S²CITIES iMEL FRAMEWORK - DRAFT

Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (iMEL) Framework and Strategy for S²Cities

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Responsible for this report: Juan Carlos Muñoz Mora, María Paulina Domínguez Hernández, Manuela Ramírez Agudelo & Andrés Felipe Sánchez Saldarriaga.

Project Director: Juan Carlos Muñoz Mora

iMEL Team: María Paulina Domínguez Hernández
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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, more than half of the global population lives in cities that create an urban-changing world that faces multiple challenges. Social, cultural, ethnic, economic, and material diversity characterize cities all over the globe, but these are also places of stark inequalities materialized in segregated urban landscapes (Nightingale, 2012). These new urbanization dynamics have generated the need for sustainable and resilient infrastructure, which tend to the communities’ economic, social, and political needs while improving social groups’ well-being and quality of life, providing them with safe spaces to develop their individual and community capacities (Egler & Frazao, 2016).

However, the development of urban spaces often relegates the needs of social groups, exacerbating even more inequality and social exclusion. One group, youth, is usually excluded, despite representing around 16% of the global population, and is seldom considered able to contribute to building urban spaces (United Nations, 2015). Young people have special needs and aspirations associated with social, cultural, economic, and political conditions. Nonetheless, they are usually rejected in various community settings, denying them the opportunity for active participation in the planning and development of urbanization policies that might affect the advancement of their social and civic rights (Dennis, 2006). Likewise, cultural and environmental conditions might restrict young people’s appropriation of urban spaces (Fabiansson, 2007; Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2000).

Young people are relevant actors in their communities since developing their capacities will determine the future of next generations (Chawla, 2002). Therefore, their relevance within the social processes of communities must be recognized, allowing them to innovate and transform the social, economic, and political aspects that affect their world. Therefore, it is essential to identify the problems associated with developing the well-being of young people in urban spaces. It is crucial to promote action towards building social and global environments that enable them to create social innovations from exploring their identities and needs (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

The S²Cities is a global program aiming to improve the safety and well-being of young people in urban environments in secondary cities. The program seeks to better understand urban systems and their influence on safety and well-being, build capacity within these systems, and enable youth innovation to solve critical challenges for safer urban environments. The program will also establish a global learning network of cities,
young people, thought leaders, and practitioners in order to foster a better understanding of urban safety for young people.

This document presents the **S²Cities Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (iMEL) Framework** that aims at providing an evidence-based monitoring, evaluation, and learning system to the **S²Cities** program. It will guide the donors, program partners, participating cities, and youth population beneficiaries through the pathway of change fostered by **S²Cities**. Consequently, it can create safer and more inclusive cities for young people in different regions.

Thus, the overarching purpose is to: (1) provide evidence-based insights into the effects of the activities that are to strengthen local capacities to make urban environments safer for young people, and (2) provide profound learnings around relational well-being dimensions (material, relational, and subjective) and improvements in local capacities to enhance youth development.

The iMEL Framework integrates the advantage of the most traditional MEL frameworks with youth-based participatory research. It combines the replicability and inference of the counterfactual quasi- and experimental approach with a theory-based evaluation process. This approach uses mixed methods where qualitative and quantitative data are treated with the same importance and where both the theoretical and community perspectives drive the final analysis (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Thus, the **S²Cities iMEL Framework** offers a dynamic and integrated approach based on a formative assessment, informing each context’s current and potential challenges and opportunities.

This document has four sections. **In the first section**, we start by building a dynamic and flexible context-based Theory of Change (the engine of change), which identifies mechanisms and routes of change that affect the well-being of young people. Then, **in the second section**, we briefly build a methodological and theoretical frame for the **S²Cities iMEL Framework** to identify opportunities and challenges to combining research-based, action, and youth-based participatory approaches into a single framework. **The third section** provides the operationalization of the **S²Cities iMEL Framework** by introducing indicators, milestones, and measurement and evaluation times. Finally, **the fourth section presents the knowledge management system (learning).**

### 2. **S²CITIES: UNDERSTANDING THE ENGINE OF CHANGE**
As an initial step to developing a system for monitoring, evaluating, and learning within the S²Cities program, we need to understand its underlying assumptions, the rationale behind each component, the expected behavior of the different actors, among other factors that might condition or foster the improvement of the safety and well-being of young people in urban environments. Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge that these dimensions are embedded in a particular social and economic context that will shape the relationship between youth participation and the building of a safe urban environment.

The theory of change is one of the tools available for the stylized analysis of the construction and materialization of the effects generated by the interventions, through the systematic analysis of the links between activities, outputs, and outcomes considering the contexts of the communities treated (Connelll & Kubish, 1998).

Consequently, we develop a dynamic and flexible context-based theory of change for S²Cities rooted in the Relational Well-being Framework (RWBC, 2021), Botnar Foundation’s Theory of Change (Botnar Foundation, 2021), and Botnar Foundation’s Evidence to Action Framework (Butcher et al., 2020). S²Cities has four components or engines of change:

1. **System understanding**: Support participating cities to better understand how safe their urban environments are for youth through enhanced monitoring, measurement, data, and engagement with young people.

2. **Capacity & empowerment**: Build local capabilities to make urban environments safer for young people by establishing meaningful engagement and empowerment structures.

3. **Innovation & youth-driven action**: Engage young people in a process that enables them to innovate in order to improve relational well-being and urban safety in a structure that links young people’s ideas to action as well as demonstrates a power shift by providing young people with decision-making responsibility for defined urban safety challenges.

4. **System change**: Use previous components to provoke a broader system change by influencing the underlying elements that predicate safety for young people in urban environments.

These pathways make up the sequential and inter-linked engine of change that will boost the creation of safer urban areas for youth.

