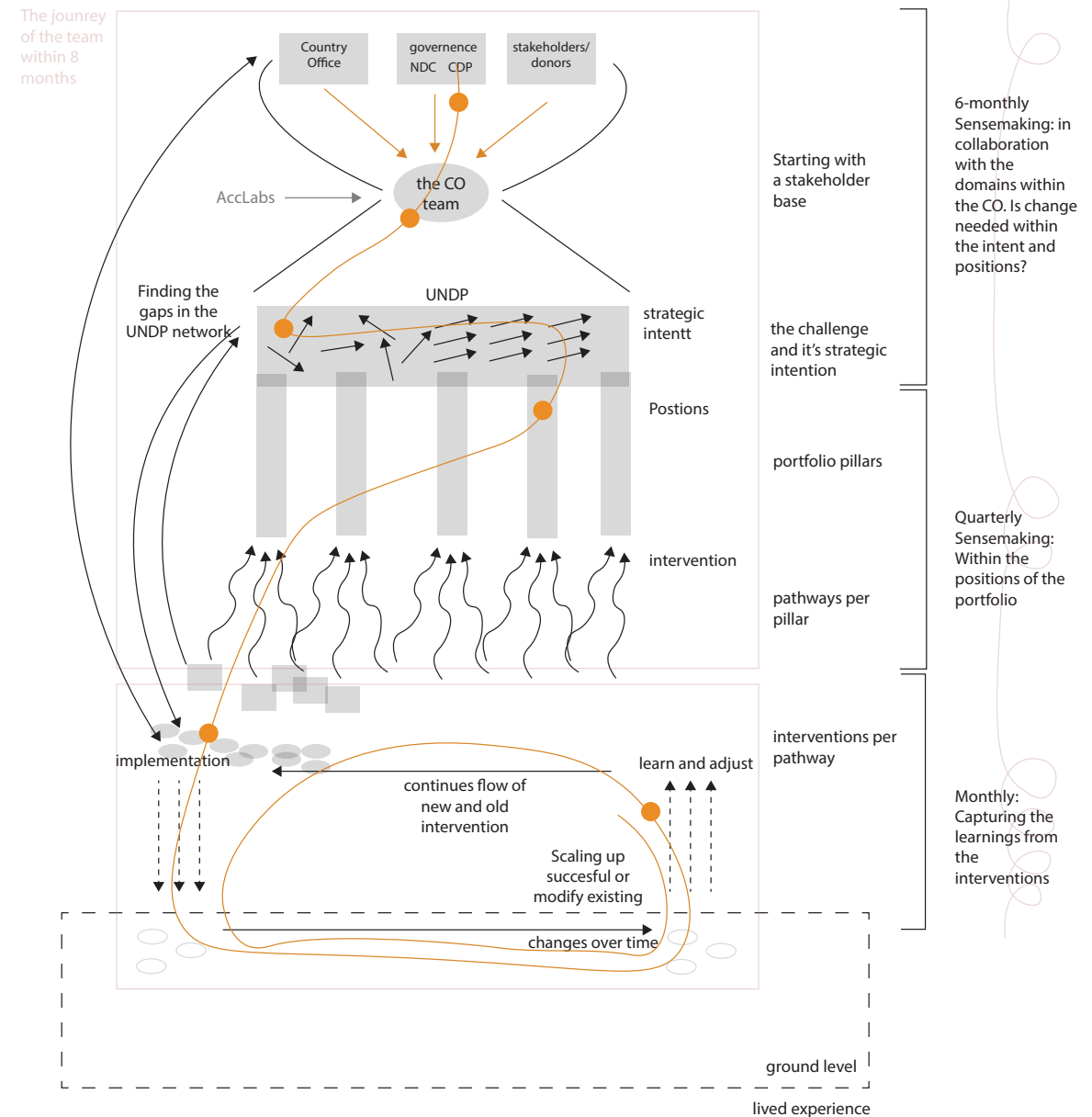


Figure 15: A visual representation of the portfolio process of the Ethiopia CO team corresponding with the story on the previous page.

### 3.3 THE TEAMS EXPECTATIONS OF THE NEW APPROACH

The expectations of the team were gathered at the beginning of the collaboration, concluded in the following points:

#### **New team collaboration**

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There is a lot of enthusiasm for the new team collaboration. The team consists of members of an old Country office complied with the old way of working and members of the AccLabs acquainted with the portfolio way of working. The members express expertise from different domains, which ignites the ambition of learning from one another.

*We're building up a new team. We have excellent teamwork and collaboration. Not only within the country office, but also with other colleagues in the region. What excites me about this initiative is being part of an amazing team that is open minded. Being part of that team that is redefining programming and pushing the boundaries*

Minimal online (and offline) group interaction

Although the quotes expose the expectation of intense team collaboration, during the online meetings there was minimal interaction between the team members. Conversations run via the moderator, but never directly addressed to other present team members, indicating a certain preset focus on the story of the moderator.

#### **Proof per context**

---

The portfolio has reached countable CO teams, however it has been difficult spreading proof of its success or confirmation that the success is coming from the efforts of the portfolio approach. Also in the team there are sounds of contemplation whether the hassle of transitioning is really worth it.

*From this I would like to learn if this portfolio thing can really work. The CO has been talking portfolio for the last 2-3 years. But we didn't walk the talk and do the actual thing on the ground. So I'm keen to learn if it can work in our context. I'm ambitious that I would be learning how this portfolio is different from the traditional way of programming*

Learn from other portfolios and COs

Taking the interventions from other portfolio's and even projects as an example. In order to trigger the feeling for what an intervention could be and mean within a portfolio. This means for the team members to read the interventions and scout them, not only to learn about them, but to deduce the elements of the intervention that could be useful for their own context.

#### **Accumulating UNDP's topics and tools**

---

The portfolio approach promotes the use of a variety of methods and tools. With a quite accessible collection of the tools in clear descriptions on Miro or other media, the portfolio approach is accessible to all. This expresses curiosity about using and learning these new methods, but also the doors they open to the broader UNDP network and skills.

*We're getting to see somehow as an organisation, maybe from a high level, how all of the different projects and things that we're working on kind of coordinate.*

High level impact on the approach

All donors, stakeholders, potential partners and internal CO are reflecting on and forming the portfolio approach, creating multiple external decision making factors. For the donors the important aspect of the portfolio is that it is an addition to what is already being funded in the domain and how it contributes to a new change

Here it is explained that the expectations of the team do not always align with the experience in the process. This is expressed by the observed hurdles of the team. On the next page Figure 18 shows the steps undertaken by the team and the accompanied hurdles that were observed.

**Specifying the experiences**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Leave expertise behind also in research</li> <li>■ Overlap with old modes of working</li> <li>■ Identify the systemic forces instead of the problems</li> <li>■ Expect insights from details in differences and similarities</li> <li>■ Assigned role division</li> <li>■ Portfolio a route to learn</li> <li>■ The burden and blessing of top down management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Limiting transitional capacity</li> <li>■ Missing strong systemic implementation</li> <li>■ Detached from the ground level and the people</li> <li>■ Disagreement on organizational reach</li> <li>■ Building on piecemealing partners</li> <li>■ Improve learning network globally and in COS</li> <li>■ Respective review of the portfolio</li> <li>■ Language limits in complexity</li> </ul>
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**Quotes clarifying the experiences**

There is no resistance to change, there is only a distance because of a lack of tools. Tools enable change and visa versa. people don't trust the process, tools create trust

Critic that was given by the CO on the previous research on GEWE mainly explained the lack of community input and perspective

Learn from datathat already exists in small scale projects from the ground level in order to understand what the needs are

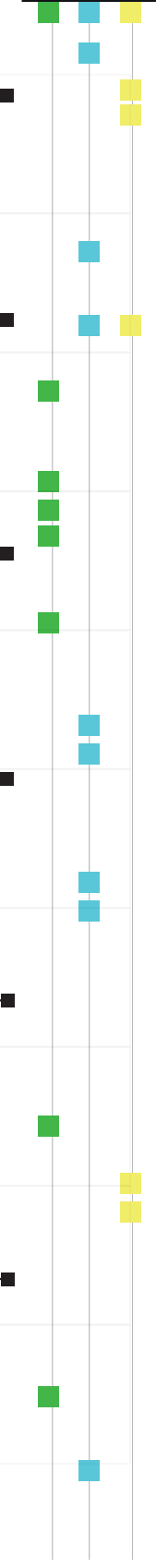
Discovering the interplay between top-down and bottom-up alignment in development

It is an internal process but calling the external parties to engage present and open the space to talk about the intent, validation proces

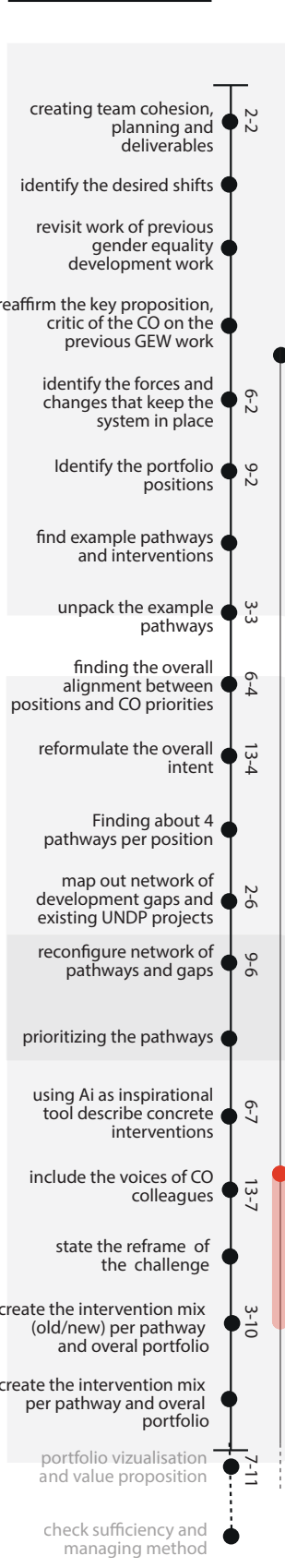
Changing from a transactional relationship to cocreational

What do we want to know from the stakeholders, who are they but simultaneously make room for what our key messages are/ objectives. In between this narrative the validation process comes to life

**Experiences**



**Portfolio activities**



**CO Ethiopia timeline**

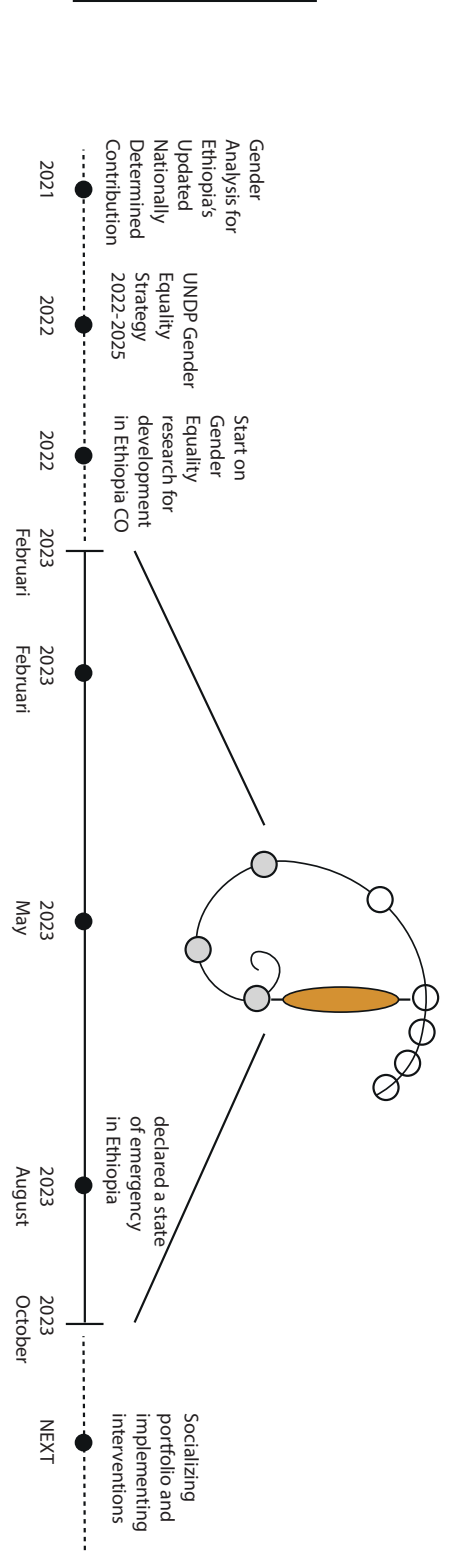


Figure 16: The image shows an overview of steps undertaken by the Ethiopia CO team, supplemented with the observed hurdles of the team members which can be found in appendix G. The image shows that the hurdles were detected during specific moments, but are not bound to these moments. The hurdles are divided under organizational level (structural implementation of the portfolio approach), team level (formulated opinion on the approach) and individual level (individual understanding) experience. These points are considered as possible intervention points for this research.



### 3.4 CONCLUDING DIFFICULTIES OF THE DESIGN PHASE IN CO ETHIOPIA

The image of the previous page shows an overview of steps undertaken by the Ethiopia CO team and has been supplemented with the observed hurdles of the team members which can be found in appendix G. Most of the difficulties expressed were able to be connected to a specific moment in the approach. The chapter further discusses the responsibilities and possibilities of igniting change through these points. With all insights gathered taken into account, 7 needs are further discussed, specifying a possible reaction to the hurdles. .

1. THE NEED FOR REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND INTERNALIZATION OF THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH PRINCIPLES
2. THE NEED TO LEARN AND ADAPT WITH LITTLE MEANS AND RESOURCES
3. THE NEED TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE PORTFOLIO CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE CONTEXT
4. THE NEED TO REFLECT PERSONAL INFLUENCE ON THE APPROACH
5. THE NEED TO LOWER THE THRESHOLD FOR OPENING UP MULTI STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION
6. THE NEED TO FIND A NEW LANGUAGE FOR THE COMPLEXITY AND SIMPLICITY OF PORTFOLIO APPROACH
7. THE NEED TO CAPTURE THE IDEA OF THE SYSTEMIC LENS

With what shifting factors does the need comply (described on page 31)?

Context	Result	Intervention logic	Team
Purpose	Solution	Governance	Approach to risk

1.

#### THE NEED FOR REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND INTERNALIZATION OF THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH PRINCIPLES

The team's expectations (page 44) reflect on the key principles of the portfolio approach: being part of the team that redefines the way of working, the pioneering group learning in a team context. But also expresses curiosity whether the approach will really work in their context. This raises questions about the approach's systemic promises, particularly regarding its applicability to gender equality and the Ethiopian context. There is a missing link between what is expected from change and transition and what is expected from the approach itself. Although the portfolio approach starts off as an experiment for most of the team members, the external factors, like CO priorities and stakeholder network, ultimately define the format of the portfolio. Consequently, the team's efforts are tailored to meet these specific needs.

Based on these observations it became clear that the external factors shaping the portfolio, influencing the team members' collaboration. It was difficult to contribute to the conversation when it was unclear what was being prioritized and to what the conversation should adhere to. There was no overview of the different players and the push and pull factors the team encountered along the way. What the team did experience were the different needs, expectations and limits of these external factors on top of the needs required and stated by the challenge itself and by themselves.

*We don't fully sort of internalise this idea of portfolio ourselves, even those people who are working with it already for some time. If we for example have those key qualities in place, then maybe we can be more relaxed about some other things. Some people from country offices, they said oh, but we want a better definition. We want more clarity. We want strategic innovation to give us clarity. We are too confused - interview 2*



The specific hurdles:

- Portfolio implementation depended on the CO
- Respective review of the portfolio
- Overlap with old modes of working

*Our initial plan was too ambitious because it involved all the required stakeholders, including government, private sector, traditional leaders, community leaders, donors, notable individuals and others. - team member CO Ethiopia*

*We want whatever 10 million for gender equality in Ethiopia, we better have a pretty good reason that this portfolio is going to do better than the existing things that donor is already funding, right. So the donor has a whole landscape of things that they're already supporting. - moderator CO Ethiopia*

*I think some colleagues also have a feeling that we are repeating things because when we worked on one of the shifts, some of the problem definitions were already made. - team member CO Ethiopia*

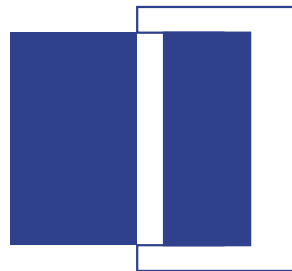
2.

