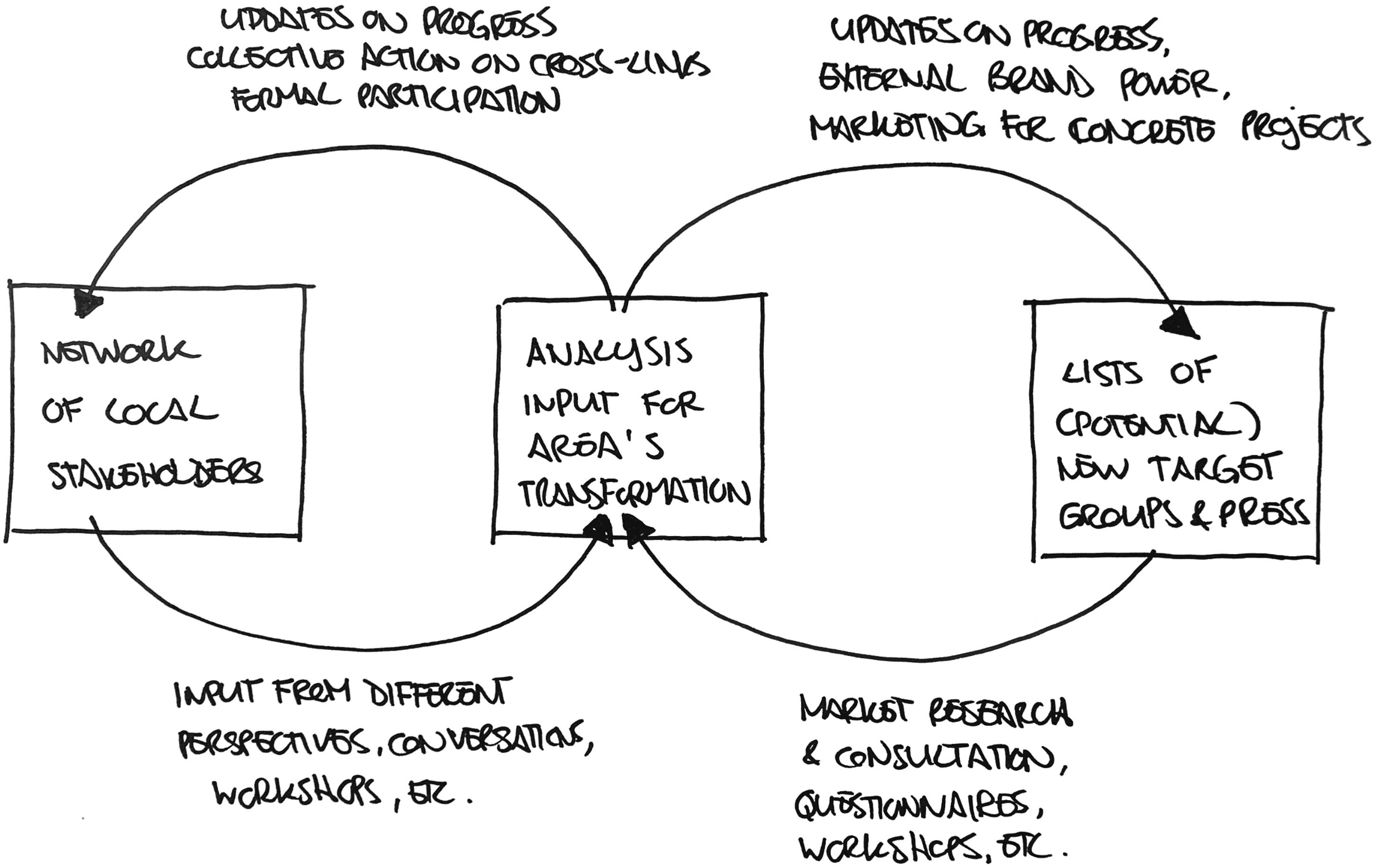
MANUAL FOR SETTING UP YOUR LOCAL DATABASE

Talking to all types of different people and organisations in the area gives you a lot of valuable information and a kind of kaleidoscopic understanding of how the area is perceived and experienced in reality. This may be different from what you as a planner or developer had expected, but this information is really important input for all your visions, plans and activities throughout the years. Therefore, you have to document it well. Build a proper database from the start. It can be a very simple document, a range of different documents and folders, or a more advanced digital tool or platform, but it will help you to structure both hard quantitative local datasets and the softer, tacit knowledge, backgrounds and anecdotes, and of course different ideas and contact details. Make sure you dedicate some effort to keep everything organised and updated over time.