## 2.1 WHAT DOES S²CITIES UNDERSTAND BY URBAN SECURITY AND SAFETY?
The S²Cities program understands safety as a complex dimension that needs a comprehensive approach. In the most traditional approach, safety, compared to security, focuses on unintentional threats, while security focuses on threats coming from outside the system, often caused by malicious parties (Bartnes, 2010). In a more profound perspective, safety is not just an end but an indispensable platform or basis upon which people can enjoy other values and activities. Therefore, those different values and activities cannot be enjoyed unless safety is assured (Waldron, 2006).

The construction of the concepts framed in the development of the S²Cities is based in the Relational Well-being Framework (RWBC, 2021), therefore, we can understand security as the mitigation of the occurrence of criminal actions and their adverse effects on the development of life plans, health conditions, and the integrity of their assets, and the concept of safety focuses on prevention and reduction of physical risks associated with the characteristics of the spaces and structures that limit the appropriation of areas by individuals and communities. Additionally, the effects of safety and security are considered at three levels, personal (opting to change), societal (better connected, more equal), and environmental (more sustainable), which in turn contain inter-linked dimensions of well-being: the material (having enough), relational (being connected), and subjective (feeling good).

### 2.2 THE S²CITIES PROGRAM’S EXPECTED IMPACT ON SECURITY AND SAFETY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

We envisage that the combined implementation of the multiple pathways of change will result in the following safety impact in personal, social, and environmental spheres:

**Personal**

The personal sphere of impact is related to the incidence of the program on the lives of each participant. The material dimension refers to the possibility of young people recognizing safety risks that can affect them in their city and having the capacity to act upon them. Finally, the impact of the subjective dimension becomes visible when young people feel safe and valued in their urban environments. The program should change the participants’ perception of safety issues and make them feel that their opinions are considered in urban planning scenarios.

**Social**
The social sphere of impact comprehends the program's influence in building bridges between young people, their communities, and urban stakeholders. The effect within the material dimension manifests into tangible improvements in young people's safety in urban environments. The relational dimension impact materializes when the public and private sector, as well as academic and civil society actors, can routinely collaborate with young people in making their urban environment safer. Lastly, the subjective dimension impact appears when young people's safety becomes a priority in urban planning and development spaces.

Environmental

Cities are material and ecological places, influencing human ways of life (Luccarelli & Røe, 2012). Some safety issues are related directly to environmental conditions. Some of these conditions are caused by human activities and therefore are susceptible to intervention. The program aims to impact these activities, arguing that youth incidence in urban safety planning can produce as a byproduct the prioritization of environmental issues and consequently the betterment of environmental conditions for the entire community.

This can be appreciated within: 1. the material dimension, where urban safety enhances environmental sustainability; 2. the relational dimension, where positive environmental impacts benefit less advantaged city localities and communities; and 3. the subjective dimension, where preventing environmental degradation and promoting biodiversity is as critical to urban young people's safety as the other dimensions.

2.3 PATHWAYS TO MAKING THIS CHANGE HAPPEN

Pathway 1: System understanding

The knowledge of the characteristics and contexts associated with community activities allows for the identification of the opportunities and difficulties that inhabitants face in the development of their life plans, the identification of particularities determines how individuals act in spaces, how they build links with other members of communities, and how the environment promotes or limits their activities. Consequently, advances in the social sciences allow us to recognize that spatial locations have physical, geographic,
social, and economic properties that are relevant for the development of activities and interactions between community actors (Anselin & Cho, 2002).

Therefore, knowledge of the capacities of the system in which the activities are conducted makes it possible to determine the factors associated with the causal routes for the generation of satisfactory changes that transform environments, individuals, and communities. Additionally, it is necessary to recognize the dynamic factor of the characteristics, actions, and links that are generated between individuals, communities, and environments, the flexibility of the S²Cities theory of change allows recognizing the particularities of the systems and their integration in the analysis of the catalysts of change of populations and their spaces.

This pathway is built based on the following assumption:

| Safety results from complex interactions which are often poorly understood, as are the critical areas for potential improvement. |

**Why is it essential to use system understanding to foster safe urban spaces?**

The characteristics of urban physical environments shape the social, personal, and environmental interactions among young people. They shape the understanding of how young people perceive their safety and security in different urban spaces. The complexity of people's behavior and relationships must be analyzed from interdisciplinary strategies and methods to satisfactorily capture the contextual characteristics (Taylor et al, 2020). Therefore, there are several strategies that allow capturing information for the understanding of the system, is extensive empirical evidence on the interaction between urban environments and youth behavior and action.

For example, Dennis (2006) has explored the pertinence of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in gathering information on youth behavior regarding their urban environment; this study makes it possible to identify the tangible impacts of urban policies on youth development. Achieving such a goal requires intermediary steps such as defining straightforward tools that help local governments observe and monitor places useful for the explosion of young people's creativity. McCall and Dunn (2012) complement this analysis by emphasizing the importance of good governance in designing and maintaining the best data collection practices. Based on their research, McCall and Dunn (2012) have found that GIS tools enable the creation of policies focused on incentivizing cultural events. Similarly, Blattman et al. (2021) have discovered that the utilization of spatial devices (e.g., surveillance cameras, among others) reduces negative behaviors such as crime and drug consumption.

Data collection initiatives are essential for the proper urban design of cities, where spaces for everyone, particularly the youth population, should be guaranteed. As they do in marketing studies, the constant observation of places pulling and attracting (young)
people is vital for correctly categorizing activities. For instance, Wridt (2010) has shown that identifying specific sites devoted to physical activities is helpful for children in the development of their life plans, as well as for neighborhood development. In a different field, Rich et al. (2018) have assessed urban initiatives that urge people to think of agricultural projects in urban spaces as productive projects that can help them with some extra income as well as the environment at large.