**THE NEED TO LEARN AND ADAPT WITH LITTLE MEANS AND RESOURCES**

One of the interviewees expresses the longing and readiness for change within development work from individuals of the UNDP, but also pointing out that there are no sufficient tools for initiating such change in the first place, for instance the means to transmit portfolio knowledge. In short, there is a desire to think about implementing change with the little means and resources available (in terms of skills, time, and financial resources), in order to shed light on the portfolio principles and to build understanding progressively. The approach should be seen not as a method that solves the issues at hand, but will clarify the route to do so. Positioning the portfolio as a mechanism to reframe development project expectations and expand team capabilities.

The presence/absence of the correct tools and competences are factors for the team to have confidence in the portfolio approach within their specific context. Mostly uncertainties caused the team to be reserved and quiet during the early sessions. Over the period of time the team better understood that learning from existing projects gave the insights they needed and that they can be used as a tool to boost confidence and raise the valuable learning questions. In addition to tools that enhance confidence in the learning process, establishing a network of portfolio learning experts is essential to make the journey less isolating and to reduce the hesitation in seeking guidance.

*The time to take a step back and reflect on the bigger picture is too often considered a luxury, Organizations have entrenched culture of short term results; processes are deemed time waiting yet systems change need that space, but development agencies are funded through usually short cycles and mostly time-bounded projects. This is a critical challenge to systems thinking. - participant of the festival of the Messy Middle*



The specific hurdles:

- Limiting transitional capacity
- Limited systemic implementation
- Improve learning network globally and in the CO

*As, UNDP, there's a limited amount of capacity that you have. And so what you're really going to need to do is to identify what are those places in the system where you can have the greatest leverage, right? that will engage further downstream changes. - moderator CO Ethiopia*

*you cannot implement this system thinking without the systemic approach. - interview 3*

*There is need to hire people in order to be able to think in portfolios because now there is only one person who's responsible for a lot of projects. So we were like, OK, in order to actually get to the portfolio project, we need to hire project managers. It's much needed that people understand at headquarters that they need to hire more people. - interview 3*

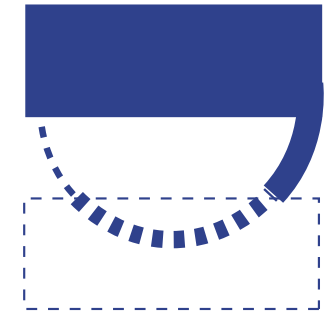
3.

**THE NEED TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE PORTFOLIO CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE CONTEXT**

The criticism on the team's portfolio mentioned the missing voices of the community and the articulation of their perspectives. The team discussed the UNDP reach within communities and related questions on how far they can engage within the community. Despite efforts, a distance remains between the team and the community level concerning the team about the high level influences. Although this high level perspective is needed in order to create the knowledge network and ecosystem. The team seeks solutions in stakeholder meetings or collaborative sessions, which due to external factors like safety or schedules do not always go as planned and mostly address the community through the organizational scopes of partners.

The portfolio approach expresses every desire to comply with the idea of a more bottom up approach. The team members also expressed frustration about their top down approach, even at the end of the design cycle. Although it is good to be critical about a top down approach, it also has its value as it enables the ecosystem network to be established and a strategic intent to be formed. Besides collaborative sessions and design with inclusivity in mind, there are other ways to bridge the gap between the team and the community by making the context of the challenge stick throughout the design process and make the team members feel part of that context instead of members analyzing it from afar.

*Alone you cannot achieve such a big impact only by contributing and doing it together you can really have this big systemic impact and this portfolio provides every actor who contributes with funding or with resources with ideas, it provides them with a chance to achieve a really big impact. - interview 2*



The specific hurdles:

- Disagreement on organizational reach
- Detached from the ground level and the people
- Macro vs. micro level
- The burden and blessing of top down management

*how an international organization like the UNDP could contribute to change within norms of a community that has been living with these norms for a very long time. - Team member CO Ethiopia*

*this is micro level engagement and I doubt UNDP is engaging at that level. Let's focus on the macro level and the major level structures like nationally - Team member CO Ethiopia*

*I want to know if there is a chance actually in the design process to engage the client, the community, the woman themselves or to validate if the interventions are really desirable from their side It looks like the design process looks very top down, like experts talking about what we're going to do for the people, so I'm a bit concerned. - Team member CO Ethiopia*

4.

**THE NEED TO REFLECT PERSONAL INFLUENCE ON THE APPROACH**

It's crucial to pinpoint essential characteristics that will more clearly articulate the portfolio approach, both within the organization and beyond. A vague framework can lead to confusion. But these ambiguities also offer a degree of freedom for the team members, allowing individuals to influence their own interpretations and ideas on the approach, fostering a sense of ownership. Eventually, resulting in better understanding and engagement. A general idea of the approach can be distilled from the many different perspectives from the CO's. In the sessions of the CO Ethiopia, the team members undergo the set up of the approach in order to learn, but are not yet fully integrated in making the approach their own.

The team showed major improvements over the time period of the sessions, becoming more and more involved in the process. Because of a clearer task division, but also because of a better understanding of the goal and outcome of each session. In this time more personal opinion was expressed which made the discussions flourish ending in considered decisions. This touch of personal influence gave the participants more energy and purpose. Igniting this throughout the process increases productivity and positive attitudes. Sometimes the division between knowledge holders stagnated the collaboration as if it was only allowed to express expertise, overshadowing space for personal opinions. Ensuring personal perspectives are valued from the beginning on can help maintain this momentum throughout the process.

*It's still hard to explain that a portfolio is a process. It's about learning that it is a learning process. And some people feel more comfortable with this sort of lack of clarity, because then they can maybe have a lot of their own ideas. And then they can fill in those kinds of gaps with their own ideas. And they feel more like owners. - interview 2*



The specific hurdles:

- Portfolio a route to learn
- assigned role division
- Expect insights from details in differences and similarities
- Leave expertise behind also in research
- Minimal online (and offline) group interaction

*we are not the subject matter specialists, actually we can contribute to this section because most of the country offices work on Finance, entrepreneurship and innovation. - team member CO Ethiopia*

*It's not like we interviewed experts, it's not like selecting somebody who is, well, an economist or a lawyer, it could be anyone, any commoner, any layperson. - team member CO Ethiopia*

*People were so amazed they talked for the first time about their topics there. Like, oh, you're also doing something on elections I didn't know. - interview 4*

*The learnings are not just about what has been implemented and accomplished, but it's also what are implementing partners finding hard to actually get going on the ground, right? - moderator CO Ethiopia*

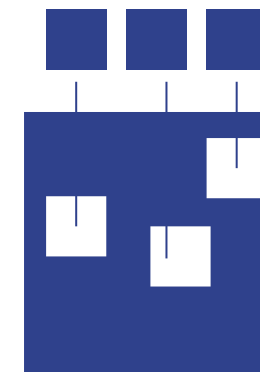
5.

**THE NEED TO LOWER THE THRESHOLD FOR OPENING UP MULTI STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION**

Organizations within the challenge's network often have their activities constrained to the immediate needs of the challenge and its beneficiaries and engage in isolated projects due to limited resources, leading to misalignment with potential partners that could address gaps in the portfolio. The portfolio approach aims to mitigate this by fostering stronger connections between potential collaborators. However, this enhancement depends on encouraging partners to adopt the portfolio approach themselves, which can slow progress. The team encounters challenges in figuring out how to broaden the appeal of the portfolio approach to stakeholders, align on common practices and leverage collective intelligence. The primary challenge facing the members is determining what they can and may ask from the stakeholders in the network and how to give proper advice when scopes need to be broadened or resources need to be shared.

The UNDP and the CO team is responsible for creating the ecosystem network for the challenge of concern, especially now that the search extends beyond the UNDP's current network. However external factors prohibit direct collaboration between the organization and even the size of the network limits the extension of these sessions. Desires are expressed for a platform where the network comes together, share resources and find overlap between scopes, but most importantly promote the possibilities of the portfolio approach as a means to connect. A platform as such also promotes the portfolio approach and the benefits for its partnering organizations. Building this network only from within the UNDP and its teams seems limiting.

*Alone you cannot achieve such a big impact only by contributing and doing it together you can really have this big systemic impact and this portfolio provides every actor who contributes with funding or with resources with ideas, it provides them with a chance to achieve a really big impact. - interview 2*



The specific hurdles:

- No tool for broad stakeholder collaboration
- Building on piecemealing partners
- What to expect from partners

*The partners tend to work in silos, and there is no real platform where they can coordinate activities. - team member CO Ethiopia*

*This is a critical gap in this country. Even UN agencies like UN women focus on a few areas. You know I used to work closely with them and they mainly focus on addressing violence against women and most often organizations do - Ethiopia CO team member*

*You know you've been working closely with partners X&Y. Could you help us get connected to them so that we can make sure that we can also work with them to do capacity building for justice sector institutions on gender, right? So it could be something more like or could we deliver this work alongside the work that you're doing in a complementary way? Do you think we can ask them to do significantly more work than they're already doing? - moderator CO Ethiopia*

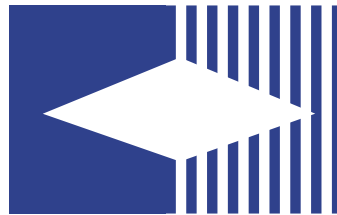
6.

**THE NEED TO FIND A NEW LANGUAGE FOR THE COMPLEXITY AND SIMPLICITY OF PORTFOLIO APPROACH**

As expressed earlier in the report (page 33), language has a great impact on the understanding of the portfolio approach and on change in general. Language, or at least, communication forms, can stagnate a new way of working as it reflects back on an old mode of talking about development. Through the meaning of words, the team often attempts to draw parallels between the new and traditional methods of working. But comparing makes it difficult to leave an old system behind. In an attempt to follow the holistic approach 'big and complex' words can make the conversation much too complex. The use of these words can also be a result of a language barrier as the team is not speaking in their native tongue. The meetings show that subtle differences in language can significantly impact the chosen strategies for change, which happens with the words perception and norms (page 57).

Defining what the subtle differences are between old vocabulary and new or intended vocabulary clarifies the intentions of the portfolio and systemic thinking, like discussing the meaning of problems and solutions. This subtle difference may imply a different targeted change and misaligns the team's idea of what is required. Similar to the discussion on perceptions and norms. The meaning of complex words used during the sessions clarify what the directions are and additionally amplify the possibilities of development, inspiring the team members.

*In the conference people talked about how they work with portfolios. Then people talked and they explained, but when it was time for questions and someone asked: OK, nice, but what is your portfolio? and the response got back to just listing projects they run. It's very easy to fall back to some very basic definitions which are not correct, because when you start just listing projects you are contradicting all the previous narrative of the portfolio you explained - interview2*



The specific hurdles:

- nuance between words for targeted change
- overlap with old modes of working
- Recurring big words that feel like empty phrases
- Language limits in complexity

*I wonder if it's social norms or if it's perceptions. And I realise those two things are tied together, but actually perception is a more specific thing than social norms. And I at least it sounds like a lot of it has to do with perceptions. - moderator CO Ethiopia*

*So what I would say is, if you if you're always kind of trying to translate what we're doing back into theory of change, what's going to happen is your language is still going to be theory of change - moderator of the CO Ethiopia*

*When women use those leadership skills to organise and to build coalitions, and to then, you know, kind of make their voice heard right, that is an increase in power. But the development of leadership skills that by itself, I don't think increases power. - moderator CO Ethiopia*

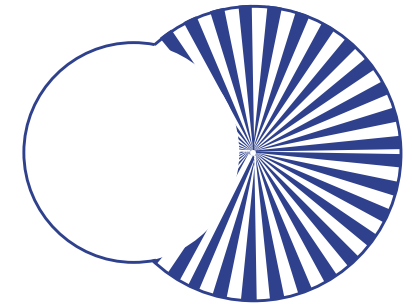
7.

**THE NEED TO CAPTURE THE IDEA OF THE SYSTEMIC LENS**

The systemic lens that has been applied is purposefully aligning the internal organization and development work with the external environment of the challenge. The systemic layers that have been added feel sometimes counterintuitive and confrontational for the team. As it discusses cause and effect in greater detail. Which makes the team consider all levels of the community of concern, within religion, generations, influencers, gender based. Going into the horizontal and vertical levels. The horizontal levels are better considered as possible partnering organizations and the vertical levels constrained to the reach of partnering organizations. While mapping the context of the challenge the reciprocal elements of its issues are considered though all these directions, following its effects through all layers. Within these elaborate stories the systemic forces come to life, when earlier they were defined in merely 'problems', almost sounding like urban myths and dominant development paradigms.

The systemic lens is an important element of success for the portfolio approach as it encourages the reframing process as explained earlier. The team went through a process of creating the holistic analysis in order to get to the point where discussions could occur on this topic. This was mostly noticeable after the in depth mapping of the community factors. Most issues were confronted from a regulatory point of view, but got emphasized once the elements of the community could compliment the story. Before this point the systemic forces were identified as problems, constraints and challenges. When reciprocity in the explanations became evident the systemic forces became better understandable by the team members. Starting with reciprocity from a bottom up view can change the attitude through the process.

*But our goal is not to identify problems and constraints and challenges. Our goal is to identify the systemic forces that are holding the system in place or that are moving it in a new direction. - moderator CO Ethiopia*



The specific hurdles:

- Identify the systemic forces instead of the problems
- differentiate between cause and effect
- exploring the cascading effect through speculation

*I would say these are probably not systemic challenges like these are actually very solvable challenges, but that doesn't mean they're easy to solve, but they are challenges. You could run interventions, for example, to address, so that's probably not so much an answer about what's keeping the system in place, right? - moderator CO Ethiopia*

*So I'm seeing things like lack of financial access and lack of I guess collateral and what would be helpful is as we're thinking about the systemic causes of something, maybe it's good to take that a level deeper and ask why is that the cause? - moderator CO Ethiopia*

*we see the cause and effect, but not in the linear way. We also see the relationship among, for example, the causes or the effects in a systematic way. - team member CO Ethiopia*

### 3.5 SUMMARY OF UNDERSTANDING THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH IN PRACTICE

The points made above have been improved over the time period of the observations. The team got more involved during the online sessions and asked critical questions implying a better sense of the intentions of the portfolio approach. However, the 8 months that were initially planned to be 8 weeks could be shortened if the team was already acquainted or familiar with a few of the portfolio ways of thinking in order to make it sticky and incorporate some of the attitudes important for being attentive from the beginning onwards. The following points are taken as concluding points for the intervention in the following chapter:

There was a limited overview of the different external and internal players and the push and pull factors the team encountered along the way.

Tools that enhance confidence in the learning process are essential to make the journey less isolating and to reduce the hesitation in seeking guidance.

Besides collaborative sessions and design with inclusivity in mind, there are other ways to bridge the gap between the team and the community by making the context of the challenge stick throughout the design process and make the team members feel part of that context instead of members experiencing the analyzing phase from afar (Figure 17).

Sometimes the division between knowledge holders stagnated the collaboration as if it was only allowed to express expertise, overshadowing space for personal opinions. Ensuring personal perspectives are valued from the beginning on can help maintain this momentum throughout the process.

Desires are expressed for a platform where the ecosystem network comes together, share resources and find overlap between scopes, but most importantly promote the possibilities of the portfolio approach as a means to connect. A platform as such also promotes the portfolio approach and the benefits for its partnering organizations.

Subtle differences in the meaning of words can significantly impact the chosen strategies for change, for example with perceptions and norms being used interchangeably (Figure 18).

Most issues were confronted from a regulatory point of view, but got emphasized once the elements of the community could compliment the story. Before this point the systemic forces were identified as problems, constraints and challenges. When reciprocity in the explanations became evident the systemic forces became better understandable by the team members. Starting with reciprocity from a bottom up view can change the attitude throughout the process.

