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# What is the Theme

## Defining (a) Challenge

The chosen challenge should necessitate students to engage and collaborate with stakeholders. There can be multiple challenges or themes for selection or a singular challenge for one or more student teams. Organizers can either choose a challenge themselves or empower the participating group to select a challenge or collectively develop a challenge based on a general theme. Both have benefits and drawbacks.

### **Organizers Can Define Challenge Themselves:**

- Students can participate in already existing collaborations or contribute to issues that partners experience within their field.
- These challenges may emerge from within the institute, involving complex problems faced by teachers, researchers, or student-led initiatives. External actors, such as businesses, private or government-owned organizations, and local governments, can also contribute challenges, fostering direct collaboration. The origin of the wicked problem can influence the nature of collaboration, shifting between a consultative approach and an equal partnership.
- Projects may create more impact as they are more interconnected and build on each other and previous projects.
- Projects where relevant stakeholders are involved in the topic of choice, more often generate impact (Groothuijsen, 2021).

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## Empowering the Participating Group:

- Student teams have the freedom to refine broader themes or wicked problems into a concrete challenge of their interest.
- It fosters intrinsic motivation.
- It may take more time as students need to find partners to work with.
- It may take more time before teams delve into their chosen challenge, requiring initial deliberation on the specific aspect of the wicked problem to address collectively.
- May create smaller impact as projects are less interconnected.
- Local community issues are attractive and generate more impact.

Local community issues, for instance, can enhance the attractiveness of a challenge. Addressing a challenge with local impact allows students to witness the tangible results of their efforts, fostering motivation and a sense of ownership. Research generates more impact if the project is not only relevant in general, but for the specific local practice (Groothuijsen, 2021). Tackling a local challenge also empowers participants to take initiative and implement their vision, promoting a sense of responsibility. Furthermore, choosing a local challenge facilitates student engagement, as it connects them with a readily available local network and encourages support from local authorities for the transdisciplinary collaboration.