**How is the program going to achieve system understanding?**

The main activity that composes this pathway to change is *engaging with urban actors to build an understanding of safety predeterminants*. The mechanisms must recognize the particularities of the urban contexts in which young people live so that we can establish observable and measurable tools that present evidence of the reality that young people face. Based on this, this pathway establishes four activities:

1. Involve stakeholders in mapping, engagement, and convening
2. Boost urban safety monitoring systems and data collection
3. Engage young people in gathering data and sharing the understanding of its relational existence
4. Apply ‘systems’ thinking to analyze interconnectivity

**Outputs:**

The outputs that S²Cities's interventions want to produce include the construction of adaptative system models on data inputs and analysis that enable relational understanding of the existing situation. Furthermore, this context-based characterization should develop interventions focused on the real needs of the youth population and the active participation of stakeholders.

**Outcomes:**

The expected outcomes are:

1. **Short-term:** The relational elements of urban safety being understood and built into city action plans.
2. **Long-term:** Authorities viewing urban safety as the outcome of a relational understanding of urban components and integrating this view into future policy and action.

**Pathway 2: Capacity & empowerment**

Starting from the understanding of the systems in which the populations develop, it is possible to identify the routes and causal mechanisms that must be promoted through the interventions, for which, by recognizing the characteristics of the systems, strategies
are built that allow the developing the capacities and skills needed to enhance the effects and impacts of changes. Therefore, capacity-building refers to how individuals, organizations, institutions, and societies develop abilities, individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems, and achieve objectives (Simmons et al., 2011). Traditionally, particularly in capacity-building within communities, it was viewed mainly as a technical process (Missika, 2006) that implies the transfer of knowledge from experts to a community. Nowadays, researchers and multilateral organizations agree that it is crucial to building knowledge from a bottom-up perspective (Philipp & Leonie, 2011), where communities prioritize their problems and establish their goals with the support of resources and a capacity development program.

This pathway is based on the following assumptions:

- Many municipal authorities lack capacity regarding youth engagement and how to address urban safety.
- Young people are often unaware of urban planning and are rarely empowered to participate in it.
- There exist mixed levels of engagement of young people with learning opportunities in the private sector.
- The private sector is part of the problem as well as the solution of creating a safer urban environment.

Why is it essential to develop capacity-building and empowerment in young people?

The ability to understand the communities and the systems in which they develop allows the creation of a framework where the factors that strengthen skills and how to mitigate the gaps are identified. Starting from the characterization of potentialities and weaknesses, actions are built that are focused on the development of capacities, to generate the construction of concepts, links, and methods at a personal, social and environmental level, which respond to the needs and expectations in the development of life plans (Brown et al., 2001). Unlocking and unleashing youth creativity and curiosity will develop their capacity to innovate and cultivate their potential to serve as influential leaders and educators for subsequent generations, positing them to create sustainable strategies to address the plethora of intractable global issues (Bastien & Holmarsdottir, 2017). In this sense, building capacity is a way to empower young people by facilitating deliberative and problem-solving spaces and using tools to create solutions.
The benefits can be summed up in a greater enrolment of young people in urban decision-making, specifically in utilizing and enhancing their resources in addressing local issues and needs. In this way, they will learn to collaborate with other sectors and propose viable innovative ideas. Additionally, it is important to point out that the achievements that occur in the young population must be accompanied by the development of capacities in local authorities and other members of the community, which allows them to recognize the importance and role of youth in society, to accompany and promote their projects from the public and private sectors.

How is the program going to achieve youth’s capacity-building and empowerment?

Capacity will be built through participatory training and bridge-building with urban stakeholders. In that way, there are four main activities that the program contemplates:

- **Identification of capacity gaps**: It is essential to understand why the voice of young people is not taken into account in the authorities’ decisions and private sector’s activities. Utilizing methods like interviews, surveys, and focus groups with young people will help in understanding their vision as well as where the main gaps are.

- **Training with the urban administration**: Policymakers have tools, resources, and experience in the bureaucratic process in the implementation of proposals and interventions; the appropriation of this knowledge by youth populations permits the construction of solutions and programs focused on youth needs.

- **Capacity development with young people and bridge-building**: The appropriation by young people of new knowledge and tools contributes to opening participatory spaces and consolidating their participation in community decision-making processes.

- **Engagement with the private sector**: Spaces that allow the inclusion of young people in the private sector permit them to obtain valuable experiences and skills in developing their professional life as well as creating opportunities.

**Outputs:**

The outputs expected from the capacity-building and empowerment pathway of change are: first, an urban administration aware of what, why, and how to engage young people in providing a safer urban environment. Second, young people will be upskilled, connected, emboldened, aware of opportunities, and invited to take power. Third, a private sector that improves its practices and opens opportunities for young people within this topic. Finally, the government, private industry, and young people will be prepared to engage in innovation incubators.

**Outcomes:**

The expected outcomes of this pathway of change are:
1. **Short-term:** Authorities being better able to engage with and act upon the inputs of young people.

2. **Long-term:** Young people being able to proceed with their lives and careers with extraordinary civic and entrepreneurial engagement capacity.

**Pathway 3: Innovation & youth-driven action**

As mentioned in the previous pathway, the materialization of the generation and improvement of the skills of young people occurs through the construction of solutions to the problems and needs of the spheres in which they develop. Therefore, innovation becomes the tool for change in communities. Urban innovation refers to creating solutions or new ways of adapting to cities’ complex challenges. Population growth, industrialization, urbanization, and direct and indirect environmental damage are the most concerning challenges.

This pathway is based on the following assumptions:

- **Young people are experts of their realities and have the potential to contribute great ideas to urban design.**
- **Young people are more innovative when they can collaborate with others to develop new concepts.**

**Why is it important to involve young people in urban innovation?**

Even if young people are becoming an essential part of the human population, they do not often participate in decision-making spaces (United Nations, 2015). In some scenarios, young people are aware of what their communities need to solve their safety problems, but they often do not have enough tools to influence urban planning. Therefore, it is crucial to: boost young people’s ability to innovate, create solutions to urban challenges, and empower them to share these solutions in decision-making spaces.