Figure 17: Observed difficulties for bridging the portfolio context gap

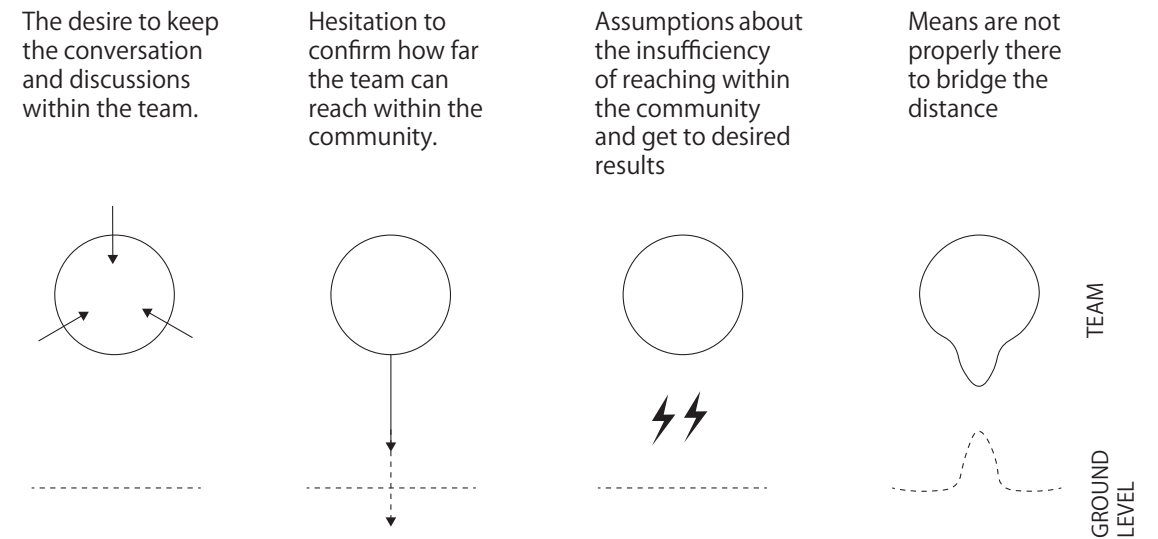
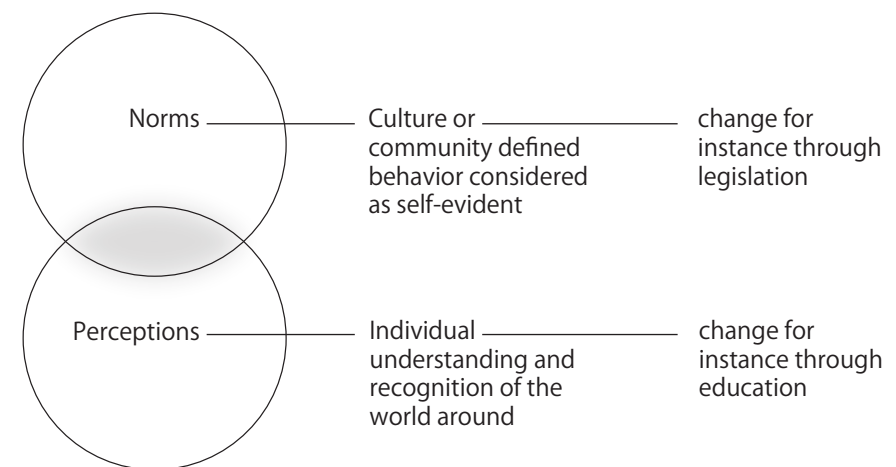


Figure 18: Words implicate the strategy for change (Van Dale, z.d.)



## 4. PROJECT INTERVENTION - THE OBJECT CATALOG

In this chapter the design direction is introduced: The object as a physical boundary object that bridges between team and challenge. The unusual objects are found through online and offline experiments and workshop, to spark new information streams and offer specific insights on the subject matter. The chapter ends with a description of the workshop.

*In my field, I see these people that come into it with big, idealist visions of becoming the leader that will create a better world. They enjoy the goal, but not the process. But the reality of it is the true work of improving things is in the little achievements that's what you need to enjoy.*  
(Celine)

*What do you mean, exactly?* (Jesse)

*I was working for this organization that helped villages in Mexico. And their concern was how to get the pencils sent to the kids in those little country schools. It was not about big, revolutionary ideas. It was about pencils.*  
(Celine)

(Linklater, 2004)

- Intervention direction - boundary objects
- Design direction validation
- Alternatives of object tools and inspirations
- The chicken and the objects - an object's perspective on gender equality in Ethiopia
- The boundary objects between team and environment-the experiment
- The first selection of objects - online tests

## 4.1 INTERVENTION DIRECTION - BOUNDARY OBJECTS

In this section the theory behind the design direction is described, the boundary object. Based on this, different forms in which the boundary object can be used are described, but most focus is laid on the physical boundary objects that had proven to be concrete through its tangibility and has the ability to go into detail due to its commonness and situatedness.

### The theory behind the objects

The symmetry of ignorance occurs in situations where two (or more) parties meet each other in collaboration. The two parties have individual perspectives created by cultural difference, use different norms, symbols and representations. Asymmetry of knowledge is another way of phrasing this notion. To understand the symmetry of ignorance it is important to design and introduce spaces and places that serve as a boundary. It enables a meeting point for different cultures as Fischer (2000) describes. The research states that the object can serve as an externalization that captures distinct domains of human knowledge and they have the potential to lead to an increase in socially shared cognition and practice. In this case it can serve to support the interaction and collaboration between different communities/stakeholders, the interaction between user and environment or user and designer (Fischer, 2001). See Figure 19.

More attention is given to boundary work as it aligns with the increasing focus on an agency perspective within the realm of sustainability transitions (Franco-Torres et al., 2020), emphasizing the role of the individuals, organizations and social groups as active agents for driving change. In contrast with a systemic change perspective that examines transition as a complex, interconnected process that shapes human behavior and decision making (Franco-Torres et al., 2020).

Boundary objects can appear in several forms as bodies, objects, vocabulary, concepts or even approaches.

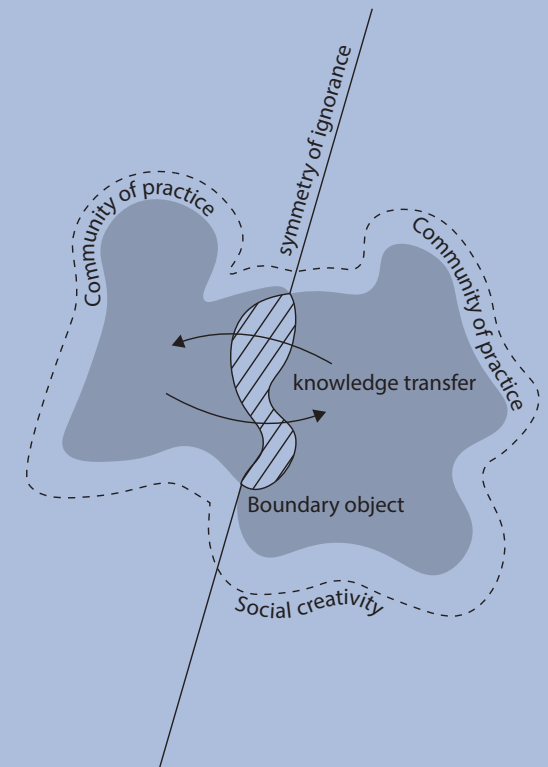


Figure 19: The boundary object brings the two community of practices together and enables them to transfer knowledge.

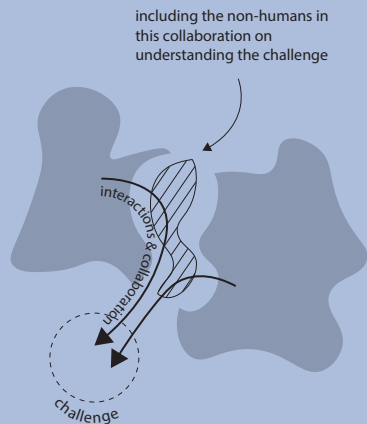


Figure 20: How does the boundary object influence the perspective on the challenge?

### Actor Network Theory

Actor Network Theory (ANT) offers an intriguing perspective for understanding the contemporary manifestation of complex collaboration. Within this network, Latour endeavors to uncover how social change emerges through the interactions between individuals and technologies (Waelbers & Dorstewitz, 2013). It acknowledges the dynamic and transformative nature of complexity, which shapes the construction of reality and contemporary discourses. Latour is considered a material-oriented thinker and strives to conquer the division between the material and the social and dismiss the notion of social phenomena as unconditionally human (Boelen, 2020), by giving agency to the objects (Figure 20).

Latour's network rejects the division between the human and technological realms and transcends the subject-object dichotomy, asserting that both humans and technology act as "actants" and play similar roles within the network, mutually influencing one another and sustaining a state of constant change (Waelbers & Dorstewitz, 2013).

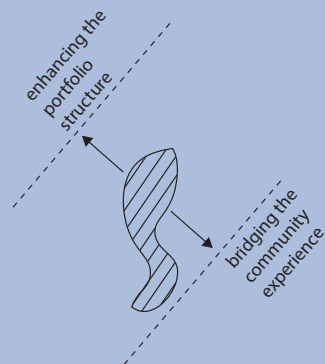


Figure 21: The boundary object bridges between the portfolio approach and the portfolio context

### Ma philosophy and boundary objects

Latour questions the spaces in between a network, he calls these the empty spaces of a network 'plasma' (Latour, 2019). He acquires them agency as well, the spaces in a network that have not yet been fully manifested in the network itself. Akama quotes Latour: 'what is in between the meshes of such a circuitry? ... Is not a net made up, first and foremost, of empty spaces?' (Akama, 2015). ANT gives us the perspective on the interaction between human and non-human. The philosophy of Ma, mentioned earlier in the report (page 33) gives us the opportunity to situate ourselves in the dynamic relationships between the two and provides the space and the emptiness that is required to explore how this relationship and activity of 'becoming with' transforms. Akama compliments this thought and argues that to pursue Ma tacit and immersive encounters of becoming should be sought (Akama, 2015).

Therefore the objects is considered as a non-human stakeholder in the portfolio and the bridge (read: interaction) between the challenge and the users. So both enhancing the portfolio perspective and the community perspective (Figure 21).

## 4.2 ALTERNATIVES OF OBJECT TOOLS AND INSPIRATIONS

Research has confirmed the widespread interest in tangible artifacts contributing to social structures. Vink et al. (2021) confirms that artifacts are shaped or mutually constitute intangible and tangible aspects of social structures, such as rules, norms and beliefs (Figure 22). The other tangible aspects that are also captured in the artifacts, as we see in this research, are symbolism (written and visual language), activities (habits) and relations (interactions). Objects in this research are physical enactment of intangible social structures. The following tools describe how objects can be employed:

### Beyond imposed boundaries:

Physically re-crafting a representative artifact to explore its relationships between that artifact and related social structures (Vink & Koskela-Huotari, 2021), recreating its boundary. 'Things' are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably, emphasizing the mutual constitution of entities according to Bared (Three Minute Theory, 2014). Questioning the boundaries imposed between them.

### Context related boundary objects:

What kind of objects are present in and around the workspace or at home that embody a present network, and may even be an object playing a part of the network you are analyzing and designing for? Realizing you are interacting and being part of the network through your environment.

### Object embodiment:

Acknowledging the powers of the objects in imposing and modifying social structures, gives them agency. By acknowledging this agency and exploring how objects' needs are perceived and prioritized within the system from a human perspective, we can gain a deeper understanding of how objects are encountered and the ways in which their roles impact reality.

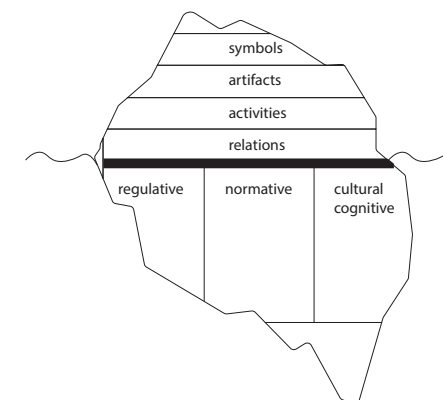


Figure 22: The iceberg model based on the image of Vink (2021), explaining the tangible and intangible social structures.

*Interview 1 explains that what she has learned from external parties when it comes to learning the principles of the portfolio approach is easiest and most engaging when working with 3D visual thinking. In the CO Egypt she worked with a life size gallery of the interventions of the portfolio on sustainable tourism. In the CO Tanzania a physical object, a mobile phone, was used to express the values of the portfolio.*

The recognizability of objects easily opened doors to abstracting structures and narratives that the research was striving to achieve. The object has the ability to embody the portfolio subjects, as the object manifests the challenge faced by the portfolio. The following section will prove this statement and discovers whether context related objects can be found.

Experience the challenge	Make research visible	Sticky and recognizable insights
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### 4.3 THE CHICKEN AND THE OBJECTS - AN OBJECT'S PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER EQUALITY IN ETHIOPIA

During the sessions of the CO Ethiopia objects popped up in discussions between the team members. Some of these objects are listed in this part of the chapter in order to start the exploration on how objects are able to represent parts of the portfolio and additionally the reason for mentioning them in the discussion. An interpretation of a map in which the objects visualize the connection between portfolio pillar and CO priorities shows a possibility of how the objects can function as representatives and symptoms of a system. The goal is to iterate on a way of using the insights of this experiment for further development within the CO teams.

Non-timber forest products (NTFP's), like spices (Ethiopian cardamom and Long paper) and gums are categorized as cash crops. Women engagement in these businesses can economically empower them and acknowledge women as key players in biodiversity conservation. The Gender Analysis for Ethiopia's updated NDC explain the extraction of tinder and non-tinder related products by men to be for commercial purposes and by women to be for fuel, fencing, food for the family, fodder for livestock and raw materials to produce natural medicines, all of which help to increase family income (UNDP & EFC Ethiopia, 2021).

Medicinal plants are an important resource for local farmers and the local community. Most of the living areas of these groups don't have access to modern medicine, which makes the knowledge of the local women on plant based medicine and biodiversity vital for these communities. The product explains the role of women in the community welfare and conservers of natural based knowledge.

Cookstove is a product in the household mainly used by the women of the family when cooking meals. It relates to their timber collecting activities. The timber is used for the stove spreading harmful smoke into the space of homes. Improving these energy resources may carry implications on the time consuming activity of collecting timber, safety and security, as these sources are safer. Women travel long distances from their home state to collect fire, exposing them to sexual and gender based violence. It also ensures women accessibility to affordable and clean energy.

(source: observed session of April 6)

Court for filing charges against GBV

(source: observed session of April 13)

Market places for Dagu communication

(source: observed session of Februari 6)

Chicken

because the criminal code of Ethiopia does not recognize all acts of violence against women. These incidents form gaps in the national legal framework that ought to protect these women for GBV. It calls for revisiting the criminal code or sections of it. In the quest for interventions this would urge the team to look into law enforcement agencies, capacity and services, for example safe houses and law enforcement bodies, like the police and prosecutors. However this requires education for these bodies since there are no women and child friendly courts that can handle these sensitive cases. Because of the cases that are not properly reported and dealt with by these bodies, the status quo will be continued.

in north-eastern Ethiopia is a prime location for the traditional communication system that in several ways resembles modern news media. Here the Afar communities live, where electricity is a rare commodity. Dagu communication works within a set of regulations and expectations, while the rules are officially unwritten. The 'law of dagu' means that whenever you meet someone on the street or market place, you are ought to ask for a news exchange session (Skjerdal & Menbere, 2008). The activity of Dagu can be associated with exaggeration that distort the information slightly, depending both on the news and the person passing it on; it is associated with trust, but it is checked according to an Afar proverb: 'news is heard thrice'; It is associated with the image of the clan and gender equality, verifying the information, especially done by elderly men; it is associated with religion as a way to stress earnestness (Skjerdal & Menbere, 2008). All the associations explain principles and needs of a community. In this particular case it also addresses the independence of the community from electricity and digitization. In some cases, it can function as an inspiration for disaster information spreading among the female populations in Ethiopia.

in the NDC document explains some mitigation efforts in changing environments in terms of gender equality. One of the interventions is in the meat industry as the country changes its diet from cattle to poultry, from high emitting to low emitting livestock (UNDP & EFC Ethiopia, 2021). The low emitting live stocks are mainly dominated by women and this shift will most likely increase their income and benefits. However the position of the women in the industry is under pressure. The shift might catch the attention of men, because they tend to control the high value products with a high income potential (UNDP & EFC Ethiopia, 2021).



