

The potential of participatory approaches in school-based prevention of non-communicable diseases in Mexico

Introduction

- Concerning rise of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and double burden of malnutrition in Mexico
- Active policy environment regarding NCD prevention in adolescents, especially within the school setting
- Highly centralized, top-down education system
- Shift towards bottom-up approaches and shared decision-making to better respond to the specific and local needs

-> assessment of the potential of participatory approaches to develop school-based interventions for NCD prevention in Mexico

Year	Policy
Since 1997	Cash transfer, undernutrition programs (Oportunidades/Progres)
2014	Food taxation policy on sugary non-alcoholic drinks
2020	Law for front-of-pack warning labels
2021	Ban of cartoon characters on packages
2024	Prohibition of junkfood sale in schools
2024	General Law on Adequate and Sustainable Nutrition
2025	Estrategia Nacional Vida Saludable

Fig. 1: Overview of the policy environment in Mexico

Methods

- International literature review of 24 papers
- Different kinds of highly participatory approaches with co-design as a representative concept
- Mix of study protocols and intervention studies

Geographical distribution of intervention settings

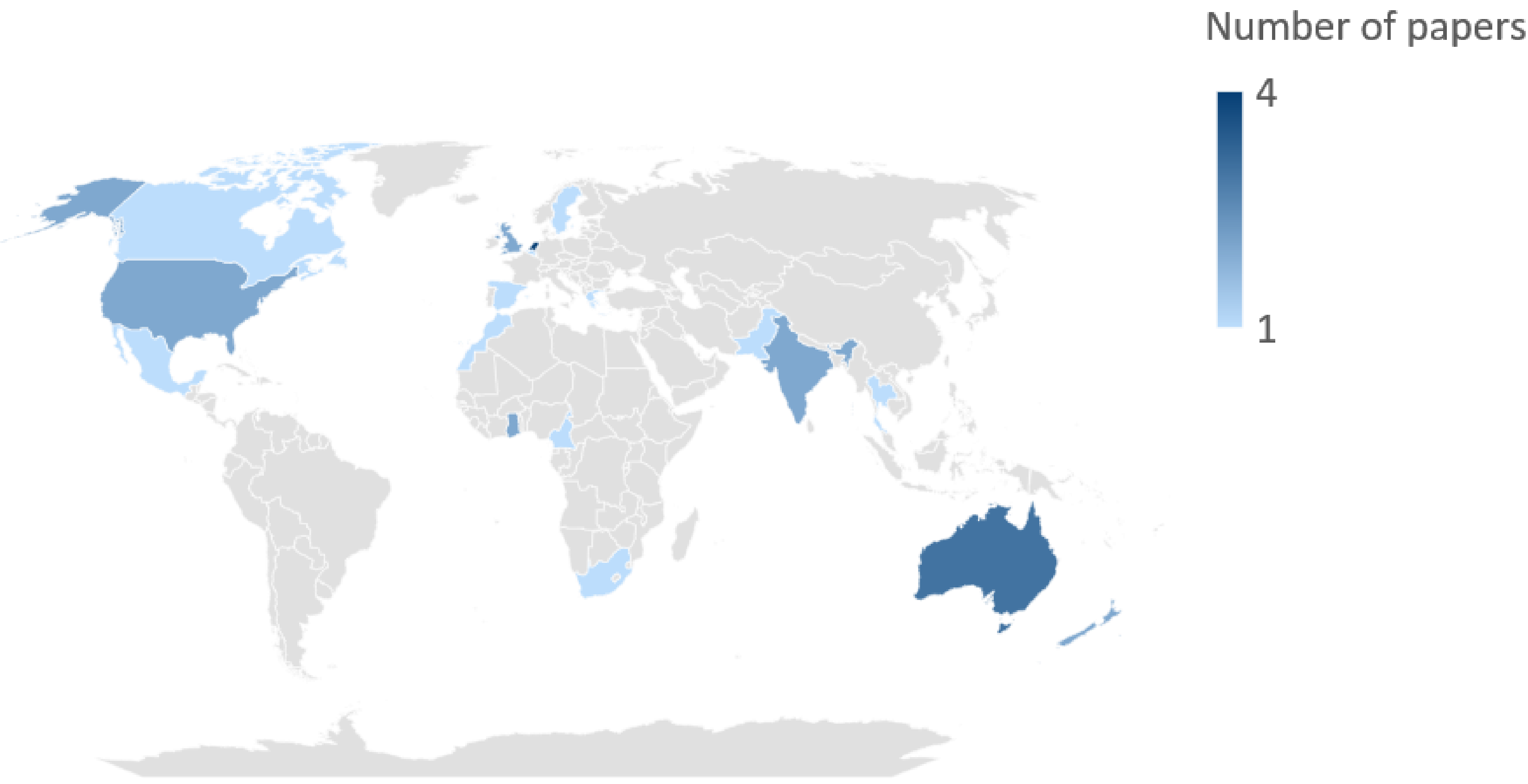


Fig. 2: Overview of papers

Conclusions

- Co-design in school-based NCD prevention as a possible pathway to strengthening future interventions by democratizing power structures and decision-making processes
- Limited research on participatory approaches in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), especially Latin America
- Importance of adapting co-design methods to local contexts and integration into the existing system which in this case is not inherently designed for participatory approaches
- Potential of combining top-down policy measures with bottom-up participatory strategies by informing and refining current policies and programs like Vida Saludable
- Current research in other LMICs: Changemaker project (Karolinska Institutet) and similar interventions by the Africa Academy for Public Health