Babatunde Osotimehin, the Executive Director of UNFPA in 2014 (the United Nations Population Fund) has said that: “We know that healthy, educated, productive and fully engaged young people are more resilient in the face of individual and societal challenges”; he has also stated that: “as skilled and informed citizens, they can contribute more fully to their communities and nations” (UNFPA, 2014).

**What does youth-led urban innovation challenges look like?**
The mechanisms to reach the goal of youth-led urban innovation for safety participation and collaboration.

Sebba et al. (2009) have developed conceptualizations on effectively engaging and preparing youth to take leadership roles as social innovators to pursue innovative solutions in their own lives and communities. The authors created a framework that studies the drivers, barriers, and facilitators to youth-driven innovation across three domains: (i) the commercial/service domain, (i) the civic/political domain, and (iii) the cultural/subcultural or countercultural domain.

Furthermore, Kempner et al. (2017) have described the main factors that impede youth innovation as: the relative lack of financial resources, limited networks, market barriers, negative perceptions of young people, and lack of business experience. They also highlighted how the lack of data to support policymaking on youth-led innovation remains an overarching concern, with there being significant effects on young people’s ability to create and implement solutions for sustainable development.

What is S²Cities's approach to involving young people in social innovation?

For young people to create safer environments, it is necessary to develop new tools and skills that help them close the gap between their needs and inter-institutional action. At the individual level, capacity-building aims to increase self-efficacy. At the inter-personal level, capacity-building involves building networks and interacting with others to share and build knowledge together (Das et al., 2020). Young people are more innovative when they can gather, bounce ideas off of one another, and collaborate with others to develop new concepts (Sebba et al., 2009).

Social innovation, or grass-roots innovation (Smith et al., 2014), aims at building innovation processes that are socially inclusive toward local communities in terms of the knowledge, processes, and outcomes involved. Social innovators are often well-informed about their environment and their community’s specific needs and contexts, which can be hard to grasp by those on the outside. The main activity of this pathway to change is establishing an innovation incubator that enables young people’s ideas to address safety challenges.

An innovation incubator is a space where people can: collaborate with their peers, receive advice from experts, access valuable tools to develop their projects, and often get grants to materialize them. These spaces for innovation refer not only to physical spaces but also to the time and opportunities needed to innovate (Sebba et al., 2009). An innovation incubator can be a perfect scenario to co-create spaces of freedom for youth. We facilitate experiences, tools, and opportunities that would allow them to explore and apply their potential capabilities and capacities as change-makers (Tolstad et al., 2017).

To develop this innovation incubator, S²Cities identifies five moments:

1. Challenge research, preparation, and framing
2. Ideation
3. Co-design with young people, city, and experts
4. Selection and launch
5. Implementation support and monitoring

Outputs:
The outputs that S²Cities's interventions want to achieve are:

1. Innovations implemented to address specific safety challenges: young people proposing projects that effectively target safety problems in their communities.
2. Enabling young people to innovate for change: young people have enough skills to build innovative projects.

Outcomes:
The expected outcomes are:

1. **Short-term**: Stakeholders (including authorities, young people, and the private sector) witnessing the positive impacts of youth innovation on urban safety.
2. **Long-term**: Mindsets being changed to recognize the capability and importance of engaging young people in urban improvement.

*Pathway 4: System change*

Young people face structural barriers to participation and inclusion in decision-making. Some consider young people to not only be lacking in knowledge and skills (as they have a "romantic and idealized" view), but also as not being legally authorized to take complete charge of their rights and duties. These people focus on the harmful effects of young people’s participation and rule out the positive impact that this population can generate (Francis & Lorenzo, 2002; Hill et al., 2004; Simpson, 1997). Thus, this pathway is focused on changing the mental paradigms of communities regarding the importance of the participation of young people in urban planning processes. It seeks to build young people’s capacities to participate in the urban planning process by sharing successful experiences and replication in different local, national, and global spheres.

Urban spaces are not usually designed for young people or to respond to their needs, limiting their movements to parks and educational institutions and restricting their contribution to communities (Crane & Dee, 2001; Knowles & Yáñez, 2005). This is related to policymakers’ lack of concern in considering the interests, preferences, and needs of young people (Talen et al., 1999). Based on this pathway, the idea is that the intervention effects are replicated in other people and then are scaled up to the community level. The skills and capacities that youth develop in the other pathways, will allow them to change their lives in various ways and these positive developments will stay with them into
Adulthood. The end result is that in the long-term, these youth, as they become adults, transmit these skills and capacities to others, create space for future young people’s involvement in urban spaces, positively impact the market (goods and services), and work towards environmental sustainability (Chawla, 2002).

This pathway is based on the following assumptions:

- City policies and practices are often insufficient to make urban environments safe. The safety of young people is often not a high priority in cities.

- There exists an enormous scope for improving understanding through research, collaboration, and learning across sites.

**Why is it essential to build & share knowledge to catalyze change?**

The effectiveness and positive effects that are generated by the developments of the other pathways outlined above represent a critical pillar for changing social paradigms. Furthermore, the recognition of the importance of young people by their communities is associated with the satisfactory experiences and positive changes in the life histories of youth populations, which helps to achieve knowledge generation which will then be transmitted to people close to them and will remain present in the actions of the young people involved when they advance to other age groups (Frank, 2006). In other words, the recognition of the importance of young people by their community helps to generate and transmit lessons learned for future generations.

**Activities:**

Two main activities compose the system change pathway. The first one consists of building knowledge to catalyze change and is based on conducting research and promoting advocacy and engagement to trigger this change. The second one consists of sharing knowledge to capitalize on and consolidate change, focusing on constructing strategies to communicate lessons learned to different actors of interest at local, national, regional, and international levels.

The foundations of these activities must allow for the effective internalization of practical lessons, in which young people must be allowed to develop in four areas. The first is that young people acquire responsibility and a voice in their social and community environments, where they share with members of other social groups (Horelli & Kaaja, 1998). Second, we must recognize that the capacity development of young people plays a fundamental role in motivating them to take action in the different areas in which the
community requires their participation (Malone, 1999). Third, we must nurture their different professional work styles, characterized by their particular view of the world, and encourage them to take action (Horelli & Kaaja, 2002; Malone, 1999). Finally, the adaptation of the sociopolitical context will enable their effective representation in decision-making and planning scenarios (Horelli & Kaaja, 2002).