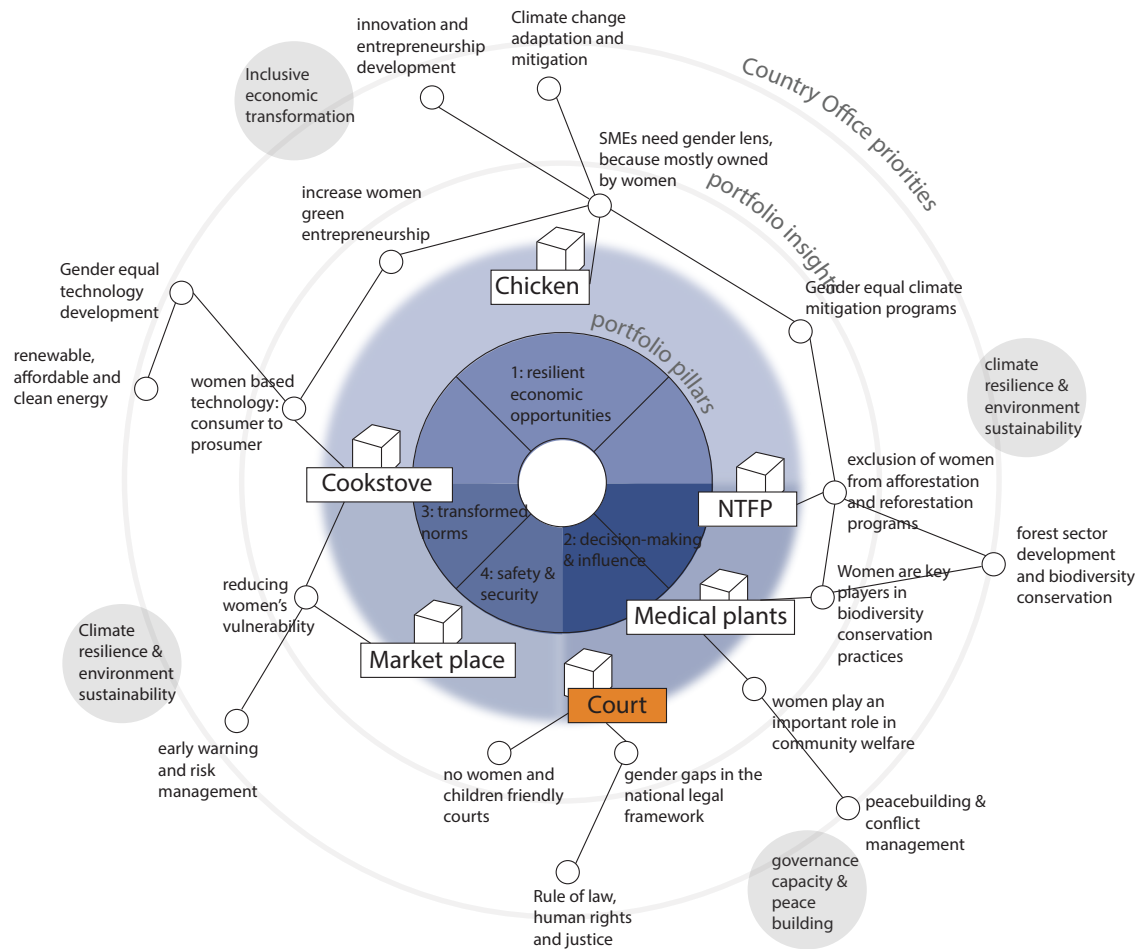


Figure 23: The object map for the portfolio on gender equality (CO Ethiopia) showing how the objects relate to the portfolio, each other and the CO priorities

In Figure 23 the objects of CO Ethiopia are connected to the portfolio position on gender equality. The objects become the bridge between the position and the information it captures. It positions the knowledge of the teams in its context and thereby validates the argument of the team member. The objects in the meeting came up while finding the alignment with the Country Office priorities, facilitating the pathway designs and igniting inspiration for intervention material. The image shows how the object eventually can be connected to the Country Office priorities (from for instance the NDC and CPD). The objects are elevated as a means to connect these points. Not through abstraction of meeting conversations, but by making the context and grass root interaction concrete, completing the story and situatedness of the portfolio positions.

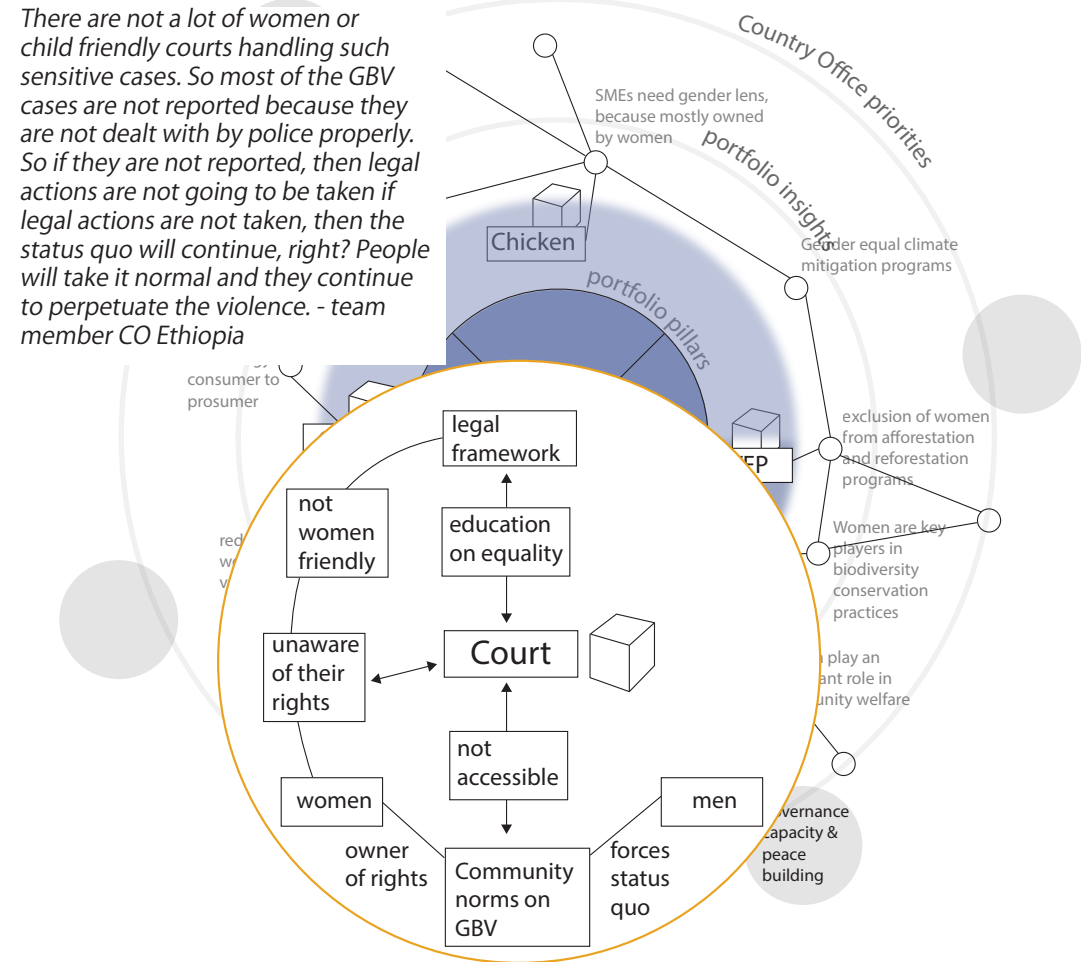


Figure 24: Zooming in on the reciprocity of the court as an object, showing how the object tells the story vertically and horizontally

Figure 24 shows how the objects express the reciprocity that is sought for, connecting the high level commitment for change and the community level commitment. In the example above it shows how both community norms and the national legal framework maintain the status quo on Gender Based Violence in Ethiopia (GBV). The reciprocity is one of the mentioned improvements that exemplified the need for systemic thinking in the team. The object, the court in this case, illustrates this narrative and sparks a sense of recognition enabling the team members to easily join in conversation/discussion.

This way of mapping the objects will be used in further tests. However it is important to understand that the objects still manifest in the construct of the portfolio, while the goal is to use them as a means to bridge the portfolio insights and knowledge with the specific manifestation of the challenge in context. This will be explored in the next sections.

## 4.4 THE BOUNDARY OBJECTS - THE FIRST EXPERIMENT

The previous section showed the objects of the meetings of the CO Ethiopia and how they reflected parts of the portfolio subject and the overlap with the CO priorities. This section will analyze the tests that were set up in order to find the objects through conversation and their insights on the portfolio.

### The test

The test was an online interactive interview in which objects would be found and unfolded in their specific relation with the portfolio subjects. The goal of the test was to find what the object's characteristics could be and establish their possible function in portfolio implementation. Additionally, understanding the method to find the objects.

### The test set-up

The sessions took place online and notes were made on Miro on which the participants could read the questions that were going to be asked. Participants were contacted by Simone Uriartt who invited the former SIU. An interesting collection of UNDP employees were invited (Table 25). The participants will be kept anonymous in this report. Because of busy schedules each experiment would take up about 1 hour. In addition to the tests with UNDP employees, students were asked to do a similar test in relation to their study projects. Different forms of experiments were tried: plain interviews, interactive conversations on the Miro board, offline conversations and embodied discussions

### Test Preparations:

The preparations for the test consisted of researching the portfolio/project topics that were going to be discussed in the tests. Possible example objects would be found prior to the test in case the participant would get stuck.

From the participant side, there was possible reading material that was sent before the test. The reading material was optional for the test and would provide the participant with background information.

Table 25: The test participant overview

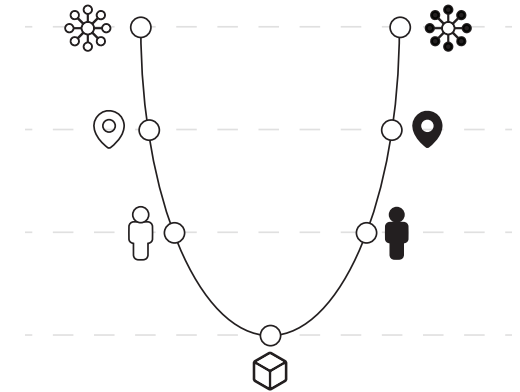
participant	function	duration	object
P1	CO	60 min	sheet blanket
P2	CO	60 min	ID card
P3	AccLab	60 min	blockchain
P4	student	60 min	HDPE bottle
P5	student	60 min	door key

Finding the objects through conversation and the interactive workshop in Miro, the conversation follows the route shown in Figure 26. From a portfolio level, about the general deliverables as the portfolio pillars and the associated stakeholders. This is kept general on purpose due to the time limits of the test and because an elaborate detailed portfolio explanation is not necessary. It is the goal to go into detail. Taking a step closer to the object's situatedness: from portfolio level, to stakeholders, to locations, to specific objects. From there, after the object's narrative is unfolded, the conversation takes the participant back to the portfolio level to describe what the object's insights were for the portfolio work.

The following steps were freely followed for the experiment to be consistent:

1. Participants explain about the portfolio/project they work on and choose one portfolio/project to work with in the test
2. Participants clearly describe the stakeholders that were involved in the project/portfolio and if needed find locations where these stakeholders interact with the issues of the challenge of the portfolio.
3. Participants find an object through discussion with the moderator
4. Participants unfold the object by explaining how and why this object represents a part of the portfolio/project through the different categories
5. The participants zoom back out to portfolio level and explain what the object has learned them
6. The participants reflect on the experiment by explaining how it has changed their perception and understanding of the portfolio approach/their work

Figure 26: The steps leading to the object and back to the portfolio

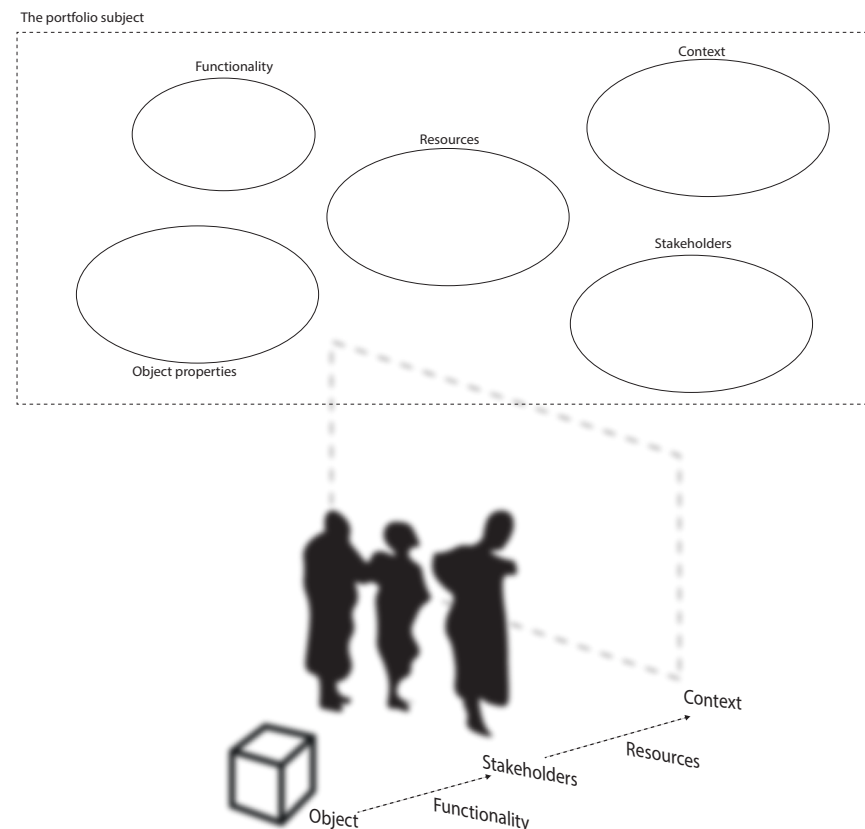


## 4.5 THE FIRST SELECTION OF OBJECTS - ONLINE TESTS

In this section the objects found during the first and online tests are described. The objects will be explained by their stories in relation to the portfolio subject, their insights, thus the question they might answer. Shedding light on the possible insights that can be gained by thinking through objects. As demonstrated later in this part, the social significance of the objects are not only validated in interpretation (or symbolism), but also in how it is being 'handled' or in how they are mobilized in practice.

In the following sections first is describes how the objects are analyzed. Through conversation an object narrative unfolds. This means that why, who and how the objects are related to the portfolio comes to light. The objects, explained through the user's interaction with it and simultaneously with the issue/challenge, explains its functionality. The users, explained through the context, sheds light on the object's resources it provides in that context. In this way the object gets unfolded through different layers and bridges between its being in its surroundings. Figure 27 visualizes this format.

Figure 27: An empty format of how the object can be visualized in context with the stakeholder accompanied with the functionality and the resources.



## OBJECT THAT EMPHASIZES THE STATUS QUO

How do the functions of objects keep a system in place? The object leading to this category was found in an interview between a researcher at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology and a UNDP researcher, who is writing the annual report on portfolio approaches within UNDP country office teams.

This object explains how objects are able to keep a system in place. Naturally it is not the object who has autonomy over this decision, but holds the attributes that empowers it to force the decision upon reality. It is not the object that holds sovereignty, but the person that holds it.

In the time that it took to write this report, the current events have majorly changed the context of the country. The devastating events are not taken into account yet. While the tomatoes have lost their meaning as an object that represents the forces of the system, it may still represent a meaning in history deformed over time. This report's incentive is to phrase the voice of time and space into the manifestations of contemporary meaning through physical objects, through more than human expressions. Resulting in the decision of keeping this object and its narrative in the report.

