



Faculty of Design

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## A Case Study of Theories of Systemic Change and Action: The Ecotrust Canada Home-Lands initiative

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# A Case Study of Theories of Systemic Change and Action

## The Ecotrust Canada Home-Lands initiative



Lewis Muirhead



Anthony Persaud



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# Limitations & Disclaimers

The project:

# **Indigenous Home-Lands Initiative**

The community:

The project:

**A community housing planning and  
decision-making processes  
*for the*  
Indigenous Home-Lands Initiative**

The case study:

**Systemic theories of change and action**

*of the*

**A community's housing planning and  
decision-making processes**

*for the*

**Indigenous Home-Lands Initiative**

The community:

The project:

# CONTEXT



## Home-Lands



### FEATURED

## Re-imagining Indigenous housing as integrated cultural, ecological, and economic systems

As the Indigenous population continues to grow at a rate faster than any other population in Canada, the demand for housing far exceeds the ability of Indigenous governments to build new or appropriate homes. Quite simply, the status quo of residential construction is failing Indigenous communities. At the same time, industrial economies of scale have led to an ironically inefficient situation, in which many Indigenous communities whose territories are “forest-rich” are themselves “frame-poor” despite wholesale logging within their territories. Overcoming this situation requires social and economic innovation, which builds upon and strengthens territorial connections and cultural-ecological values. Why Ecotrust Canada? Ecotrust Canada has a 25-year history of partnering with communities and Indigenous Nations to find practical and innovative solutions that ...

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## WHAT IS AN INDIGENOUS HOUSING SOLUTIONS LAB?

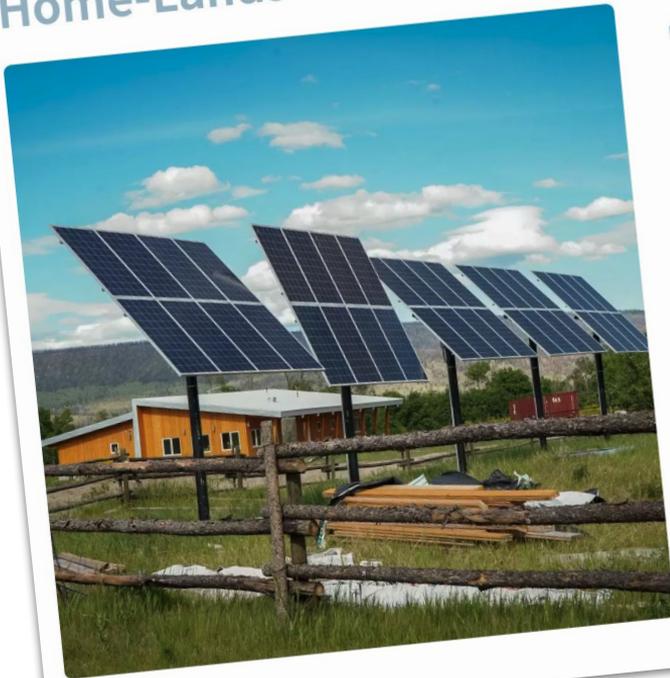


Solutions Labs are an innovative approach to tackling complex societal and community challenges that require transformative systems change. They can be referred to as social innovation labs, design labs, or change labs, and the idea is to take an evidence-based planning and decision-making approach with the help of innovative methods and tools.

Although social innovation has been applied to housing challenges before, Ecotrust Canada's Indigenous Home-Lands Initiative and our partners have sought to apply solutions labs thinking to the unique challenge of Indigenous housing.

We define **Indigenous Housing Solutions Labs** as a structured, community-driven approach to identifying challenges, testing ideas, evaluating potential and sharing possibilities in terms of community governance innovations that enable the building of culturally appropriate housing stock and local economies in Indigenous communities.