Outputs:

The outputs that the S²Cities program wants to produce for the pathway of “system change” are, on the one hand, the knowledge and skills learned by participants on how to create community change (Sutton & Kemp, 2002), and on the other hand, the attitudes and behaviors which encourage young people to be more confident and assertive, as well as develop enthusiasm for planning and community involvement (Frank, 2006).

Outcomes:

The expected results are:

1. **Short-term**: Participating in cities improves the preconditions of system change, which leads to safer urban environments. This is substantiated by addressing youth and community concerns and presenting and implementing feasible recommendations.

2. **Long-term**: Improvements overflow from participating cities to neighboring cities, cities in the global learning network and beyond, all based on ethical and inclusive standards.
In this section, we build the methodological and theoretical structure for the S²Cities iMEL Framework. We aim to identify the opportunities and challenges to combining research-, action-, and youth-based participatory approaches into a single framework. This framework incorporates theoretical bases that identify the mechanisms through which the program affects youth populations and the environments in which they coexist.

The S²Cities iMEL Framework connects the mainstream methods of intervention evaluation (counterfactual and theory-based assessment) with the Participatory Action Research Approach (PAR). This allows us to build a comprehensive system through the participation of communities, measurement strategies, identification of causal effects, and lessons learned based on the communities' experiences, needs, and social challenges. The following figure summarizes the approach:

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1 Some other approaches to participatory research are: Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Participatory Research (PR), Development Leadership Teams in Action (DELTA), and Theatre for Development (TFD).
The *S²Cities iMEL Framework* integrates three central moments:

- **Monitoring**: The purpose of a monitoring system is to oversee the programmatic advances of the expected outcomes across the established levels of the Theory of Change (ToC). A fundamental aspect of the monitoring component is establishing routine records on different matters such as: attendance at sessions, relationships between stakeholders, stakeholders’ satisfaction with the activities proposed, among others (Proctor et al., 2011). Monitoring focuses on the processes and products of the program. Its main objective is to give feedback on the *efficiency* of implementation, suggesting actions for getting back on track when needed (Aquilino et al., 2019).

- **Evaluation**: This is the systematic process of observation, measurement, analysis, and understanding which will generate the knowledge necessary to arrive at evidence-based insights. In the evaluation process, causality is corroborated by measuring the relatedness of assumptions, activities, and outcomes. Thereafter, this information becomes a source of knowledge for learning and decision-making for all stakeholders (Baškarada & Koronios, 2013). In comparison with monitoring processes, evaluation measurements focus more on the *efficacy* of a treatment or activity than the efficiency of the program implementation (Aquilino et al., 2019).
• **Impact**: Impact evaluation is an ex-post measurement of a causal explicative nature—it explains the outcomes (in contrast with the expected results) and the accomplishment of the planned objectives.

### 3.1 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN YOUNG PEOPLE

The PAR approach on implementation and evaluation of interventions is part of the heritage of sociology’s methods. Its essence is collaboration, in other words the idea that research and action must be done ‘with’ people and not ‘on’ or ‘for’ people. In contrast with research that seeks to generate “knowledge for understanding”, participatory research focuses on “knowledge for action”. That is why in participatory research, the emphasis comes from a "bottom-up" viewpoint, with a focus on locally defined priorities and local perspectives (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) finds in collaboration its primary dimension. The idea is that research and action must be done ‘with’ people and not ‘on’ or ‘for’ people. In contrast with research that seeks to generate ‘knowledge for understanding,’ participatory research focuses on ‘knowledge for action.’ In participatory research, the emphasis comes from a ‘bottom-up’ viewpoint, focusing on locally-defined priorities and local perspectives (Cornwall & Jewkes, 2010). In that sense, the participatory approach is an empirical process with emphasis not on outcomes but on processes, which implies that the critical element lies in methods and researchers’ attitudes. In other words:

*Do not monopolize your knowledge nor impose your techniques arrogantly, but respect and combine your skills with the understanding of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers [...] Do not impose your ponderous scientific style for communicating results but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals (The Guardian, 2008).*
Engaging youth in evaluation efforts can lead to positive changes in organizational practices and can boost positive impacts on youth and communities (Roholt, Baizerman, & Hildreth, 2013). To have a successful intervention, it is essential to be responsive and accountable for the needs of young people; young people’s lived experiences, perspectives, and values must inform and support decision-making in a meaningful way (Pereznieto & Harding, 2013).

Developing the iMEL Framework Adaptative Approach contemplates four participatory levels (Oaktree, 2016; Purdue et al., 2018), though the framework aims to promote the third and fourth levels:

1. **Passive participation**: Youth are subjects of an evaluation but have no real opportunity to influence it.
2. **Consultative participation**: External actors source information from young people. Unlike passive participation, each young person has more opportunities to influence the discussion and share their opinion.
3. **Youth as partners**: Youth collaborate in the monitoring and evaluation process with other actors and share decision-making power.
4. **Youth as leaders**: Youth are leaders of the monitoring and evaluation process as well as subjects of a peer-to-peer evaluation.
3.2 EVIDENCED-BASED RESEARCH

The ability to generate knowledge has allowed humanity to develop skills and improve quality of life. The mechanism that has permitted advances in knowledge is research, a systematic and structured form of collecting and analyzing evidence that generates feasible and reliable knowledge. Therefore, the essence of generating expertise lies in the adequate collection of information and characterization of relationships. Based on this, researchers can reliably test findings for the analysis of situations, the generation of new tools, and the solution of problems, which finally, enables the cognitive advances of the population (Ethridge, 2004).