## CROWNLESS TOMATO IN GAZA ABOUT ECONOMIC GROWTH

The program was working on a different take on economic growth in Palestine where there is a high value based economy. There is a tendency of giving products the label they are entitled to, as for the production of Palestinian based goods. In Gaza these efforts are translated differently, taking into account the very limited and arbitrary import and export possibilities of Gaza, depriving this region from the possibility to thrive on long term jobs in businesses that can actually grow, expand and be innovative.

An object that nullifies the efforts is the tomato. This product is not allowed to be exported with the green crown still on it. Without the crown the product is vulnerable to rot and to fungus, because removing them creates a little wound, making them more perishable. Ultimately removing the possibility of fertile exports and the possibility of developing a rich business environment.

*When you're in a 70 years protracted crisis, that's really not going to make the difference, right? Yes, we're keeping people alive but where are they going to thrive? They're going to thrive in long term jobs in thriving businesses that can actually grow when they can expand and come up with new products and innovation*

## OBJECTS THAT HAVE CHANGED FUNCTION

What are the grass root reactions to certain issues related to the portfolio subject? In the cases of the objects found during the experiment there was a clear connection between the social structures and the objects function and meaning for the users. In both cases objects were found with a changing functionality.

### BED SHEET IN PANAMA CITY FROM WASTE MANAGEMENT TO SOCIAL COHESION

In the heart of Panama city, the waste problem affected various stakeholders. Many institutions were unaware of the issue, while the waste collection authority knew but had difficulties to address it. In the neighborhood of Santa Ana (Panama city), an unusual yet practical solution emerged to deal with the persistent waste problem. The streets were often littered with trash, causing inconvenience and blocking the road. It became so severe that the waste collection truck struggled to navigate through the streets. To address the issue, garbage collectors used a large bed sheet to collect the waste. With shovels, they scooped it up and piled it onto the sheet to transfer it into the truck (Figure 28).

The use of the sheet as a tool for waste management demonstrated that waste disposal was not a matter of apathy or displaced feelings of responsibility but rather a matter of immediate needs and concerns. Sometimes, more pressing issues overshadow the importance of waste management. This unique solution not only addressed the practical waste problem but also revealed the complex realities of everyday life in the neighborhood.

Figure 28: 3 garbage collectors carrying garbage in a bedsheet in Panama (image source: P1)



*The problem is that each institution works on its own. I think there is a lot of egos and resistance to work together and that obviously limits the capacity to respond systemically to the problem. And the blanket symbolizes that we're all under the same blanket or we have a saying that you have to kind of cover yourself to the extent that your blanket allows you to cover yourself, so that you don't do more than what you can. Maybe in Panama it is also related to your budget: don't spend more money on things you can't use. Maybe it also has to do with the consumption because in Panama, there is a big issue of consumption and that generates a lot of waste. - P1*

### YELLOW HDPE BOTTLE IN ZANZIBAR ABOUT WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING STREAMS

In Zanzibar, a plastic recycling project was underway, where glass had already established a basic logistics system and agreements with hotels for collection. On the other hand, plastic had no recycling program in place. The students initially assessed the quality of different plastics and identified HDPE as a suitable candidate due to its robust nature.

However, when they conducted their initial tests and presented their findings, local women expressed their disapproval. They used these sturdy bottles, initially bought for laundry detergent or cooking oil, for water storage, soft drinks, or corn storage, and preferred not to see them shredded. The bottles held a different meaning for the women than they did for the project (Figure 30).

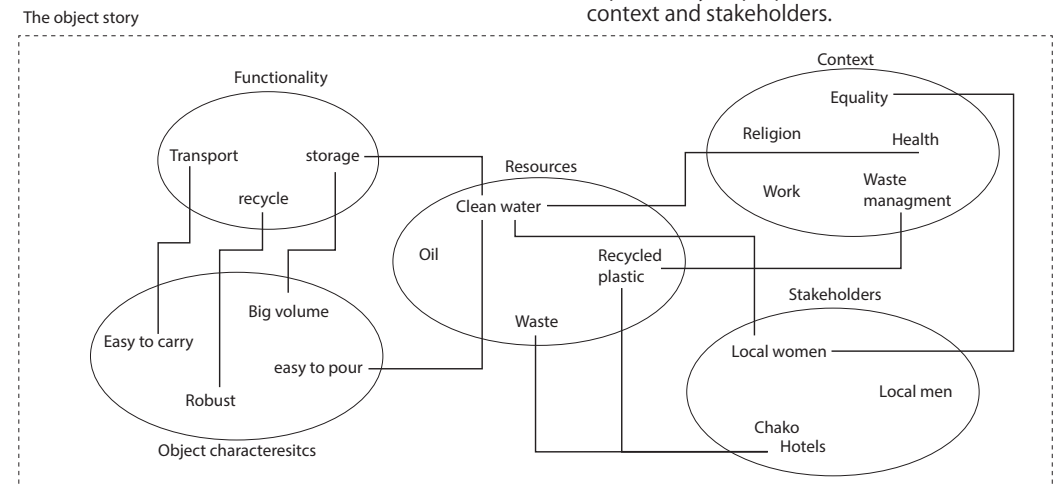
This highlighted the significance of preserving essential resources like water (Figure 29), especially when they are not always readily available, and collecting them can be time-consuming, certainly for the women of the community who are responsible for the water supplies for their families. The social structure played a role in this issue, and the bottle became a symbol of it.

Figure 30: Showing the HDPE bottle (object) with the women collecting water (stakeholders) in Zanzibar (context)



*I could never have imagined this if I had not been involved in the project. But that makes me think, what other things don't I know yet? - P4*

Figure 29: A visualization of the object story explained by its properties, resources, functionality, context and stakeholders.



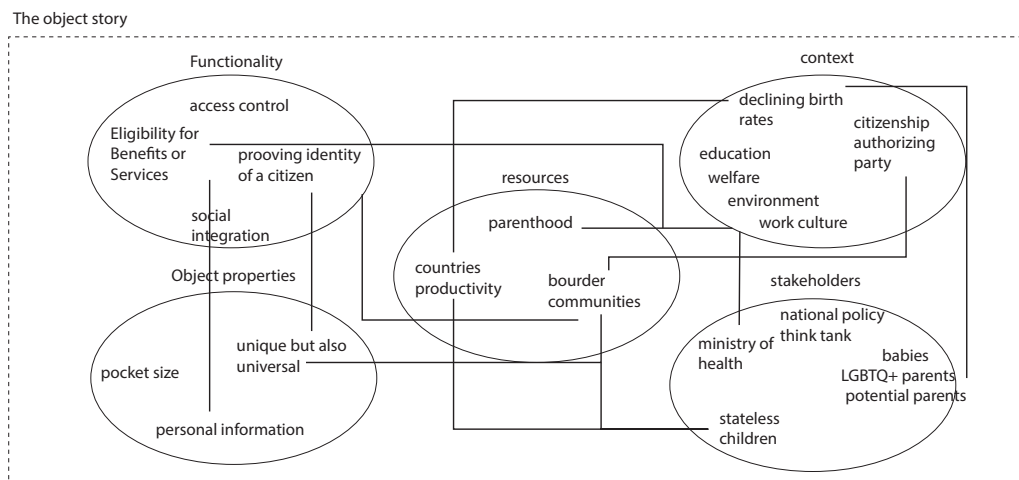
## OBJECTS DESCRIBING SYMBOLISM

What are the values of the community/region on certain subjects related to the portfolio subject? The objects that have functioned as an analogy or as a physical equivalent for the values that were searched for. The use of language, communication, and social practices shape and influence how we understand social systems producing knowledge and meaning.

*I wanted to know more about this object. This is a very trivial object to me. I wanted to know who has authority to give these children ID cards like the number or anything. I think about how that would work in more detail. And who to talk to understand more about the process. And who's in the decision making seat for them.*

*In an abstract way, it also makes me think of how trivial and taken for granted these objects are to some people, myself included, but like how sought after it is to people who are left behind, like stateless people. So how one thing can just hold the power to like having access. - P2*

Figure 31: A visualization of the object story explained by its properties, resources, functionality, context and stakeholders.



## THE THAI ID CARD ABOUT BIRTH RATE DECLINES IN THAILAND

The Thai ID card serves as a symbol in a portfolio examining the country's declining birth rates and the concept of citizenship. It represents more than a legal identity; it symbolizes the means to obtain rights and privileges. These rights can be acquired through birth or successful integration, which requires adherence to the nation's norms.

The portfolio explores the importance of securing these rights before starting a family, as they contribute to stability needed for a healthy family. However, the factors, tied to the environment, education, public healthcare, work culture, and public social welfare, are subject to change and not always a focus of national policy (Figure 31). In the meantime the portfolio's research has shifted focus to stateless children living on Thailand's borders, seen as a speculative solution to counter declining country productivity. The country's borders stand for geographical limits, but in this case explain the demarcation of citizenship. This shift also impacts the object itself, the ID card, prompting it to challenge and reshape the nation's understanding of (birth) rights and citizenship.

## OBJECT EXPLAINING A TIPPING MOMENT

How do sustainable interventions ignite a tipping point? The chicken is a symbol for a pivoting moment in the gender equality balance. It closely relates to the intentions of climate mitigation projects in the country and the efforts are almost contrarian. The meaning the object presents at this moment and the meaning it might present in a potential future are a relevant piece of information to understand how portfolio subjects and their intention influence one and other.

## THE CHICKEN IN ETHIOPIA ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The story about the chicken can be found on page 63 (Figure 32).



Figure 32: Showing the chicken (object) in relation to the Ethiopian women (stakeholders) depending on the income from the chicken in the Ethiopian rural area (context).

## 4.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF THE ONLINE TESTS AND OBJECTS

The online tests confirm that the participants experienced an added value in approaching their work through tangible objects. The process of finding the objects themselves naturally stimulates the conversation to unfold the experiences and interactions which are relevant for the challenge at hand. The unusual object functions as a bridge to externalize the hidden narrative of parts of the portfolio work. The accessibility and universality of the objects made the test and its outcome feasible and doable within an hour. In that time the portfolio subject was discussed to a certain extent and an object was found. The insights that the participants gained are described on the next page.

Concluding from the objects categories, the following conversation characteristics are set out to be the indicators of an object exploring the possibilities within the portfolio realm.

Objects describing symbolism  
Objects that have changed function  
Object explaining a tipping moment  
Object that emphasizes the status quo

It is plausible that there are many more ways to interpret an object in a certain context apart from the ones mentioned above. But from this research these are the ones validated.

### **Relatability**

The object evokes a sense of relatability with the context of the object or accentuates the distance between the test participant and the interactions with the object.

### **Regulations**

The object explains rules within a certain context (courts Ethiopia)

### **time / speculation**

The object represents a moment in time, possibly referring to history, current times or speculating about possible future events. (the chicken)

### **Situatedness**

The object is set in a context specific for the object and explains how the context reacts to its interaction with an issue. (the HDPE bottle)

### **Interaction**

The object explains the interaction between the users and the challenge or the reaction to the challenge by the users of the object. (the sheet blanket)

### **Symbolic**

The object symbolizes norms, values or principles relatable to the challenge. (the ID card)

### **Functional**

The functionality of the objects is considered as a bridge between the portfolio and the interaction with its issue. (the blanket)

### **Social structures in cultures**

The object is specifically focusing on the social structures that it may interfere in (the marketplace for dagu communication)

### **Connection with the other**

The test highlighted how certain objects can stress the fact of opposite perspectives and how this influences the approach on the challenge. By letting the object express the difference it tells the story of the other.

*We're, we're big believers that, you know, people that are closest to the problem are already responding to the problem with solutions that are or are not sustainable. P1*

### **Find the objects through conversation**

Through finding the objects the participants of the test are able to tell the story, they possibly already know, but in a different way. Not by introducing the objects in conversation to stress their point, but by finding new objects that can show them new points and a new perspective.

### **Locations of interaction**

This particular perspective focuses on the tangible interactions possibly taking place at specific locations, making the interaction concrete and experienceable.

### **Overlap with other challenges**

With the narrative of the yellow HDPE bottle an easy bridge could be made between the solution space of waste management on Zanzibar and the issue of clean water supply in the area, for which the bottle was used. Thereby a pressing matter of gender role division became a topic and emerged through the connecting stories.

*so it is about two things: who to talk to, like I want to understand the dynamics or decision making behind it but it also makes you reflect differently in terms of how people assign values and significance to an object depending on who you are.*

### **New stakeholders**

The Thai ID card was an eye opener for the participant of this test. It shed new light on possible partnerships and stakeholder inclusion as it told the story of accessing citizenship and the taken for granted status of an ID card. The card highlighted that these processes of becoming citizens are important for the research on country productivity. And symbolizes the factors of accessing this status and who might be involved in this trajectory.

*It makes you empathize with someone who has a different relationship to the objects. We [the CO team] were juggling between that. But also trying to appeal directly to the public. So we haven't really spent time gaining empathy. We're already trying to channel public understanding of the issue as well. - P2*

## Limitations of the (online) tests

The participants expressed that it was difficult for them to know whether they were doing the test correctly when they were not yet aware of the intent of the test and level of freedom to answer the questions.

*It is just such a broad topic, it applies to everybody, but lets take parents - P2*

Describing the location was a difficult yet effective step. Some subjects are way too broad or not really location specific. For instance, waste management is more visual than birth rate declines. Although the step called up confusion it guided the participants to more detailed explanations.

*when you say location, you really mean a location, like a place? - P2*

The conversation was taken from the universal level of the portfolio to a detailed level of specific situations through the objects. Most interventions are meant for a broad target group and it was difficult to make room for individual experiences.

*Because I think when we talk about solid waste management and circular economy, it can be relevant for almost anywhere in a different lens. - P1*

*This is something I struggled with, because the topic is nation wide which means it applies to everybody (I think it does not underpin the portfolio), It is meant to be a universal thing, so you can not really test it out with a place - P2*

*I left the team with this dilemma, you can not look at it that specific because you can not be sure it will apply to everyone, but that are the kinds of solutions you are looking for - P2*

The test was only for experimental means, which provided the participant with enough freedom and creativity to step away from the formality and feasibility of a real intervention. Eventually leading them to feasibility insights and directions.

*if this is just an experiment, we can look at how you can give citizenship to stateless children near the border, from a national point of view these are children that can be included for national productivity, how do you enable them to participate in national community? - P2*

In the online test concerning the digital workstream in Pacific Asia, there was no specific object found. The subject was not suitable for the current test. Metaphors and already existing intervention were found, but eventually did not lead to the intended results as these mostly confirmed what was already known.

*A bridge represents digital division among grassroots stakeholders that the government aims to overcome, which makes this an UNDP focus too - P3*

## 4.7 THE LIVE WORKSHOP - SARAJEVO

Until this point of the report almost all tests and workshops have taken place online and were executed through Miro with only one person of the portfolio team. The first offline version of the workshop was tested with the UNDP CO team in Sarajevo (Figure 33) on the topic of Green Transition in the Country (of which the background can be found in appendix K).

### The context of the workshop

The team in Sarajevo is part of the Country Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The country has endeavored on projects on circular economy and green transition for a long time already, but due to short sighted projects and misalignments little change has come from the years of experience (portfolio outline). The UNDP portfolio approach is intended to make a systemic change by making the current and future interventions interconnected and fostering a relevant partner and stakeholder network. Compared with the CO Ethiopia on gender equality, the CO BiH is at a similar stage of the portfolio design spiral. But compared to the implementation of the portfolio approach in other countries BiH has gone through the process at a rather high pace, which has led them to the current phase of socializing the portfolio and the first portfolio option launched. Making the team an interesting and knowledgeable test group for the developed workshop.

This section should be read as a possible user scenario which explains the consecutive workshop steps, possible outcomes and (based on the team's evaluation) final proposals for how to communicate the findings of the workshop to the stakeholders in the stakeholder meetings. This last part is not executed with the team in BiH, but is discussed and the proposals described are the result of this discussion.

This section provides an answer to research question 4: How can the insights of the boundary object be used to grasp the systemic character of the approach, increase internal/ external communication and share the specific narratives of the portfolio of concern?

### The goal of the workshop

The goal of the test is mainly to gather more insights on how this communication form and conversation starter may unfold and could be employed in further portfolio endeavors. The main point of evaluation is how the workshop is executed in group form and within the given time of 2 hours. Additionally, the objects will be used to map out the interaction domain between people/community and challenge. Concluding the insights of the workshop into a practical and reflecting form.

