



# Whitaker Institute Policy Brief Series

## Policy Brief No.: 66

August 2020

**Cluster:** Applied Systems Thinking

**Theme:** Public-Sector Innovation and Reform

**Further Reading:**

Healthy Ireland (2013) Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 – 2025. Available at: <https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/HealthyIrelandBrochureWA2.pdf>

Domegan, C., McHugh, P., Flaherty, T and Duane, S, (2019) “A Dynamic Stakeholders Framework in a marketing system, *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp.136 – 151.

Domegan, C. and McHugh, P., Stakeholder Analysis in a Systems Setting in *Stakeholder Involvement in Social Marketing*, edited by Kathy Knox, Nuray Buyucek, Krzysztof and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, Routledge Series in Marketing, (2020) Routledge, Singapore.

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**Funding:** This research was conducted with the aid of Healthy Ireland.

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## Systemic Stakeholder Analysis for Policy Making

The ‘new normal’ for policy making, in the face of Covid-19, climate change and the UN SDGs, is to broaden its focus beyond ad hoc, short term sectoral issues to address the systemic, non-linear feedbacks and dynamics that form, grow and evolve in local to global provisioning systems. Policymaking is increasingly an iterative process of complex, balanced, state power with localization and social openness; hierarchy with innovation and just transitions and tradeoffs between prescriptive choice with individual preferences. Policy makers are recognizing that systems behave in ways determined by the actions and reactions of diverse multi-level stakeholders within a system. The movement is away from sector-centric descriptive stakeholder analysis towards systemic stakeholder analysis embracing micro, meso and macro stakeholders, including citizens. In this research an illustrative Active Travel case study is set against the Department of Health in Ireland and its aim to ‘increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life’ through the implementation of the Healthy Ireland Framework (Healthy Ireland, 2013, p. 6).

### Research Findings

Key systemic stakeholder analysis tasks included first, the identification of the focal system boundaries and its adjacent, complimentary and competitive systems. System boundary analysis is important because the relevant stakeholders live and operate in the system, controlling assets, information, communications and networks and influence what the target groups value or do not value and what can and cannot be exchanged. The second task concerned the classification mechanisms of all micro, meso and macro stakeholders. Stakeholders with clearly defined roles and status quo, e.g. dominant or incumbent stakes fitted well into the classification platforms but classification of emerging or dormant stakeholders’ presented difficulties. The third task was a power/influence analysis and the mapping of stakeholder dynamics. A power/influence visualization showed what can be characterized as the ‘value action gap line’, an abstract threshold below which stakeholders’ pro-environmental values, if any, do not entail system-changing actions. Understanding not just the detail but the dynamics at work in a focal system of stakeholders is the fourth and final step in any multi-stakeholder assessment. The analysis focused on the relationships, perceptions, exchanges, actions and reactions between the active and passive stakeholders in the system, however large or small. The stakeholder dynamics within a focal system were non-linear in nature - stakeholders engaged and shifted in any order at any point in time.

### Policy Implications

Our findings highlight that systemic stakeholder analysis demands complexity and dynamic research to understand the multiple stakeholders, their stakes, processes, power and environment. Stakeholders at all levels affect every dimension of a system – its behaviours, structures and resilience. Stakeholder dynamics are fluid, constantly changing and as a result, mapping the stakeholder dynamics is a process, an iterative process. Stakeholder analysis from a systems perspective is pivotal for policy makers to understand how systems originate, operate and develop and critically, how to co-create win-win scenarios for all stakeholders, micro, meso and macro in the face of complex problems and the UN SDGs.