Therefore, relevant evidence permits the generation of learning strategies and practical knowledge application, alongside the transformation of living conditions, making these strategies transmittable and replicable in other contexts, specifically for communities in personal, social, and environmental aspects (Das et al., 2020). The iMEL Framework proposes the use of both participatory and inductive research, utilizing the most relevant elements of each methodology, to achieve a flexible and adaptable framework, using tools based on theoretical and empirical evidence.

The traditional research approach to qualitative participatory methodologies allows the participants to define the research tools used, the objectives as well as other elements of the research design, which typically impedes obtaining generalizable and comparable results. Though these participatory methods do not always allow for the construction of validation and reproducibility measures, they permit us to more deeply understand specific contexts in which the interventions are developed. Again, we aim to utilize triangulation and use the best parts of both participatory and inductive methodologies.

The construction of a new paradigm in participatory research is guided by the triangulation capacity of the mixed methods, enabling the link and the use of qualitative and quantitative tools, allowing the construction of knowledge based on the particularities and needs of the communities, supported in reliable methodological schemes with the ability to provide verification and evidence to theoretical and empirical knowledge (Olsen, 2004). Therefore, triangulation makes it possible to obtain information and data through flexible strategies, which must be accompanied by an adequate definition of indicators supported by the mechanisms of change that trigger implementations. Additionally, it is important to define the moments of measurement, which must be framed in the monitoring of the development of the program and integrated into the intervention activities, allowing the evaluation of the catalyzing effects of change and the obtaining of tools for the appropriation and transmission of...
knowledge integrated with the scaling of the positive effects at the local and regional level.

Consequently, our framework proposes the integration of mixed methods in participatory research as the strategies, tools, and techniques permit the use of both qualitative and quantitative information to better understand the development of interventions as well as the contextual complexities of each community.

The above flexible scheme will allow us to obtain more reliable results. Quantitative component of a mixed method approach permits measuring the magnitude and distribution of impacts and testing statistical differences. In contrast, the qualitative component integrates the description and analysis of social relationships, and also makes it possible to analyze evidence of tangible changes in small-scale projects and interventions, enabling the identification of possible counterfactuals. The various benefits of using mixed methods are: the feasibility of triangulation, which allows for obtaining valid and credible information through various forms; the joint construction of instruments using different techniques; and complementing the findings for a better description of community processes (Bamberger et al., 2015).

Subsequently, these methods that support the convergence of various traditional methodologies are adaptable to the implementation process of interventions, where relevance is given to the versatile and flexible construction of measures and data collection. For the development of measurements and tools that enable the identification of intervention effects, it is crucial to create milestones to help identify community contexts, the various stages in the development of projects, and the various routes of the ToC. For this purpose, the iMEL Framework presents five milestones, created in order to identify the environmental, social, economic, institutional, and political aspects of the community contexts in which the interventions are developed. The milestones use flexible and adaptable indicators that utilize various methods of data collection and analysis (Bamberger, 1998).

4. S²CITIES IMEL IN ACTION

The Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework provides evidence and information for the accountability of interventions, making possible the modification and improvement of the different steps and activities to achieve successful outcomes. Consequently, the operation of the iMEL framework must present the development of when, what, and how to measure the development and effects of the interventions steps.
This section provides some definitions, a measurement timeline divided into five milestones, an overview of the Indicators Reference Sheet, and guidelines related to the management of the indicator system.

### 4.1 MILESTONES

The precision of the development of the indicators is related to establishing measurement times since the interventions are made up of various moments that allow the commensuration of the effects of the interventions, the evaluation of changes, and the identification of improvements in the processes.

The iMEF Framework proposes a timeline of five different milestones:

- **Milestone 1 – City profile:** This milestone comprises a set of ‘contextual’ indicators meant to capture the current sociodemographic regarding young people in the territory. The sources of these indicators are secondary data sets from public documents or surveys.

- **Milestone 2 – Intervention baseline:** At this moment, data will be collected from the participants as a starting point to measure the possible changes the program might have on these young people. Local grantees must collect this information in the first formative meetings with the participants. This information is related to some of the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the ToC.

- **Milestone 3 – Intervention midline evaluation:** The collection of this information will depend on the timeline of the local grantees. This milestone is a follow-up measurement point that will help understand the evolution of capacity-building and empowerment of participants. At the same time, it will serve as feedback for the program implementors, so they can be informed of the advances in pursuing the objectives and make any necessary adjustments.

- **Milestone 4 – Intervention endline evaluation:** The fourth milestone is the endline. This measurement point is related to the outputs and outcomes levels of the ToC and will serve as a comparative point with the baseline to determine if the expected change was achieved. This information must be collected finalizing the innovation incubator meetings with participants. The local grantees are responsible for collecting this data.

- **Milestone 5 – Post-intervention city profile:** The fifth and last milestone is the impact evaluation that will measure the different effects of the intervention on the Relational Well-being Dimensions. The evaluation will also measure the scale
of the intervention on all populations and the possibilities of replication in other contexts. This impact evaluation will put together the significant experiences and lessons learned into a knowledge management system that aims to contribute to the constant betterment of the program.

The following figure summarizes the timeline of data collection:

Figure 3: Timeline of the milestones

It is highly suggested for an impact evaluation to create a pseudo control group formed by the participants that deserted the program. This pseudo control group would allow the iMEL team to compare the program's effects on individuals who completed the program compared to those who did not.

Parallel to the different evaluation milestones is the monitoring system, closely linked to the management indicators extracted from each one of the activities of the ToC that the local grantees will implement in the territories.

4.2 S²CITIES IMEL FRAMEWORK INDICATORS
The materialization of the theory of change of S²Cities lies on the construction of indicators that confirm the routes of change and allow to show the advances, achievements, and improvements that occur in the development of the program. Therefore, the S²Cities iMEL indicators reflect a combination of the mainstream methods used, the Youth Participatory Action Research Approach (PAR), and the ToC of the S²Cities program. Each indicator represents a measurable unit for each element in the ToC, in its various levels and pathways of change. To assist with this, our framework has developed criteria for consolidating an Indicator Reference Sheet: participative, achievable, specific, evidence-based, measurable, and meaningful (PASEM).