### Goal of the workshop for CO BiH team

For the team the focus was set on the socialization of the portfolio to (potential) stakeholders and the experiment was a new tool to potentially be put into practice for upcoming meetings. By socialization of the portfolio is meant the intention of the method, emphasizing the systemic character and the need for a systemic lens on the challenge. Additionally, the team articulated the need for a conversation starter, creating the openness required for a portfolio meeting on potential partnerships and a mutual understanding of objectives related to the subject.

The test will be evaluated on the following points making sure the workshop and the reactions are reflected on:

The completion of the tasks:

Focusing on whether the steps of the workshop were easy to follow, understandable and executable. The information given between and within the tasks, like example objects, description of the tasks and the main questions were clear and answered during the workshop. Important was to see whether there was a continuous storyline of the workshop towards its end goal.

The experience of the workshop:

Besides the functionality of the workshop, the overall experience of the participants was observed. The engagement of the team will be acquired, through their response and overall attitude during the workshop. What did they find interesting? What was less interesting? What questions prompt their attention?

The effect of the workshop:

The long term effect will be difficult to capture in this test. However an attitude comparison between the beginning and ending of the workshop could provide an interpretation of the effect of the workshop on the way of thinking about, interacting with and formulating their work on the portfolio on green transitions.

Figure 33: Pictures made during the workshop. Photo courtesy of workshop participant.





The goal of the workshop is to provide the team with the possibility of gaining more insights/ experience of the community in which the issues of the challenge prevail in an accessible manner and make the reciprocity of issues clear and sticky. This is done by moving from a universal and formal portfolio to a detailed story level, taking steps deeper into the possible daily experiences (Figure 34). And when detail has been met, move back up to the high level of the portfolio to translate the insights.

### The portfolio visualized

What are the portfolio transformation pillars? What are the sub-areas in these pillars? Who are the stakeholders? Think about humans, organizations, non-human (trees)

### The interaction locations

What are the locations where issues or phenomenas of this challenge occur? Where do people/stakeholders interact with the challenge?

### The objects

Can you find an object that represents responses of individuals at the grassroots level to specific issues connected to the challenge? That embodies the values that the community or region hold in relation to the subjects of the challenge? That exemplifies how sustainable interventions can trigger a tipping point in the future? That demonstrates how the functions of objects contribute to keeping a system in place?

### The object statements

What do the objects tell about the renewed vision of the portfolio and how would you like to see this coming back in the portfolio efforts?

### The interaction map

Who or what is connected to these objects and will experience a change when the portfolio efforts are put into action?

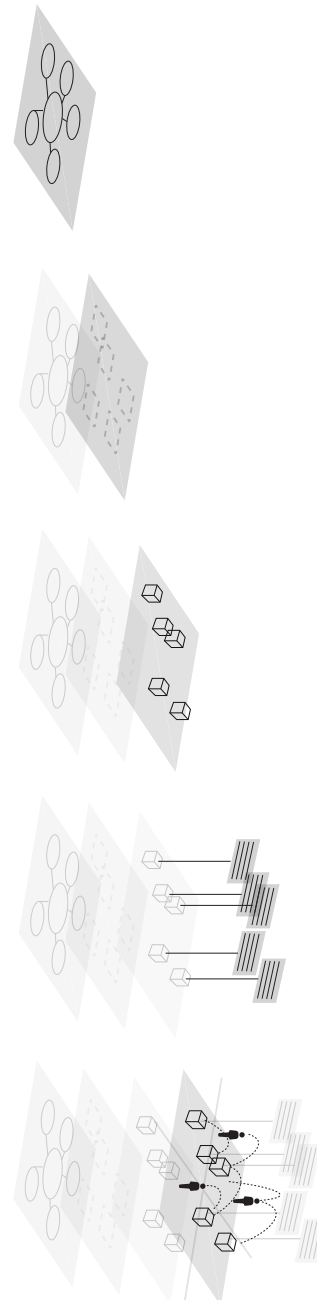
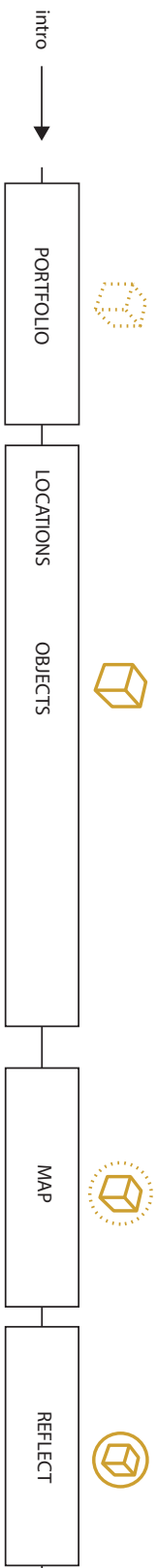


Figure 34: The workshop steps are considered layers. With every layer a step closer to detail is taken.

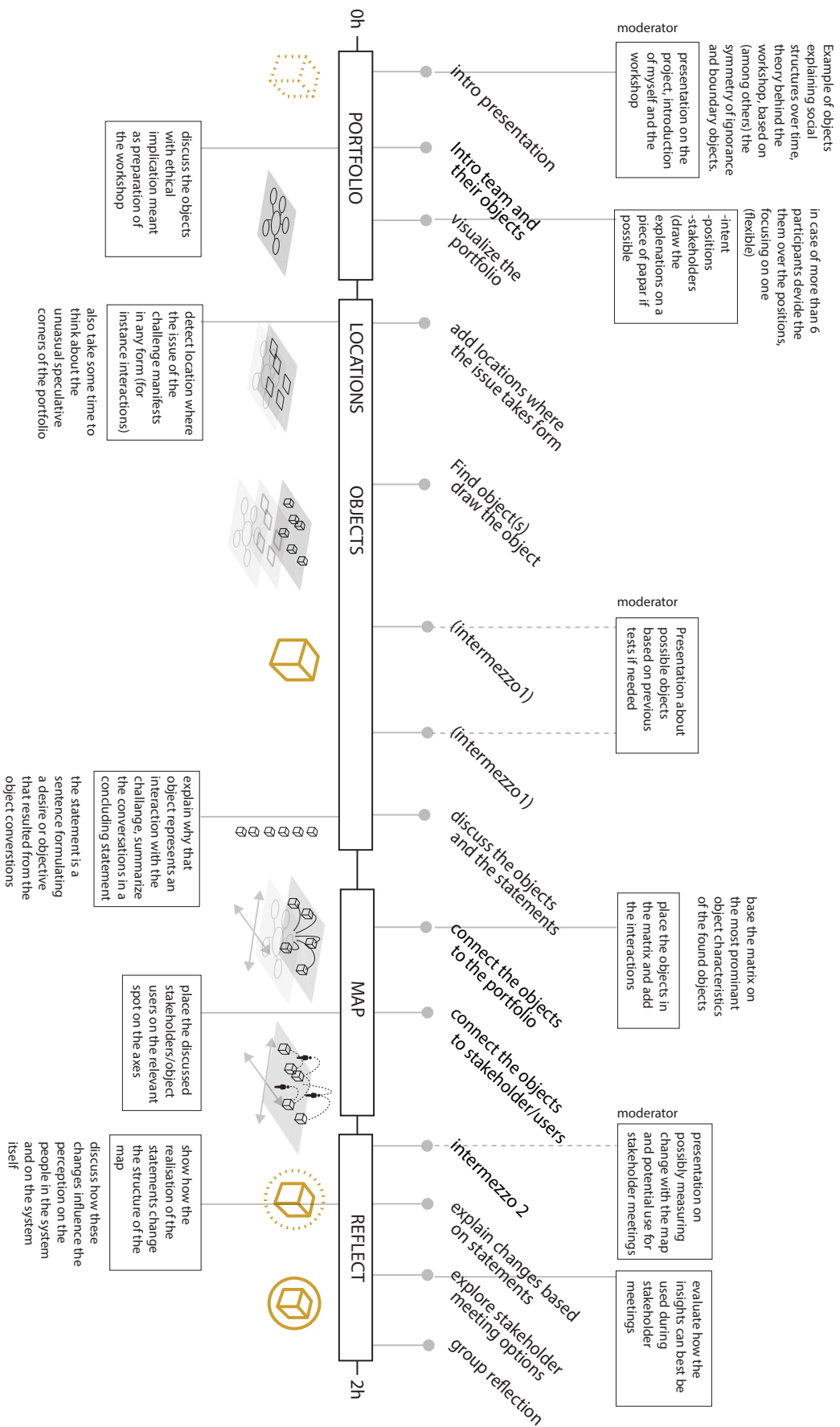


On the previous page a visualization of the steps of the workshop is shown (Figure 35). In this report not all steps will be discussed. Only the once providing the insights for this research are described and accompanied with examples. See the workshop booklet to get the full description of the steps of the object oriented workshop.

In the upcoming sections the following steps will be described in further detail:

1. Familiarize: Discussing objects carrying ethical implications chosen and brought by the participants (page 84)
2. Collect: The object conversations and the corresponding statements, that function as concluding main thought through the conversation related to the portfolio subject (page 85)
3. Map: Mapping out the objects-users/ stakeholders-portfolio and discuss the changes in this structure due to the statements (page 90)
4. Propose: Reflection on the workshop and proposals for stakeholder meeting purposes (page 94)

Figure 35: The steps undertaken in the workshop and the additional information provided by the moderator of the workshop





## 4.8 FAMILIARIZE - OBJECTS WITH ETHICAL IMPLICATION

The assignment for the participants prior to the workshop was to find an object that represents ethical implications. By introducing the object, the participants would introduce themselves and their personal point of view on the subject of the portfolio, was the hypothesis of this first task. All objects presented by the participants can be found in appendix L. Here an example will be given.

This exercise has helped the participants getting familiar with thinking in objects, which will guide them through the next step: Finding the objects that describe parts of the portfolio.

*It is a tool that enables us to make other tools. The tool is being replaced by other tools, for instance the computer or other technologies, that replace all the possible functions and outputs the pencil embodies.*



Figure 36: The pencil and the comparison material that changed its presence.

For me this quote elaborates on the displacement of objects and the symbolic value of these objects that are transferred to new technologies over time. A pencil does not lose its value and symbolism, but instead its functionality is being compared and ultimately changes its character and story (Figure 36).

This shows how thinking in objects could go into the future, the past and the current. It shows the ability to tell a story through time and how it changes meaning when the surroundings are changing. A short description of an object explores what for the person seems to be important and gives a strong indication of that person's set of values. This person is an architect and automatically drawn to collaboration of techniques and their own personal capabilities.



## 4.9 COLLECT - THE PORTFOLIO OBJECTS

Some personal objects/ concepts that were presented were relevant for the objects related to the portfolio as well. After about 1 hour of discussion and drawing the portfolio, locations of interaction (conclusion of test 1, page 74) and possible objects, 7 objects were chosen to best express the discussions in the team on the subject. The following objects were found: a traditional BiH woolen sock, the river network of BiH, a coal stone, a plastic bag, electric car and the subsidized theater in Zenica and a thank-you-note from the Olympic games in 1984.

### Concluding statements

Although the 6 conversations explore the corners of the portfolio on green transition, it does not yet add a portfolio layer that makes the objects both embedded in day to day life and in the high level portfolio discussions. In order to integrate the objects in the portfolio conversations as a communication tool a statement per object has been developed based on the red thread of the conversations. This has been done after the workshop, after analyzing the conversations. It was observed that a clear statement can facilitate the participants to address the object correctly in the next step, helping the team members understand and express their personal vision in the subject of green transition and express their interaction with elements of the issues. It also guides the team members into the same mindset about the subject as they are able to express their personal lived experience while formulating them into a collective statement. The statements have later been discussed with the team and confirmed.

The shortened conversations can be found in appendix N. On the following page one conversation is shown as an example to clarify the outcomes. The conversations take place between the team members and the moderator and conclude in the concluding statement of the object. Take note that the conversations have slightly been rewritten, not in content, but in formulation on green transition.



### Object conversation about the BiH river network

The conversation provides a thoughtful exploration of the complicated relationship between the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and her rivers. It weaves together cultural insights, environmental concerns, and societal reflections, creating a nuanced story about the rivers in BiH (Figure 37). The metaphorical comparison of the rivers to daughters and the pride in their existence contrasts with the reality of rivers becoming dumping grounds for waste, reflecting a complex interplay of emotions and actions. It offers a glimpse into the cultural and environmental landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the lens of the rivers.



Figure 37: A collage of the object conversation of the water network of BiH, showing how the different communities are connected by the flowing river and are depended of one another



Person 1: There are a lot of legends and stories tied to the identities of the rivers. Interestingly, 90% of them have female names – that’s why I started this project.

Person 2: Bosnia, the country, is named after a river herself, serving as a representation of the country, its location, and ground.

Person 1: That’s interesting. When I was working on this book, we spoke with people who grew up on the riversides. Their connection to the rivers they grew up on was very strong. When asked why they loved it so much, they compared it to loving a daughter – maybe not perfect, but it’s there and it’s their own. It’s interesting that we do have that pride, but we’re not necessarily reacting to it.

Person 3: Yeah, it’s fascinating. We have 244 rivers in Bosnia, and people are often surprised when they see them all drawn out. They might know their own river but not the rest. Sometimes, they need reminders of the beauty surrounding them.

Moderator: Is that the feeling of being taken for granted?

Person 4: Completely. An example is our attitude towards nature. We love going into nature but casually toss waste, expecting it to be carried away by some third party, like aliens.

Moderator: So, a lack of responsibility?

Person 1: Exactly. There are no consequences. Other European nations may be more environmentally conscious, but we just throw trash without repercussions.

Person 3: It’s interesting how we’re proud of our rivers but also use them as dumping grounds for waste, thinking it will just disappear.

Person 4: Rivers were also connectors in our divided country, despite being dividers. They don’t change if they cross borders.

Person 2: True, rivers show everything is connected, including the waste issue. You can literally see it passing by.

Person 4: It’s terrible; suddenly, the entire river is filled with plastic. It seems like it has become almost the norm.

Person 3: That reminds me of a friend in elementary school who painted a river brown, and the teacher said it should be blue. But he replied he’d never seen a blue river.

Person 5: This waste problem might be something we have learned. In previous generations, everything produced was organic waste and nature could just take care of it.



## The objects' concluding statements

There were 7 objects found concluding in 6 statements that summarize the discussions in a desire expressed by the team related to the course of the portfolio on Green Transition.

On the next page it is explained how the conversations and the statements contributed to the visualization of an interactive map, showing how certain intentions affect the significance of the objects and their users/ stakeholders.

Priglavke - traditional BiH socks



SUSTAINABLE INTUITION

I want to increase the potential of intuition in sustainability approaches in order to correctly react to complex and expensive initiatives and to facilitate the seemingly easy and responsive initiatives.

electrical cars and the mobility network



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

I want to facilitate a green transition that creates equal opportunities and solutions for everyone and takes extra notice of the people and their context that most benefit from the opportunities.

the river network in BiH



CONNECTED THROUGH NATURE

I want to reflect on the transformation and challenges faced by the community, particularly in post-industrial communities and take extra notice of the experience of the local youth and their view on cultural identity.

Plastic bags



CREATE COLLECTIVE ATTITUDE

I want to create a collective attitude towards recycling (of plastic bags) or on minimizing the use of them that mutually inspires a shift in societal behavior between citizens.

Coal stone



NEW PURPOSE FOR COAL

I want to redirect the purpose and presence of coal in the county in a way that does not contribute to its pollution but to its symbolic value for the community

The subsidized theater and a thank-you-note from the olympic games in 1984



LOCAL YOUTH AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

I want to reflect on the transformation and challenges faced by the community, particularly in post-industrial communities and take extra notice of the experience of the local youth and their view on cultural identity.



