

COP4HL GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This document is a draft version - the final version will include references in the text and a reference list

What are guiding principles?

According to Patton (2018)[#], a principle is

1. **Guiding:** a principle is prescriptive. It provides advice and guidance on what to do, how to think, what to value, and how to act to be effective. It offers direction.
2. **Useful:** a high-quality principle is useful in making choices and decisions.
3. **Inspirational:** principles are value-based, incorporating and expressing ethical premises, which is what makes them meaningful.
4. **Developmental:** this refers to a principle's adaptability and applicability to diverse contexts and over time
5. **Evaluable:** a high-quality principle must be evaluable. It must be possible to document and judge whether it is actually being followed, and document and judge what results from following the principle.

Why are they important in Social Innovation?

Social innovation has been defined as 'changing social relations'. Societal challenges are complex, systemic, interconnected, and urgent. They require insights from many perspectives, and they don't have outcomes which can be predefined. Initiatives that are innovative are often in a state of continuous development and adaptation, and they frequently unfold in a changing and unpredictable environment. Rather than sticking to a linear, predictable pathway, they adapt within and navigate the turbulence and uncertainties of complex system change by *adhering to principles* (Patton, 2018).

Social Innovation in the context of COP4HL.

COP4HL is a project aiming to improve the healthy lifestyle of people in local communities. The assumption is that classic project-based knowledge-to-action approaches are largely ineffective and do not necessarily meet the needs and assets of the local community, thus jeopardizing ownership and sustainability. Instead, in COP4HL, the aim is to learn and experiment with social innovation to improve healthy lifestyle in several local communities throughout Europe in a more sustainable way; by creating innovation ecosystems. This is a relatively new approach - often very different from conditioned approaches - which is reflected in the recognition of the involved partners that they need to learn how to do this. The ecosystems of stakeholders within the local communities are called COP's: Communities of Practice'. Representatives of these local COP's are regularly reflecting upon, combining, elaborating and, when possible, generalizing the local COP learnings. The formulation of a first set of Guiding Principles is one of the outputs of this learning process. It can serve in the future to facilitate Social Innovations towards Healthy Lifestyle or possibly in other societal challenges. It also offers an instrument for use in the (developmental) evaluation.

How did we develop our principles?

Our principles were developed collectively on the basis of 'lessons learned' by the six COPs.

The process for doing so consisted of the following steps:

1. Using various methods, such as timeline sessions, group discussions etc., all COPs collected 'lessons learned'
2. In an international meeting, these were collected and discussed, and a first impression of themes was brainstormed by all participants
3. The list was complemented by extracts from the literature that were in line with the issues raised by the participants
4. The team members involved in work package 3 'analysed' the list and clustered them into themes
5. On the basis of the themes, the same team members then suggested 10 draft principles, using the guidance provided by Patton 2018
6. In a second international meeting (conducted remotely due to travel restrictions in relation to COVID), these drafts were discussed and changes in content or wording were suggested
7. The team incorporated the feedback received and drafted the final set of principles (11)

8. These 11 principles were then subjected to the 'rules test' * and the 'alternative principles test' **, which led to minor changes in wording of one principle
9. Local COPs suggested contextualised examples
10. We developed brief descriptions for each principle, and its relevance for social innovation

Principles-focused evaluation: the GUIDE. Michel Quinn Patton, The Guilford Press, 2018.

* The difference between a rule and a principle is clarified by the following. A rule prescribes precisely. You must do this specifically and precisely (using a cooking recipe analogy: 'use two tablespoons of salt'). Principles must be interpreted and adapted to content ('season to taste'). The test is done by stating a rule that pertains to but contrasts with the principle.

** The alternative principles test is meant to test whether a principle provides distinct and meaningful guidance by conceptualizing the opposite or a specific alternative.

Both tests were applied by one team member and discussed with two others. After discussing the results of those tests, all principles were scored 'fail' or 'pass' ('fail': further change is needed; 'pass': the principle is fine as it is).