# Home-Lands



## FEATURED

### Re-imagining Indigenous housing as integrated cultural, ecological, and economic systems

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# Initiative Process



Art by Sonal Deshmukh (Ecotrust Canada, 2021)

# Method

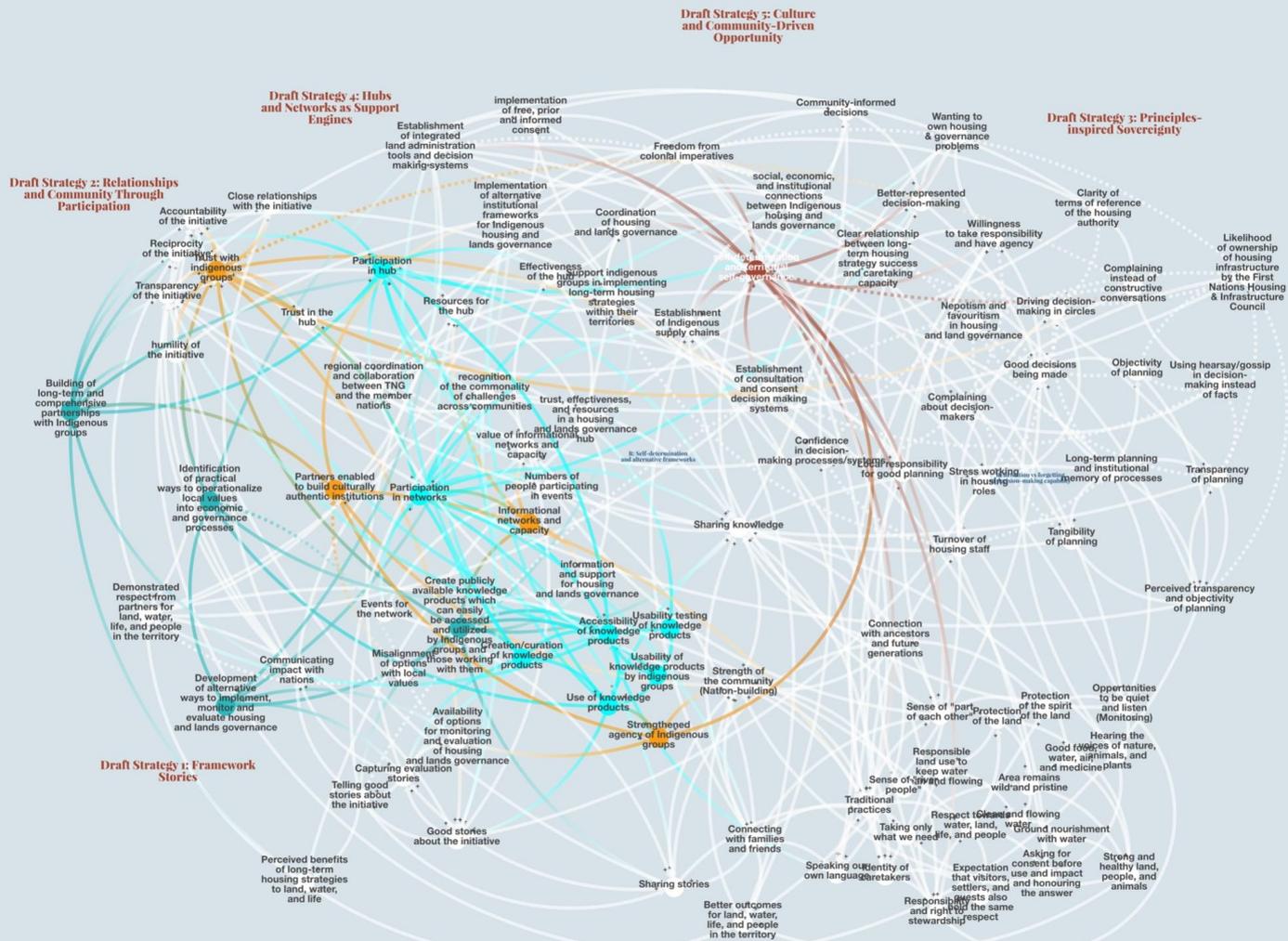
- ✓ Analysis of strategy documents & problem statements
  - Identify and map phenomena and their relationships
- ✓ Map the system
- ✓ Check model with experts
- ✓ Re-model
- ☐ **Check model with community**
  - “Resonance-dissonance testing”
- Re-model
- Conduct leverage analysis
- Identify strategic options