## 4.10 MAP - INTERACTIVE MAP

The interaction map shows the object as a bridge between object stakeholders and portfolio subject and has the goal to map out the interaction between the people and the challenge. In order for the map to visualize intended changes in the structure the map consists of two axes, both of which are based on the object characteristics that can be found on page 74. The interpretation of the axes are chosen by the team members in line with the most prominent and present characteristic of the objects in the workshop. In the case of the CO BiH, the objects mostly reflected the history of the country, related to characteristic of time, and a division between personal stories and stories of relevant stakeholders, like coal miners. This resulted in the axes of external-internal and past-current-future. The following questions helped by placing the objects:

- Relatability Does the object evoke a relatable response from you/the team?
- Non-relatability Does the object elicit an unfamiliar or non-relatable response from you/the team?
- Future Does the object explain a future event or tipping point in development?
- Present Does the object explain the current status quo and the forces of the system that keep it in place?
- Past Does the object explain an event or phenomena of the past that still influences current times?

The maps formed during the workshop can be found in appendix M. In this section the adjusted maps are shown that both include the outcomes of the workshop and the discussed reflections that were not directly visualized on the workshop sheets.

Figure 38 illustrates the link between the portfolio and the objects and answers the question how the objects are relatable to the portfolio pillars (much similar, but less detailed as the map on page 64). Figure 39 shows the discussed users and stakeholders associated with the objects, the map expands, highlighting the diversity between users and other stakeholders, ranging from individuals the participants can relate to, to those who are less relatable for the team members. The maps also demonstrate the role of stakeholders in the past, present, and future, clarifying that the objects' significance has evolved over time. Emphasizing the relatability degree of the different users/stakeholders shows the parties that could be better looked into if it turned out to be necessary and valuable (read page 75).

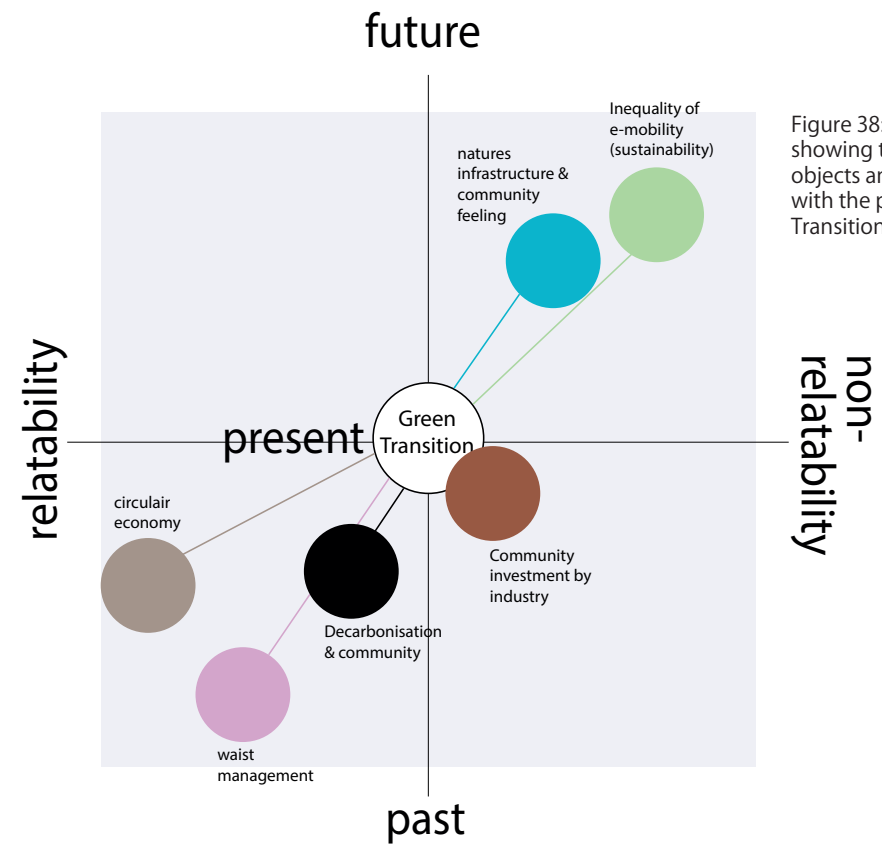


Figure 38: The interactive map showing the placement of the objects and the connections with the portfolio on Green Transition

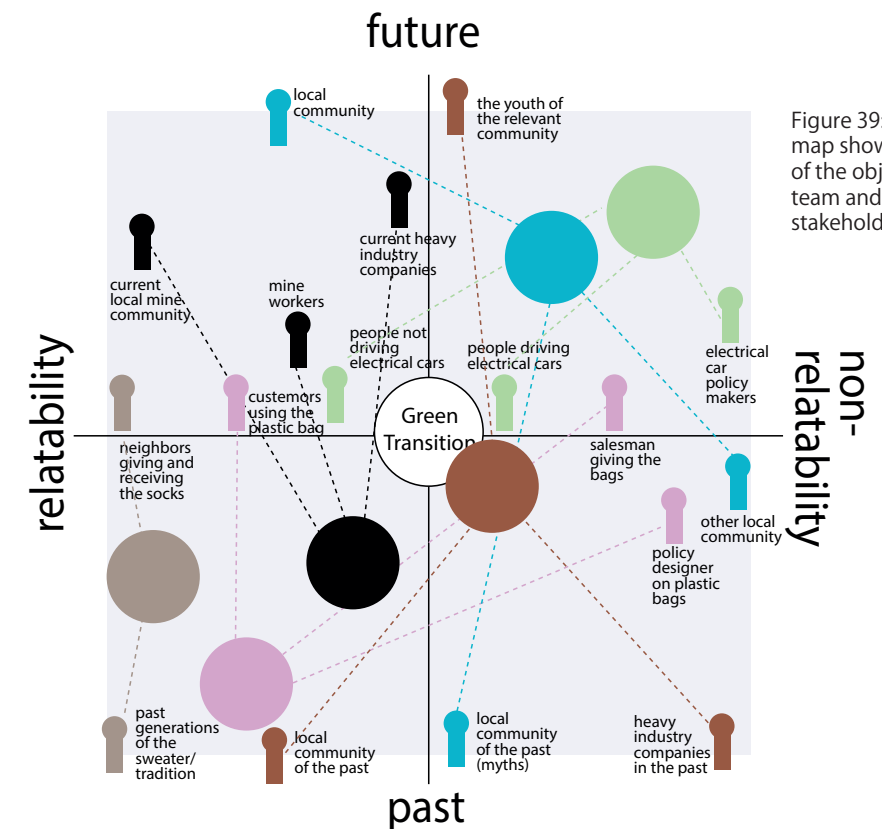


Figure 39: The interactive map showing the placement of the objects of the BiH team and the discussed stakeholders/users



## Map interpretation

As an example of what these maps have to offer in insights, the position of the sock and the car are clarified. Both symbolize reactions to becoming more sustainable, while highlighting different points of views. Respectively, speaking of sustainability associated with success and an exclusive privilege or as an economical driver fueling a humble intuition for sustainable practices. The position of these objects on the map indicate the team's reaction to this division. Speaking of the sock as a story recognizable to them and closer to a vision of the past. Meanwhile the car represents a more unrelatable object reflecting sustainability and seems to be more of an interpretation of the future. This articulates the team's personal view on sustainability being more engaged with the reactions of communities of a lower segment and thus the reaction the sock represents. Posing the question how the qualities of the reaction with the woolen sock can be integrated in the interventions around mobility.

## Interacting with the maps

Looking ahead, a key question is as follows: How would the map evolve if specific portfolio interventions were implemented? Remarkably, some objects were already positioned by the team based on their future vision, prompting a reverse inquiry: How would the personal statements and desires expressed in the workshop influence this map?

Although the map is based on subjective interpretations, not only the team interacts with the dynamics of this map, also the objects, the users, stakeholders and the challenge interact with it. Showing how reinterpretation, through for instance the concluding statements, can change the configuration of the map. Parts of the interactive map then show how the objects and its users can be moved over the axes based on the discussions between team members ultimately changing the objects meaning. Figure 40 shows how the coal moved in the map during the discussion. Figure 41 shows a similar movement triggered by the conversation on the river network of BiH. The quotes simulate the movement in conversation.

Figure 40: A visualization of the movement of the coal and its stakeholders during the discussion, based on its reinterpreted meaning

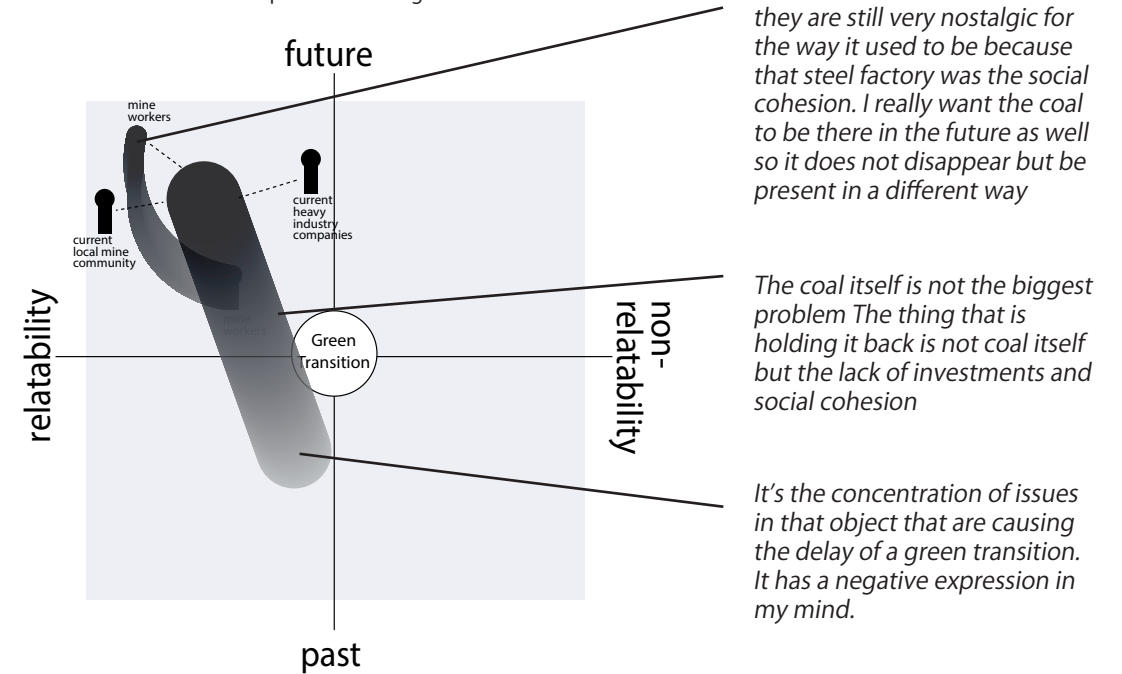
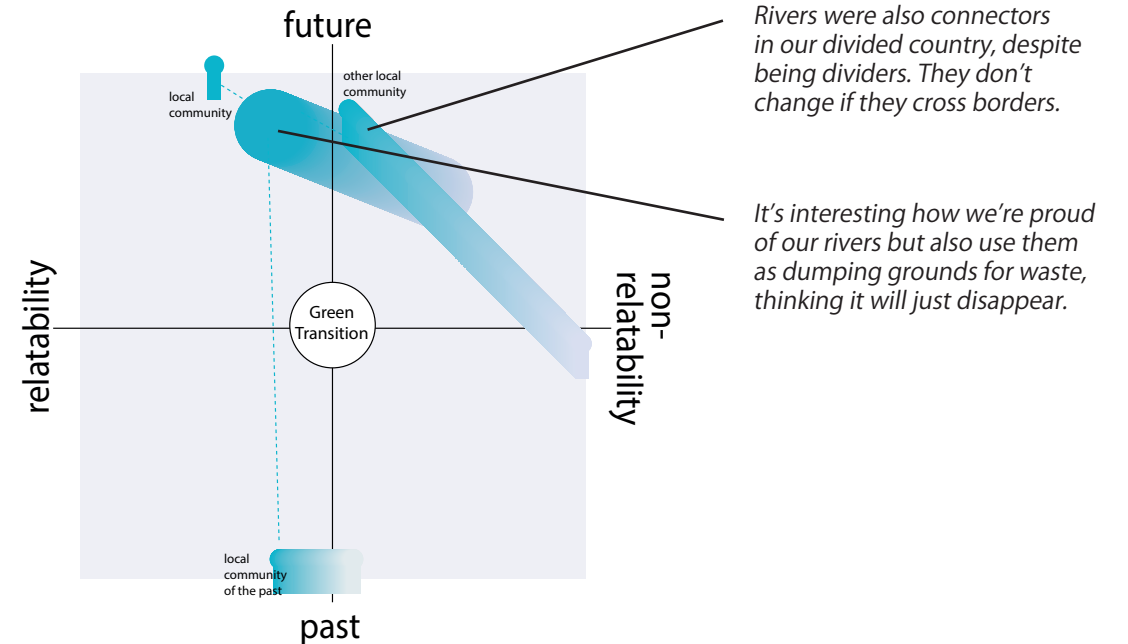


Figure 41: A visualization of the movement of the water network of BiH during the discussion, based on its reinterpreted meaning





## 4.11 PROPOSALS - STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

At the end of the workshop the team discussed possible functions of the workshop and its outcomes. What do they see as possibilities to employ the objects further in the process of the portfolio.

Looking ahead:

The outcomes of the workshop can be used as an indication for where the portfolio of the team is heading towards. Using the objects and their stories as a way to express future endeavors.

*It can become something as a letter to the future*

Provoking similar conversations amongst the stakeholders:

The team expressed a desire to do a similar workshop with their stakeholder network. But also admitted that there was no time for the same tasks. Additions should be made in order to give the team the opportunity to show their findings of the workshop to the stakeholders and let the stakeholder show their personal objects, preferably within half an hour.

*Maybe we can give the same homework to our partners and instead of serving them our vision, we can invite them to bring on that network meeting the object that they connect with.*

As a measurement of change:

The team figured the object conversations change over time as the challenge and their perception of the challenge will change. Accordingly the perceptions of the stakeholders on the challenge will also change. Making the chosen objects snapshot in time that can be made over again indicating what the change in perception is.

*We can also ask the collective [stakeholder network] a little bit of storytelling or at least start this conversation because we'll have a series of events with that group. We could give them the homework and add different elements if something additional comes up. So we make the snapshots out of it or into an exhibition?*

Exhibiting the outcomes of the workshop within the country office:

Another idea was to exhibit the objects and their stories in the country office to steer up conversation and exhibit the portfolio. Although this is a very nice idea, it did not fit in the scope of this project as it required a in context visit and testing.

*we can make an exhibition out of it and this can be the first way to make the narrative behind the story or the problem of the vision*



## 4.12 EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP - SARAJEVO

In this section the workshop is evaluated. Based on these insights followup proposals will be introduced that are continuing the conversation through objects during stakeholder meetings. The workshop was therefore evaluated on its current state and on its possible employability.

### **The completion of the tasks:**

The flow of the workshop created a sphere in which everyone felt they were able to contribute. Only a few questions and tasks stirred the conversation to an end result.

Continuing philosophizing on the objects kept the associations and stories coming that strengthened the objects' story. It was important to keep the goal of the object story clear.

During the conversations the participants referred back to each other's personal object that reflected a sense of the discussion. In this way they could compare the ethical impact and evoke a quick understanding.

*It was not yet another meeting or workshop in which I will decide: Maybe I would say something or not, like just the natural flow of discussion.*

*Trust me, there is more. This is the short version. I was also super surprised.*

*It's somewhat similar to what you have with your Mountain House [object with ethical implication] and how people don't appreciate it as a common space.*

### **The experience of the workshop:**

The team could hear each other's angle on certain topics related to the portfolio approach, but apart from formal meetings. There was a sense of freedom and personal approach.

The participants expressed that they had learned a lot about their country. There was a surprise factor.

It was easy to engage with the object because the participants already had a certain feeling and bias about the object. They experienced the power of objects as a source of reference.

*It gives you a narrative of this complex thing, and I was also surprised to hear different angles of how we read those objects, and that's also first. And if there were 20 more people, maybe you would hear deeper and multi-layered ideas. So that's very interesting*

*I'm going to be very honest, I learned a lot about the country. I thought I was living somewhere else for a moment. You can really live in your bubble and forget that.*

*But in a way for the general public, it's way easier to connect with an object and with an idea. So I think people are not they know what this means. It means this. And I'm warm. I'm not. I'm home. I'm cold. I'm not cold and it's, you know, it's a type of a tradition. So basically when you see it, you already have a full set of emotions Rather than explaining the meaning of the Ideas of [a system, a portfolio, or development].*

### **The effect of the workshop:**

It made the participants wonder how certain interactions and relations are very specific for the context they discussed. The object has a meaning in this certain context and may have a totally different meaning in another context.