What are our draft principles?

Figure 1 shows the 11 GPs identified in the COP4HL project.

The question mark in the figure indicates that these principles will be subjected to evaluation themselves and therefore, they will not be a static set, but in fact will change and develop in the future.

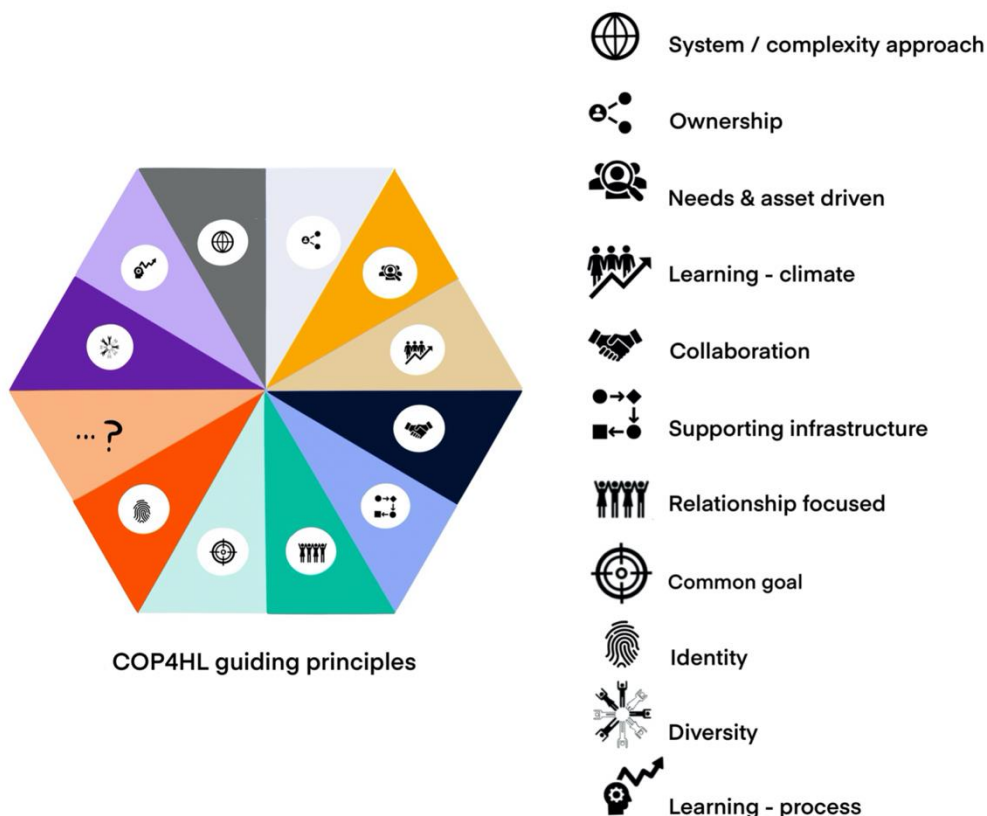


Figure 1: 11 COP4HL guiding principles

In full, our COP4HL principles read:



- Anticipate and act based on systems thinking and the complexity of the innovation context.
- Develop ownership of the innovation in all stakeholders
- Act evidence informed in the innovation process, building on needs and assets from the local individual to the wider society
- Create a learning climate that is safe to experiment and facilitates reflection
- Maximize alignment, collaboration and co-creation between stakeholders in all phases of the innovation
- Create a flexible support structure to develop agency, and to plan, manage and communicate the innovation
- Invest heavily in building relationships to grow a lasting and inclusive community
- Establish and embrace, with and for the community, an inspiring common long-term goal
- As a community, nurture your own shared identity and culture
- Strive for diversity in the composition of the community and use of a variety of resources
- Embed developmental evaluation in the innovation to guide decisions and actions and to interpret impact