From the software perspective of community engagement and branding & pr, we identify three main types of data you want to keep track of in tight combination: 1) the network of different local stakeholders, 2) the different stakeholders' input on the area and its transformation, and 3) external target groups and press contacts.



1. Network of different local stakeholders

- Make a tab for every stakeholder group (property owners, companies, residents, government, etc.)
- Make columns for basic personal info, like name, function, organisation, contact details
- Add a column with special background remarks, sensitivities, conflicts or anecdotes regarding the area
- Add a column with their main input on the area and its transformation
- Add a column to highlight stakeholders who show willingness to engage or somehow contribute actively
- Add a column for personal interests that may be relevant for the project (sports, music, gardening, etc)

NB: You have to be very careful and discrete with this database. There are sensitive personal data in here and you have to be compliant with all privacy regulations, like GDPR. You cannot share, leak or publish any of this. This is purely for your own internal project administration.

2. Spatial input & data analysis

Here you structure all the different input on the area transformation that you collect during both your stakeholder conversations, on-site actions and community workshops ánd your market research and consultations with potential new target groups.

You can start by for example creating a simple (Excel) matrix in which you structure all input vertically per local theme/topic and horizontally for short, middle and long term. You can give every line of input a colour or label from which stakeholder group it is coming. This will give you a factual yet kaleidoscopic overview of all different input. This can grow and be updated over time, so you may want to save the document as new versions to build an archive for yourself.

This matrix provides you with a source of input which you can copy into a work file where you can start clustering input along (sub)themes. Where do the overlaps overlap, complement or conflict? Where can you spot potential cross-links where you can bring the relevant stakeholder groups together to discuss collective action? What topics can you combine on the agenda? And if you go to the network database, which stakeholders per group should be invited (all of them or do you want to start with the most active and enthusiastic ones or with the ones who also have a personal interest in the topic, etc etc)?

This database forms a tight combination with your own spatial data, research and analysis. In a way it is a critical mirror for your own findings and ideas, a double-check on what the local community thinks about this. If you manage to really integrate this mirroring into your project, you can build an increasingly powerful and diverse support base around the complete area transformation, from tackling concrete and urgent issues on the short term, reaching transformation goals on the middle term and realising large and important transitions on the long term.

The more you do this, the less formal this exercise may need to be because of course you grow a database in your own head as well. Over time you will more and more naturally and rapidly make associations when you talk to stakeholders, so this becomes an ongoing and natural way of working. However, you do want to document everything well. It is an archive full of evidence (in case of formal participation for example) but it also makes sure your work (including your priceless tacit knowledge) is transferable to your colleagues or successors and doesn't get lost along the way.

3. External target groups and press relations

The list of contacts you collect over the years, both local stakeholders and external visitors and other interested parties – who also deserve their own tab in your database – gives you a head start for later marketing activities, for example when the first housing projects are coming up. You have a pipeline already that you can further build on. Not only you but also the different developers and stakeholders in the area. Every individual project can profit from this and further build on this, as your big project has been triggering people's interest and appetite for the area for a long time already.

Add a tab to your contact database for different target groups, for example residents for new housing projects or interested entrepreneurs for the new shops and cafes in the area. Add a column for special remarks and interests, just like you did with the local stakeholders. Sometimes local stakeholders can also be prospects for specific projects. You may copy their data in this tab as well, so you can reach them with targeted marketing messages if you like. Make sure you add a tab for press relations too. These may start very light by inviting them to your placemaking actions, but they can evolve with the area transformation taking more and more concrete and tangible shape.

Try to join forces with local initiatives and project developers where possible. You don't want to overwhelm stakeholders or external target groups with similar messaging from different directions. This can cause confusion or worse, engagement fatigue and this can result in people unsubscribing from everything. You first want to fully utilise existing channels before adding new ones. And even in the new ones you may want to partner up to send a clustered, consistent and powerful message.