# Systemic Theories of Change & Action

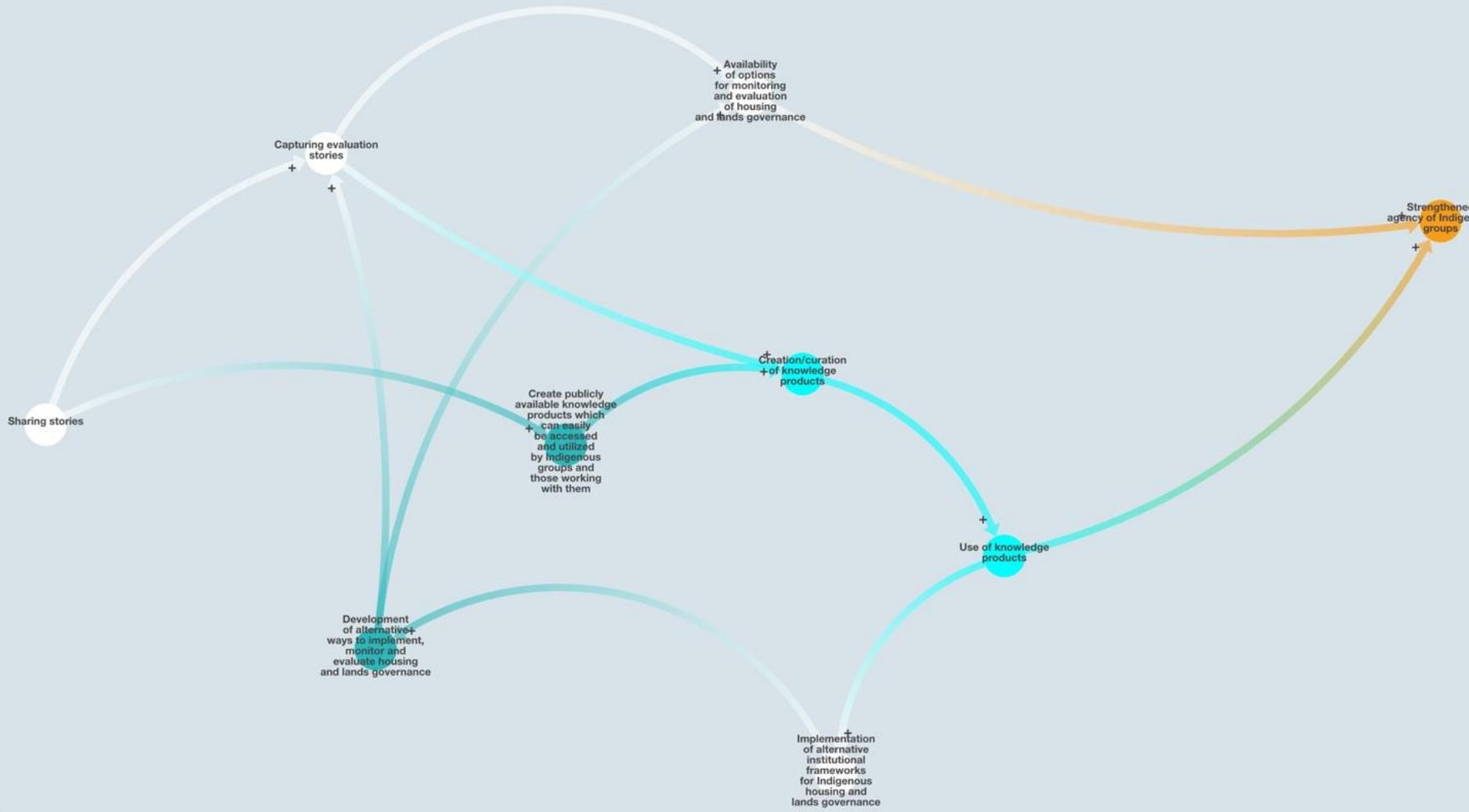
- How does the system work? (**Modelling**)
- Why do the actors behave as they do? (**Understanding**)
- What are the best ways to facilitate change from where we are? (**Strategizing**)
- + Apply leverage analysis to identify phenomena of interest for strategy design (**Leveraging**)