The participant sees the object as a valuable way of connecting to reality. Of experiencing the reality of the people who's issue the portfolio is addressing and whose lives are affected by the work of the team.

*The thing it makes you connect your perception of something or expression of something with a customized reality. So I'm asking myself If we bring this object with this story to another continent. What would that mean? What would you understand? So is it specific enough to tell the story, or not? I think objects can actually scream for context and for opportunities or for dreams and for past and future. I also learned a lot.*

*I think that this connection when you have this object that is physically present in reality. And looking at it from different perspectives, helps you actually to be in connection with reality, which is obviously a necessity because many times I think that people are talking out of general knowledge, not being there. We are talking about the coal mines. I never met the coal miner myself, I never talked to any coal miner. I never went into the hole. I'm not in their shoes and somehow I'm trying to fix their problems and this kind of going for the objects as a source of truth of what's going on in the world. It's very useful, I would say.*

*I'm super happy with the work we did today.*

## 4.13 SUMMARY OF THE WORKSHOP - SARAJEVO

This section describes the conclusions of the offline workshop combined with the difficulties from the observational research that can be found in detail in appendix G in order to underline the needs the intervention replies to.

The need to bridge the gap between the portfolio context and challenge context

The research indicates that by talking about and through physical objects related to the portfolio subjects the team feels a stronger connection with the community they are designing for, bridging the gap between the team, portfolio content, and the environment and community it will impact. This results in increased empathy, understanding and speculation of how changes can take place within the intended context. Giving the team a feeling of confidence and control to find and describe the multitude of perspectives.

- Disagreement on organizational reach
- Detached from the ground level and the people
- The burden and blessing of top down management

The need to reflect personal influence on the approach

The research indicates that by talking about and through physical objects about the portfolio subjects the team feels a stronger connection with the community they are designing for, bridging the gap between the team, portfolio content, and the environment and community it will impact. This results in increased empathy, understanding and speculation of how changes can take place within the intended context. Giving the team a feeling of confidence and control to find and describe the multitude of perspectives.

- Assigned role division
- Minimal online (and offline) group interaction
- Leave expertise behind also in research

The need to find a new language for the complexity and simplicity of portfolio approach

The team also indicated a vision for the future and proposed sharing similar insights with their stakeholder network to stimulate parallel conversations. This way, they can learn more from their network and vice versa. Furthermore, the conversations revealed how the portfolio is embedded in the topics it addresses and the extent to which subject manifestations can reach. The next step is to incorporate these insights into an intervention that can be effectively implemented by the teams.

- Language limits in complexity
- Portfolio a route to learn
- Identify the systemic forces instead of the problems

Also the limitations expressed in previous tests were solvable because of the team context of this test. In the offline team setting it was easier to find and discuss specific locations and team members inspired each other to find many objects and express different angles.

Over the course of the workshop it was noticed that the participants got more and more interested in what these objects could mean and found more ways of expressing why they were relevant for them and the portfolio. It started from a hesitant reserved attitude to an open one, aspiring to say the unsaid.

### Limitations of the workshop

Although the test showed that desired conclusions were achieved, there were also some limitations to the test.

Firstly it was difficult to bring everyone together for the test. Sensitizing on the idea of thinking with and through objects is an unrecognizable concept for people working in the UNDP context. Although there were also expressions of curiosity and a longing for a more creative point of view on the team's work.

The workshop took up 2 hours, but it was still not enough to go through every step. Therefore the beginning of the workshop should be elaborated enough to quickly go through the follow up steps.

The outcome of the workshop is a mix of personal point of view and knowledge of the teams. It is not an outcome based on clear data, but constructed out of discussion and conversation. Which makes the map and the statement an impression.

## 4.14 SCENARIO'S OF USE

The following scenarios give an impression of when the workshop and other additional concepts can be used within the portfolio approach steps. This will be indicated by looking back at the steps of the Ethiopia CO team (see Figure 42). The workshop can emphasize different difficulties depending on when it is being employed. It has to be further tested at the stated moments in the portfolio process to confirm these scenarios.

scenario 1.1: At the beginning of the process - introducing the portfolio approach

When the workshop is employed at the beginning of a portfolio approach journey, it can be used to express and find the portfolio key elements. The object's conversation can surface where the team stands at that specific moment. What is their point of view on the portfolio subject and till where does their knowledge reach on the subject? The workshop can be revisited during the session to evaluate what has changed over time, to reflect on the team but also on their expectations of the portfolio approach. It can also be used as a group exercise.

scenario 1. 2: At the ending of the process - going to the next cycle and collect learnings

As the BiH CO team had indicated during the workshop, collecting objects can be used as a tool for measuring change. Revisiting objects and their stories indicate how the perception of a challenge has changed over time, because objects do have the ability to indicate a moment in time, a snapshot. So either the object's change or its story does. The change then elaborates on the external factors igniting it, referring to the interventions or the dynamic of the challenge itself. But it can also refer to the change in experience of the team or stakeholders.

scenario 2: Defining the CO priority alignment - strengthening the socialization pitch

As seen earlier, objects are used in the meeting of the CO Ethiopia to argue the alignment between their portfolio and the CO priorities. By finding and expressing the objects the outcomes of the workshop can be used to show and evaluate the alignment within the CO. As a reminder and as a tool to find more alignment these objects can be showcased within the office.

scenario 3: before or during intervention design - dive into grass root experience

A good moment to look at objects as a source of inspiration and fueling team's conversations with alternative input would be during the synthesis of interventions. By that time the portfolio is already set up, the positions are in place, which would help to connect objects to the portfolio and find the limit of the reach of the positions. The objects can then facilitate new opinion on the stakeholders, the intended effects and the specific locations for change. Thereby, after this phase the socialization of the portfolio takes place and stakeholder meetings will decide on the priorities of the portfolio and where the weight is put for change. These meetings can be supplemented with the statements of the objects. In order to facilitate multi stakeholder conversations, the team can easily express their own standpoint.

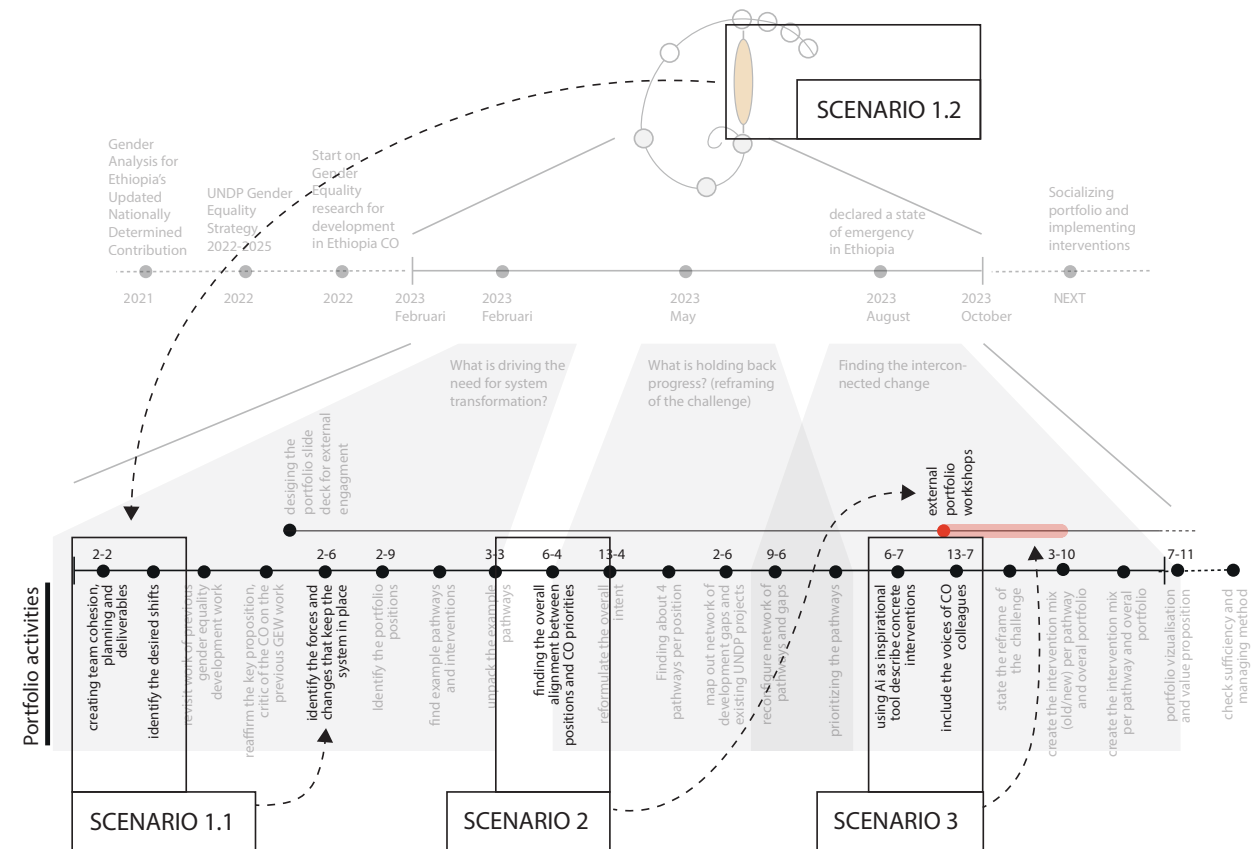


Figure 42: Where in the observed trajectory of the Ethiopia CO team the object focused workshop could be deployed for different purposes



## 5. OVERALL CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was how and if thinking through boundary objects can facilitate the Country Office teams working with the portfolio approach to grasp the systemic character of the approach, increase internal/external communication and share the specific narratives. The research has proven that the theory behind the boundary object is applicable in the context of the UNDP teams working on specific development domains with contributing effects, thereby overcoming the observed hurdles from the case study.

In this section also the research limitations are described.

### 5.1 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

#RQ3

#RQ1 #RQ2 The reframing process goes beyond the scope of development work within the UNDP. It necessitates not only a new perspective on the challenges, the intended paradigm shift in the domain, but also a reorganization of the work itself, which puts the structure of the UNDP in a reframe. Steering development closer to the grass roots of the challenge, consequently requiring the teams to take a new stand in communication from different points of views. The attempts of the UNDP to foster alternative collaboration and communication methods show positive impact on the team and its stakeholders. The participatory observation of the transition of the CO Ethiopia team to a portfolio approach, surfaced the experienced hurdles of the team. Substantiated with multiple points of views from relevant interviewees. Concluding in the following needs: The need for realistic expectations, to learn and adapt with little means and resources, to bridge the gap between UNDP, team, portfolio and challenge environment, to reflect personal influence on the portfolio approach, to open up accessible multi stakeholder communication and collaboration and to find a new language for the complexity and simplicity of portfolio approach. These needs show valuable insights on possible intervention areas to further guide the transition to a portfolio approach on CO team level.

- #RQ1 the current shifting qualities
- #RQ2 the steps undertaken to implement the portfolio approach
- #RQ3 the needs from the prominent difficulties of the Ethiopia CO team on gender equality
- #RQ4 the insights of a boundary object tool
- #RQ5 the use of the insights of the boundary objects

#RQ4

The physical boundary object proved to be an interesting tool for bridging the gap between environment, team and portfolio. First, the research confirmed that the narrative of the objects were used by CO Ethiopia team members to find and discuss alignment with the Country Office priorities, facilitating the pathway designs and igniting inspiration for intervention material. Using specific objects in the stories the team members were able to spark recognition and understanding by their colleagues, in order to make their argument concrete and in line with systemic thinking by walking through various levels, horizontal and vertical, of the community and its environment. The stories were also a way to explore the driving forces of a system and define alternative root causes of its stagnation. In further research it was concluded that similar objects could be found by the CO team members and that the object's narratives explored the portfolio's overlap with other challenges, detect new possible stakeholders and bridge the mental gap between team member and the challenge environment, which resulted in more empathy for the grass root level and feeling part of the structure of the challenge. Namely because the object's physical presence in the challenge environment and the universal character of objects, encouraged the test participants to tell its story through (a.o.) time, situatedness, symbolism, function, social structures and relatability.

#RQ5

The workshop that concluded from this research confirmed that objects were able to be found in team context through conversation and personal anecdotes. The participants of this workshop expressed surprise by the amount of new and personal information on their portfolio subject. Approaching the subject through objects decreased the threshold to join the conversation and new angles on the matter were found. It was also clear that the outcomes of the workshop could be relevant to use during stakeholder meetings in the form of clear statements on portfolio matter concluding out of the objects and an exchange of the stakeholders and teams objects in the domain so that a snapshot of perspectives could be made and later used as a change measuring tool.

## 5.2 OVERALL LIMITATIONS

Observations are reliable on the observers point of view, biases and background knowledge. Making the observation process rather individual, although the insights were discussed with the external mentor. An improvement of the research would have been validation sessions with the Ethiopia CO team in order to check whether the observations resonated with the experience and feeling of the team members.

This research was done alongside the team of the case study, which made it indispensable that I also did not fully understand the method, when the team experienced difficulties. On the other hand this made my experience similar to theirs, stimulating the feeling of empathy and understanding. Besides this, the case study explored a specific context of the research while the intervention was meant for a wider employability. Thus the obstacles of change are collected from different inputs: Interviews, observations and research are based on a variety of CO's in order to get a full picture of possible problems and solutions. Because I was not particularly designing for Ethiopia CO, I was able to accumulate the issues found and use them as arguments for the concept of this project. However the differences in context, subject and culture are not broadly discussed and taken into account in the evaluation of the issues faced.

It can be discussed whether the chosen direction was the best and most effective way of addressing the communicative errors of the teams shifting to a portfolio approach. Ironically, the online context in which all observations and most of the early testing took place, diminished the effect of the physical objects chosen as a means for connection. but later in the offline test it was confirmed that the presence of these objects are not a necessity at all. Had there been more interaction and inclusion possible with(in) the teams, a different type of intervention might have been considered.

Thereby there was little to no comparability data, to confirm that the object catalog made a significant change in the experience and acceptance of the portfolio approach, although the reactions to the interventions were praised on this matter. Further research can confirm the impact and the further employability of the workshop and outcomes.

Furthermore, one of the tests was focused on the inclusion of digitalization, one UNDP's prominent priorities in the future of development work. This is not particularly an object oriented subject, leading to an interesting but incomplete test result. Although objects were found, it was later realized that these objects were not desirable: referring to metaphors or already existing UNDP interventions/ projects. Resulting in limited new insights. How this could be improved is further to be researched.

## 5.3 PERSONAL REFLECTION

I believe, and have experienced, that in the field of design for interaction, designers strive for a level of freedom to question their own biases, and also to design with and beyond these biases. The field of design for interaction unfolds close to everyday life, making it a challenge to ignore one's own vision within the domain. However, I have also considered this as inspirational. Starting this project I took some of these biases or assumptions with me in the process. For one, I found it difficult to imagine being an individual entity within a global organization that I experienced as a living entity moving on its own, almost with a free will. I wondered how you can have an impact as an individual on this entity. And this collaboration between individuals and organization kept me intrigued. The collaboration, observations and conversations that I had the pleasure of engaging in with these individuals were therefore very interesting and eye opening. The different layers of such an organization and all minds that influence its identity captivated me. I found this aspect of my journey very interesting, and I believe this experience will shape my further development as a designer, as I will be looking to find those 'context-related selves' and unique points of view.

At times, the project overwhelmed me due to its layered nature; it still does. Sometimes, it was difficult getting into contact with the right target group, as everyone seemed very busy and I didn't want to intervene. Although, everyone that I talked to was eager to learn from new perspectives. Therefore I am very grateful to the immense effort of the external mentor, Simone Uriartt, in always trying to find colleagues for me to interview or test with. But the experienced distance that I had with my target group also gave me the freedom to consider my own point of view in the research, which in the end added an extra layer of complexity and endless associations.

I experienced that what I was missing and what would have added nuance and overview in all these layers was a team. I look forward to not having to confront the overwhelming aspects of design projects on my own but in team collaboration. I'm eager to experience this again, armed with the knowledge acquired in recent times.

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