Assumptions regarding the principles

- They can be (partly) overlapping, or even paradoxical
- It is likely you need all of these principles in order to achieve your goals
- They are distinguishable principles but should be seen in relation with each other.
- Some may be more important in certain phases of the existence of the COP. For example, when a new COP is being created it is very important to focus on building relationships first.
- They are not a static set of principles, but they will evolve as a result of applying them to and evaluating them in future situations and initiatives

Intended future use of these principles: evaluation of these principles

In the future, these principles can guide further development of the existing networks as well as future ones. These principles are therefore, -by definition-, drafts until they have proven their use. Other groups are welcome to use these principles, which will be freely available from Yanuz, our online Social Innovation Platform. However, we would appreciate to know in which contexts they are being used, how they are operationalised and what the experiences are from users (please refer to Yanuz for more information). The platform also offers support in the operationalization of the principles. This will be organised via monthly seminars, in which each seminar will deal with one principle in detail).

Our draft principles will be further described in this document, including definitions ([please note they are draft versions - the final version of this document will be updated with references](#)).



Anticipate and act based on systems thinking and the complexity of the innovation context.

In social innovation, new and alternative values and practices are collaboratively explored and experimented with in an (eco)system of actors in a specific environment (innovation context). A 'system' is created when the relation between actors fosters interdependence on one another; the action of one actor can have broader implications for the other connected actors. A system becomes 'complex' because the interdependencies that define the system also render it highly dynamic. Complex systems therefore have 'fuzzy boundaries'; their interacting agents operate on the basis of internal rules that cannot always be predicted; and they adapt, interact and co-evolve with other systems. This makes that they are subject to the so-called 'law of unintended consequences'. This means, complexity cannot be understood by only using deterministic approaches as the dynamics always lead to a whole which is more than the sum of its parts. This also makes it impossible to predefine outcomes and subsequent criteria and actions. Crucially, complexity is a feature of the system(s), not merely a characteristic of interventions. Change happens by building and leveraging a social system to embark on a learning journey by enabling ideas to emerge and spread across the system. In doing so, it is important to keep an open mind and see what is needed along the way, as needs are emergent and unpredictable.



Develop ownership of the innovation in all stakeholders

In social innovation, we strive for sustainable change by creating long-term systems for change. In contrast to 'projects' these systems can be continuous; with a network of actors who work towards initiatives and activities that are in line



with a common direction, and self-driven by community members. The relational character of the network emphasizes distributed agency. For this, power often needs to be shifted from the system leaders (backbone) to actors and community members who are direct beneficiaries of the innovation activities. Social innovation initiatives often strive to create spaces where individuals can feel empowered, whilst simultaneously striving for collective empowerment.



Act evidence informed in the innovation process, building on needs and assets from the local individual to the wider society

In social innovation, the system works to develop the agency to address the needs of the actors involved in the system and -if necessary- to rethink this same system, while keeping in mind common goal(s). Actors find creative ways of using (often underused) assets (for example necessary expertise, talents, resources or ability to impact the behaviour of groups) in the system and within border crossing activities. The system works evidence-informed. Different resources (stories, art, science, experts and so on) are weighted critically within the context and a priority/wise decision as to how to proceed is formulated in a collective process with all actors.



Create a learning climate that is safe to experiment and facilitates reflection

In social innovation, a resilient system makes use of the perspectives of all actors involved and assists learning from each other. This requires a culture that fosters relationships, trust and respect across actors, and a space and process for experimentation, learning and reflection together. In a playful environment, actors should feel safe to mention ideas and express needs that may be deviant from those of others. Critical thinking (evaluating various perspectives and 'pieces of evidence' in light of the context and goals) is an important aspect in how the system determines upon actions. Action, then, is characterised by a process of experimentation and reflection – in light of common goal(s). Short, iterative learning cycles are guiding future actions and constantly update theories and assumptions underpinning the actions.



