

Is it important that the answers are user-generated? Could you suggest some responses to participants which would then reduce coding time?

Yes, you can preset a dictionary of possible responses, which then drastically cuts coding time. Ultimately, this choice depends on your research question. Previous uses of the methodology have always given rise to factors being identified by users that were not thought of by the group running the activity. The risk with presetting a dictionary is that you introduce bias in a new way.

To what extent has Systems Effects been used in policy evaluation?

We have begun to use the method to answer evaluative questions using a range of different research designs:

1. Asking a group of stakeholders to map the systemic impact of program or policy and aggregating that data into a System Effects map.
2. In instances where System Effects has been used as a diagnostic tool – i.e. understanding the barriers to food access – which led to the implementation of a new policy or program, comparing barrier maps over time to explore the way the interventions have changed the system.
3. Doing the exercise in pt. 2 and including a control group to simulate elements of a randomized control trial.

How do you interpret the output in order to make recommendations for policy/ practice?

Some more examples of interpretation are available in this presentation (<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/kite/social-renewal/little-heresies/heresy13/>) and in this podcast (<https://www.buzzsprout.com/248820/992850-exploring-complex-systems-through-lived-experiences-using-system-effects-episode-6>).

Does it need training to use?

There is training available upon request, but the software is fairly intuitive and there is a comprehensive user guide available. Most use cases could be successfully completed by organisations without training. For more complicated data work – comparing maps over time, RCTs, etc. we are able to provide additional support around data analysis.