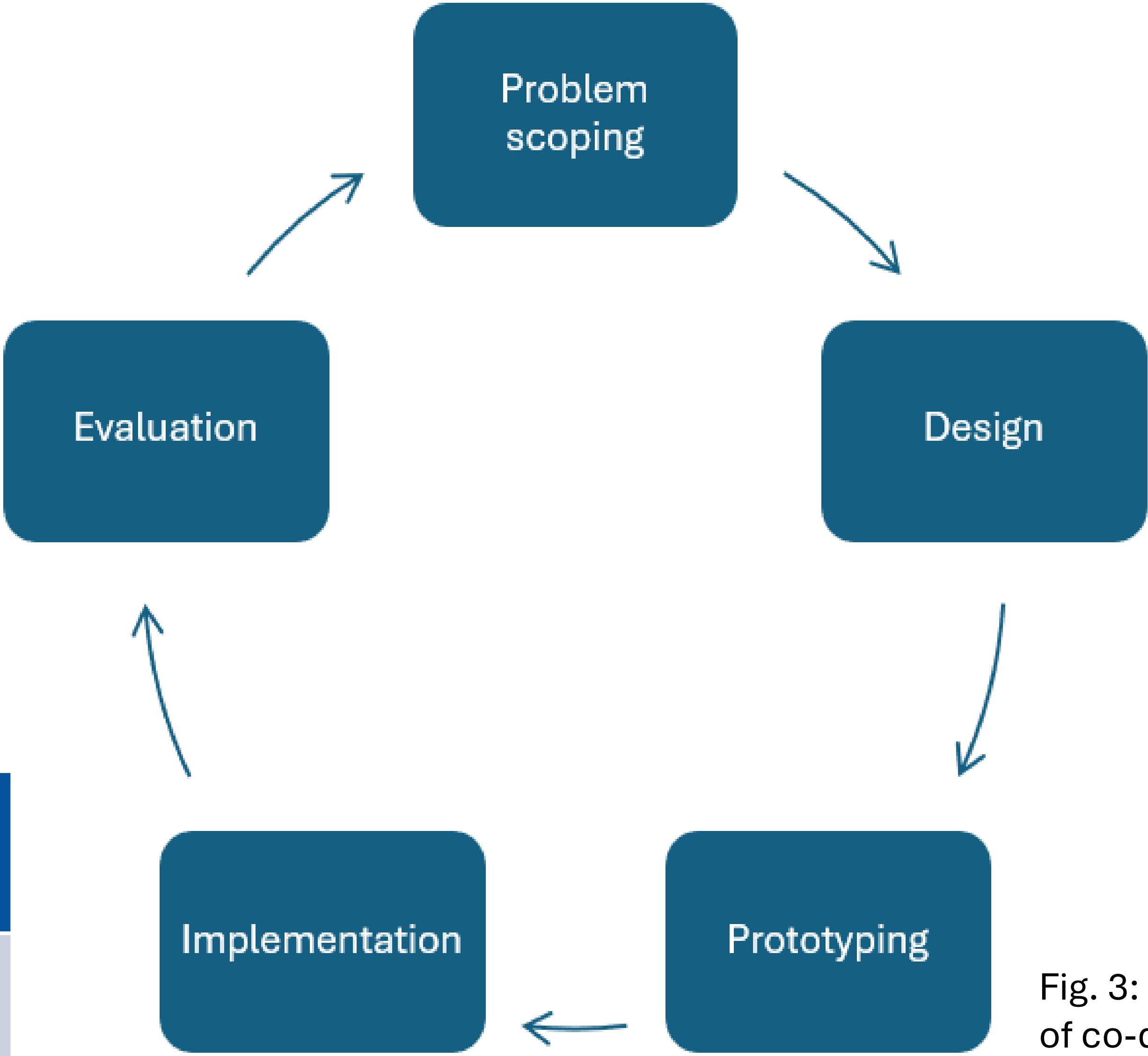


Fig. 3: Typical phases of co-design

Results

- Diverse intervention focus: nutrition- and health literacy, physical activity, food environment, policies, mHealth interventions, and cultural interventions
- Multiple groups of stakeholders: students, families, school staff, experts, researchers and communities
- Most studies on participation occur in high-income countries
- Only limited evidence on effectiveness available
- Common facilitators and barriers across studies, but also high context dependence

Discussion

- Potential to address inequalities and adapt to diverse contexts within the country, especially regarding the double burden of malnutrition and the cultural diversity
- Broader determinants: Individual well-being, mental health, and socioeconomic factors
- Key implementation barriers: Funding, curriculum- and time constraints, power dynamics, and resource gaps



Fig. 4: Students studying in a classroom