Maximize alignment, collaboration and co-creation between stakeholders in all phases of the innovation



In social innovation, sustainable solutions are developed in co-creation *by* and *with* all actors; not *for*. Collaboration rather than competition is the basic attitude. To ensure the many actors in the system, who may have different perspectives and needs, are still working towards the shared, common goal, and the activities are still mutually reinforcing each other, constant alignment is needed between actors and activities. This can be done by keeping track of a common agenda (seen as one of the foundational requirements of social innovation) and organising regular reflective sessions to discuss issues on that agenda (for example: emergent developments/findings (and how to act on those); whether activities lead to the desired results; whether changes in direction are needed and so on).



Create a flexible support structure to develop agency, and to plan, manage and communicate the innovation

In social innovation, a network of actors is working towards achieving the common goals. Ownership and self-guidance are important aspects in how the system operates. However, a flexible, credible and skilled backbone (composed of one or more organisations) is often seen as a foundational requirement. This ‘backbone’ may be tasked with building relationships and trust; coordinating and aligning activities; sharing data and organising reflection upon and interpretation of the data; creating agency; and ensuring two-way communication. Specific tasks may vary according to the stage of development of the innovation and the respective needs of the actors involved.



Invest heavily in building relationships to grow a lasting and inclusive community

In social innovation, actors commit to working together towards long-term goals. Often, key drivers of success and systems changes are early changes related to partnerships, including the deepening of the relationships, the expansion of the relationships, and the degree of commitment and engagement. Trust can be built based on shared interests and honest interactions. Particularly in new initiatives, it takes a long time to build these relations, however, this process, including the design of the common agenda is a prerequisite for starting the results-oriented activities and needed in order to maximise the scale and scope of the changes possible.



Establish and embrace, with and for the community, an inspiring common long-term goal

In social innovation, people work on pressing challenges to create true value for society. In order to ensure commitment and continued support from all actors, for this often long-term process, it pays off to take the time upfront to discuss shared values, dreams and agree upon a societal mission' which resonates with everyone, creates a sense of urgency and purpose and is ethical. In working towards the mission, often smaller goals are developed. The dynamics of the process, in which constant alignment is taking place between activities and goals as well as individual and collective values, can lead to refining and redefining the common goal.



As a community, nurture your own shared identity and culture

In social innovation, as in any initiative, it helps if people who are part of a 'fluid network' feel they are part of something special, a movement they want to belong to. This can be done by nurturing a collective identity and culture (aspects of which may be reflected in language, behaviours, safety, habits and rituals and even physical locations within the community).



Strive for diversity in the composition of the community and use of a variety of resources.

In social innovation, people work on pressing societal challenges. These challenges are complex, systemic, interconnected, and urgent. The learning process and the necessary creativity towards innovation only thrives in a climate where a variety (potpourri) of perspectives are the bases of the creation and experimentation of alternatives. For this, a community needs to welcome people representing diversity in terms of background, domain, culture and role and systematically use a variety of evidence resources. For example, poverty cannot be solved without attention to the interconnections between nutrition, health, infrastructure, and education, as well as redistributive tax policy. Therefore, a resilient system is one where all perspectives can be represented; heterogeneity is key. Out-of-the-box and truly innovative solutions are more likely to stem from a diverse system.





Embed developmental evaluation in the innovation to guide decisions and actions and to interpret impact

The assumption of complexity in social innovation means that the community deals with “a dynamic and constantly emerging set of processes and objects that not only interact with each other but come to be defined by those interactions”. The long-term, mission-orientated processes of working towards goals can be viewed as a continuous and collective learning process. Developmental evaluation supports this learning process and offers a framework to explicate its impact. It directs contemporary action, gives directions towards learning goals and aligns small scale and short-term innovations and experiments to the long-term mission orientation. It also offers the opportunity to integrate, when opportune, a criterium output and outcome-based evaluation as well as evaluation of emergent impact throughout the process. Data in this process is being used intentionally to inform innovation in progress and to show impact for audit purposes. Development evaluation combines the rigour of evaluation (evidence-based, objective) with the role of organisational development coaching (change-oriented, relational). In order to do this, the evaluator is often part of the team working on solutions.