- **Participative**: The indicators are built via a co-creation process with the program’s partners. They can be measured using participatory methodologies where stakeholders and beneficiaries are both subjects and active contributors to data collection.

- **Achievable**: The indicators represent a realistic scope of action concerted with the partners in the Indicator Reference Sheet co-creation process. The indicators can be modified in the first year of implementation, adjusting to context possibilities and necessities.

- **Specific**: An indicator’s specificity can be distinguished based on whether it reliably tracks a few or many attributes, which is why the iMEL indicators correspond to a single component of the ToC. That element appeals to specific attributes of the program, both by "pathway of change" and by level (context, activities, outputs, outcomes, and results). They are non-interchangeable with but complementary to the other indicators of the pathways of change to which they belong. For the matters of evaluation, the specificity of indicators is necessary to establish inferences across the different levels of the theory of change.

- **Evidenced-based**: This criterion corresponds to the indicator’s relationship with the observed phenomena and its interactions with program activities. The iMEL indicators should be able to accurately represent the expected changes in the relationship mentioned above.

- **Measurable and meaningful**: The indicators should be approachable and meaningful. They must be formulated by thinking in advance about how they will be collected and measured. These kinds of criteria can guarantee the pertinence and the quality of the data collected in relation to contextual opportunities and limitations.
Using the PASEM criteria, we built the Indicator Reference Sheet (IRS) through a cooperation process among the different partners of the S²Cities program. As a result of the aforementioned co-creation process, more than 100 indicators were proposed, discussed, and consolidated into the reference sheet.

These indicators are divided into four distinct kinds of measurement during the program: initial context, monitoring, evaluation, and impact. For better navigation of the ToC, these indicators can also be filtered by the pathways of change (system understanding, capacity and empowerment, innovation and youth-driven action, and system change) or levels (initial context, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact).

From the ToC, the various levels in each pathway of change are logically concatenated. As a reflection of this, the IRS aims to replicate that rationale in its structure. An example of how that concatenation of indicators in the different levels of the ToC is conveyed in the IRS is represented in the following diagram.

Figure 4: Capacity and empowerment pathway of change ("authorities participate, value, and learn skills to engage young people in decision-making")

### 4.3 S²Cities IMEL Indicators Codebook

Consistent with the previous sections where the when and how to measure the operation of the intervention is presented, this section presents the codebook of the S²Cities indicators where there are characteristics that allow easy identification such as the ID, the relationship of the indicator such as the domains and pathways of the theory of change, frequency of measurement, the type, some sources of information, among other relevant elements for implementation, and development of indicators.
The following chart presents the different categories utilized in the IRS for describing the indicators. An example is provided for each kind of indicator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Initial context indicator example</th>
<th>Monitoring indicator example</th>
<th>Evaluation indicator example</th>
<th>Impact indicator example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Identification code of the indicator in the reference sheet</td>
<td>ID005</td>
<td>ID006</td>
<td>ID007</td>
<td>ID008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathway of change name</td>
<td>Pathway of change in the ToC</td>
<td>Capacity and empowerment</td>
<td>Capacity and empowerment</td>
<td>Capacity and empowerment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain name</td>
<td>Element of the ToC</td>
<td>Many municipal authorities lack capacity regarding youth engagement and how to assess and address urban safety holistically</td>
<td>Identify capacity gaps</td>
<td>Urban administration is aware of what, why, and how to engage young people in making urban environments safer</td>
<td>Young people's safety is a priority concern in urban planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of ToC</td>
<td>Level in the ToC</td>
<td>Initial context</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementary domain code</td>
<td>Relationship of the indicator with other indicators in all paths of change and levels</td>
<td>ID011</td>
<td>ID012</td>
<td>ID013</td>
<td>ID014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Measurement related to the corresponding element of the ToC</td>
<td>Number of programs/scenarios (physical or digital) with the participation of multiple actors (young)</td>
<td>Number of meetings with local authorities dedicated to identifying capacity gaps for the integration of</td>
<td>The extent to which the local authorities have and use a guide or &quot;path of actions&quot; to engage young</td>
<td>The extent to which public policies, programs, and/or projects prioritize young people's safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of indicator (people, local authorities, private sector, NGOs, research groups, among others)</td>
<td>Nature of the indicator (young people's participation in urban decision-making)</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source (Public or private sector secondary data</td>
<td>Local grantees' attendance sheets</td>
<td>Interviews, focus groups, public documents</td>
<td>Local authorities' documentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (The number of times the indicator is measured)</td>
<td>Single time</td>
<td>Single time</td>
<td>Single time</td>
<td>Single time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible (The partner must collect the information)</td>
<td>Regional ICLEI partner</td>
<td>Local grantees</td>
<td>Local grantees</td>
<td>Local grantees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the complete list of indicators, please consult the online annex.

### 4.4 METHODS APPLICATION

This framework's adaptive and flexible capacity is based on recognizing the institutional, political, social, economic, and environmental characteristics of the contexts in which the interventions are developed through indicators adaptable to the approaches of the different projects and the data collection methods. Consequently, the operation of the framework and its construction of the indicators based on the logical routes identified and substantiated through the ToC, which allows the definition of possible counterfactuals that would enable the identification of the impacts of the interventions as well as the description of the levels of analysis based on quantitative and qualitative approaches, characterize the most adjusted measurement activities for each intervention. The following scheme presents some of the suggested methods for collecting data in the interventions.
Available triangulation strategies of mixed methods are related to using different data collection methods, comparative context analysis, diverse conceptual frameworks, and inter-temporal variable analysis. An example of these processes is utilizing a short survey of the beneficiaries who complete the intervention functions and of those who deserted. This strategy permits the construction of a pseudo control group and obtains comparative measures of the project’s impact between groups.

5. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LEARNING)

This knowledge management system (KMS) aims to process the collected data, create insights, and escalate the lessons learned in the S²Cities program to its stakeholders and partners. The KMS seeks to give constant feedback on the program’s processes to adjust and improve it within each implementation in any context. It also expects to share the iMEL learnings with other programs in different contexts, intending for these insights to be valuable and replicable. The system is composed of five phases: 1. Data collection, 2. Systematization, 3. Reporting, 4. Analysis and compilation of lessons learned, and 5. Communication of lessons learned. The next section will describe each phase in more detail.
5.1 PHASE 1: DATA COLLECTION

Sources: The KMS contemplates diverse types of sources from which data can be collected.

- **Public data sets**: Public access documents and datasets that contain sociodemographic information are significant for city profiling.
- **Public, private, and academic research**: Research documents from different sectors may have insights that could be useful to strengthening context information about young people’s roles and necessities.
- **Directly from stakeholders**: Asking the stakeholders for their opinions and perceptions, reporting on their habits and decisions, even measuring their capacities, are ways to harness these inexhaustible sources of information.

Instruments: The KMS envisions using mixed-methods instruments for data collection. The iMEL team will develop a broad toolkit where different qualitative and quantitative tools will be suggested. On the one hand, more traditional data collection tools such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups will be available. On the other hand, more diverse methods, such as participant or non-participant observation, participatory workshops, and cartographies will be presented as alternatives to collecting data. We highly recommend using multiple data sources to provide the best insights for the analysis and conclusions.

5.2 PHASE 2: SYSTEMATIZATION

The systematization process consists of categorizing the data. This first step in the processing of data would allow for, on the one hand, the comparison and analysis of data, and on the other hand, the creation of information that would be useful to guide the decision-making process in the program.
The partners will be responsible for the data collection, systematize survey answers in data sets, and transcribe the qualitative information that they consider pertinent in light of the categorical analysis of variables.

Some criteria must be followed:

- The files suggested are comma separated values (.CSV) or Excel files (.xlsx)
- To use rows for subjects and columns for categories
- Each dataset should have its corresponding codebook

### 5.3 PHASE 3: REPORT

A report will be requested in function of the contractual deliverables from local partners and grantees aligned with the natural development of their activities. The annual report should describe, on the one hand, the advances for each indicator in terms of preliminary results and, on the other hand, the lessons learned in the reported period. The lessons learned should be based on:

- Limitations and barriers
- Opportunities and advantages
- Reflections and insights.

We recommend that the reports include narratives and highlighted participant experiences to complement the lessons learned section.

### 5.4 PHASE 4: ANALYSIS AND COMPILATION OF LESSONS LEARNED

Universidad EAFIT’s iME Lal team will collect the reports, shared evidence, and other sources of information in order to frame the program’s evolution. The team will compare and
analyze these sources, report insights, and suggestions to see which ones can be used in the contexts of other allied cities.

5.5 PHASE 5: COMMUNICATION OF LESSONS LEARNED

The iMEL team will establish clear communication channels through which feedback can be shared with partners and beneficiaries. By doing this, the iMEL team will be aligned with the methodologies proposed by Cities Collab.

Our team will deliver data files and documentation on demand to the strategic advisors, global partners, local partners, and grantees in each step. Datasets and documentation to be provided will include:

- Raw and clean versions of the baseline and endline survey database
- Codebook for each dataset submitted
- Data cleaning and analysis of do-files
- Final analytic dataset
- Corresponding reports on the analysis of information and indicator advances

5.6 ETHICS

As mentioned above, the development of new knowledge can arise from using different methods. The tools and instruments used for this process must provide clear and reliable evidence as well as guarantee the use of ethical practices that allow for the construction of reliable evidence based on intervention transparency, maintaining not only the security of information but also the confidentiality of those involved in the intervention processes.

For this process, the methodology associated with the iMEL Framework highlights the use of security protocols for the data collected, which must have the participants' authorization and generate mechanisms that permit secure storage and reliable information transfer systems. In addition, we use tools that enable information, data, analysis, and results to be observed transparently and securely, allowing the processes and methods used in developing monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities to be reliable according to ethical practices.

On data collection

We will collect and store data via a private server located in Universidad EAFIT, which guarantees that all data is protected by 2048-bit encryption, which will be automatically encrypted in transit. Universidad EAFIT's data files are kept in a unique domain, which
can be thought of as an insulated physical entity that has no relationship with any other part. This ensures that only Universidad EAFIT has access to this data stored in the cloud. Universidad EAFIT can download data from the cloud through encrypted Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) connections.

Qualitative data—including recordings, transcriptions, translations, and coded files—and quantitative data and sample lists will be shared between Universidad EAFIT and the donors via WinSCP, EAFIT’s Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) provider. The SFTP provides secure file access and transfer functionality via password protection and encryption.

Informed consent

Informed consent must be received from respondents before conducting any data collection. A consent form will be used that will be translated into the appropriate local languages. Scripts for interacting with participating households, survey instruments, focus group scripts, and other data collection materials are subject to ethical approval from Universidad EAFIT and Lotte Ladegaard Ethical Consulting before use. Universidad EAFIT’s team will safeguard the privacy and anonymity of all instruments.

Ethical approvals

The evaluation team will strive to maintain high methods, quality, and data security standards. Universidad EAFIT’s team will obtain required ethical approvals for each data collection process through the Universidad EAFIT Ethical Committee and the Global Infrastructure Basel Foundation. Likewise, our team will also get any in-country permissions required by local governments. All data collection activities will adhere to the professional standards of the American Evaluation Association. All data will be handled in such a manner as to protect the identities of informants in any situation where their comments could potentially harm their employment or security. In addition, the evaluation team will safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents. In all cases, and specifically, where data is collected from individuals not acting in their professional capacity as representatives of an organization, our team will obtain their informed consent first.

6. REFERENCES


