

Pentagonal map

Tools for Shared Agendas, No 3

March 2026



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Tools for Shared Agendas is a series of practical instruments designed to support collective work on place-based challenges under conditions of complexity. The tools build on established frameworks in systems thinking and transformative innovation policy and are adapted for use within Shared Agenda processes.

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1. Why systemic diagnosis matters in Shared Agendas processes¹

Shared Agenda processes begin with the articulation of a place-based challenge and the definition of a shared direction of change. The shared direction expresses how the configuration of the place should function differently over time.

Movement toward that direction depends on the emergence and consolidation of alternatives aligned with it. These alternatives may take the form of new infrastructures, governance arrangements, value-chain configurations, financing mechanisms or social practices. Their development is shaped by the system conditions that structure the current configuration.

System conditions operate across multiple dimensions — policies and governance, markets, investment and financing, science, technology and infrastructures, and society and culture. These conditions interact and reinforce one another. Their alignment influences whether alternatives gain traction, stabilise and connect, or remain marginal.

Systemic diagnosis makes these conditions explicit. It provides a structured way to examine how the current configuration is sustained and how it shapes the feasibility of alternatives aligned with the shared direction.

By linking the place-based challenge, the shared direction and the analysis of system conditions, systemic diagnosis establishes the foundation for organising coordinated portfolios of action. It clarifies which facilitators can be strengthened and which inhibitors need to evolve in order to support movement toward the shared direction.

2. How the pentagonal map structures systemic diagnosis

The pentagonal map is used after a place-based challenge has been articulated and a shared direction of change has been defined. It structures the analysis of the system conditions that shape the current configuration in the place and influence the emergence and consolidation of alternatives aligned with that direction.

¹ This tool builds on system analysis frameworks developed within the Transformative Innovation Policy Consortium (TIPC), including resources developed in the [TIP Resource Lab](#). The present version is adapted for use within Shared Agenda processes.

The template organises this diagnosis around five interrelated dimensions:

Policies and governance: Public policies, regulatory frameworks, institutional mandates and coordination arrangements that shape decision-making and responsibility distribution. These conditions influence whether alternatives receive institutional support and coordinated stewardship.

Markets: Value-chain structures, demand patterns, pricing mechanisms and bargaining power arrangements that influence income stability and value capture. Market conditions shape whether alternatives can access demand and operate under viable economic conditions.

Investment and financing: Funding instruments, capital access, risk distribution and sequencing of financial resources that shape feasibility and continuity. Investment conditions influence whether alternatives can emerge, scale and stabilise over time.

Science, technology and infrastructures: Technical knowledge, advisory systems, research linkages and physical infrastructures that condition operational capacity and scaling. These elements shape whether alternatives are technically and logistically feasible in the place.

Society and culture: Norms, expectations, identities and social practices that shape legitimacy, participation and trust. Cultural conditions influence whether alternatives gain social acceptance and collective engagement.

Across these dimensions, actors analyse system conditions in relation to the shared direction and identify facilitators and inhibitors.

Facilitators are system conditions that strengthen the emergence and consolidation of alternatives aligned with the shared direction.

Inhibitors are system conditions that reinforce the existing configuration and shape the pace and orientation of change.

The pentagonal map makes visible how conditions across these five dimensions interact and reinforce one another. This relational reading clarifies how the current configuration is sustained and which conditions would need to evolve for alternatives aligned with the shared direction to consolidate.

In many Shared Agenda processes, biophysical conditions of the place are also examined alongside these dimensions. Water availability, soil characteristics, climate exposure, ecosystems and land capacity shape what is materially feasible across policies, markets, investment and infrastructures. Integrating these conditions grounds systemic diagnosis in the material realities of the place and clarifies the feasibility of alternatives.

3. How SharedAgendas.org uses the pentagonal map

SharedAgendas.org introduces the pentagonal map after a place-based problem has been articulated and a shared direction of change has been defined.

The tool is used to examine the relationship between the current configuration and the shared direction. Actors analyse system conditions across the five dimensions to understand how these conditions shape the persistence of the problem and influence the plausibility of alternatives aligned with the shared direction.

Through facilitated collective discussion, participants identify facilitators and inhibitors that explain the pace and pattern of movement toward the shared direction. The analysis focuses on system conditions.

This structured diagnosis clarifies:

- how the existing configuration is reinforced across dimensions,
- which conditions constrain the consolidation of alternatives,
- which conditions can be strengthened to enable progress toward the shared direction.

The outcome of this exercise provides the analytical basis for organising systemic portfolios of action. Portfolios are designed to influence specific system conditions identified through the pentagonal analysis.

In practice, the pentagonal map is often used together with the multi-level perspective and the theory of change. The multi-level perspective situates dynamics across levels. The pentagonal map clarifies how conditions across dimensions interact. The theory of change connects portfolios to system conditions and to the shared direction.

4. The pentagonal template