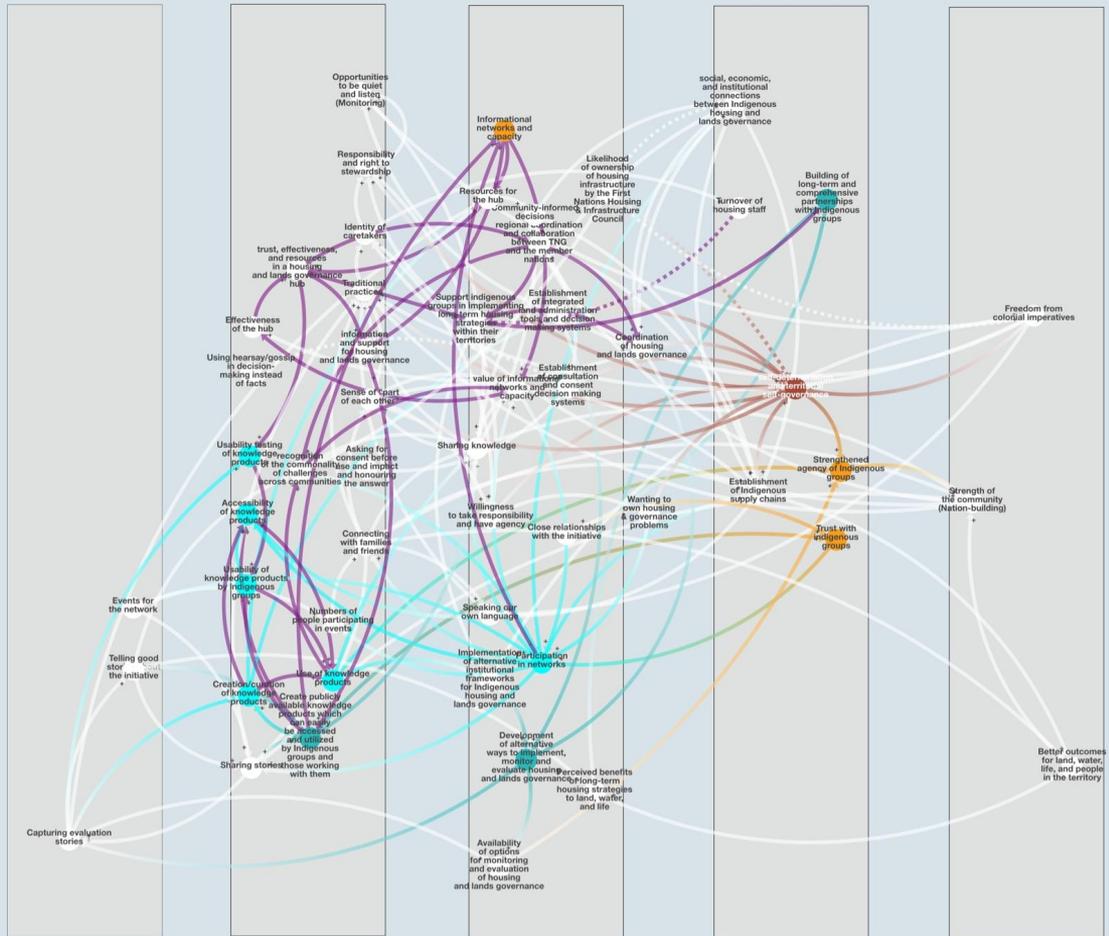
Process: (iterative, incremental)

1. Model the system
2. Identify strategic objectives and actions within the system
3. “Thread” strategies from actions to objectives
4. Create views of the model to show systemic strategies









**Draft Strategy 5: Culture and Community-Driven Opportunity**

**Draft Strategy 4: Hubs and Networks as Support Engines**

**Draft Strategy 3: Principle Inspired Sovereignty**

**Draft Strategy 2: Relations and Community Through Participation**

**Draft Strategy 1: Framework Stories**

**“Inputs” “Activities” “Outputs” “Outcomes” “Impacts”**

# Workshop



# Designing the workshop

Adapting systemic tools to communities

Balancing education and outcomes for the workshop

The history of oppression related to 'school'

Responding to the energy and time in the workshop's flow

# Resonance/dissonance tests (example)

- The test: Traditional practices and principles are (still) important
  - We heard:
    - Default modes of organizing (e.g., Robert's Rules of Order) are colonial and ill-fitted to the community's needs
    - Solution: shift to a more culturally-adaptive model for future meetings
  - Ergo, this section of the model is probably true



# Lessons and takeaways

- **Thinking in (Sub)systems**
  - Different maps of current initiatives, perceived problems, and the community itself each provided paths of understanding through different parts of the system
- **Evaluation indeterminacy**
  - Analysis of the map led to the identification of missing phenomena that influenced the effectiveness of different interventions
- **Systemic design + developmental evaluation = developmental systemic design & evaluation**
  - E.g., resonance and dissonance tests

# Moving forward

- A discomfort: how to involve the community without asking for their labour
- Gaining legitimacy by showing the effectiveness of the approach
- Applying lessons learned in strategizing/workshopping with other nations
- Reusing the model/strategies