



Policy brief

Co-creation experiences of the ALL-Ready Pilot Network

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Summary

Co-creation has become a popular concept across different fields and sectors. However, the implementation in practice is less straightforward for policy makers. In the ALL-Ready project, co-creation methods have been applied and tested through different activities in the project's pilot network involving agroecology Living Labs (LLs) and Research Infrastructures (RIs) established by the project. This policy brief aims to summarise the major outcomes of the co-creation experiences and provides policy recommendations based on these, providing to serve as recommendations for future policy considerations.



One of the co-creation workshops in the 4th pilot network meeting in Montpellier, Photo: ÖMKi

Introduction

Co-creation - in a living lab setting - is a living concept and refers to a form of open innovation, where the development of new value happens in cooperation among the experts and a variety of stakeholders from industry, research, public institutions, and civil society, in which the needs of the user play a central role.

Co-creation in Living Labs (LLs) supports the transition towards agroecology and the co-development of knowledge through tacit and implicit knowledge sharing. Furthermore, it is particularly important to involve the knowledge of local communities and to foster the participation of all actors involved in agroecology from the local to the global level (from farmers to

consumers). This can mobilise and bring together complementary and transversal agroecological expertise which increases the speed and uptake of innovations.

Research Infrastructures (RIs) on the other hand provide services for the research community in the first place. Although co-creation is not a requirement, there are Research Infrastructures that support the agroecology transition through co-design and co-development of research environments. Moreover, stakeholders such as farmers and advisors are becoming more and more involved in systemic experiments, (e.g. redesign of farm systems or long-term monitoring), thereby creating space for open innovation and co-creation processes similar to Living Labs. The ALL-Ready project applied the concept of co-creation through its pilot network which acted as a testbed to not only experiment with the different concepts but also to co-create and co-design new tools and activities for the pilot members and for the larger agroecology community.

Approach and results

Co-creation activities applied a range of methods and mixtures of methods tailored to the goals of each event. These events led to recommendations for the future European Network of Agroecology LLs and RIs, and to the design of a Capacity Building Programme and a Virtual Research Environment for the agroecology community.

The following co-creation methods were used :

- **Validation sessions:** participants discussed a predefined set of topics and ideas to spark debate and arrive at a common understanding or set of preferences. Based on this, tasks or actions were prioritised.
- **Mapping:** this method involves collecting information orally or in written on a given area of interest, and then recording it on an online workboard in which the group can provide feedback.
- **Match-making:** this method helped to identify and connect members with common agroecological interests.
- **Peer assist:** during these sessions 1-2 peer members were invited to provide their experience, insights and knowledge on a commonly identified problem.
- **Carousel brainstorming:** provided space for small groups to get acquainted with new information or review existing information through movement, conversation, and reflection.
- **Two-step evaluation:** feedback, satisfaction and opinions were evaluated through short questionnaires after each meeting, individual and feedback calls. At the end of the project, members filled in a longer survey and participated in a group reflection on experiences about the whole co-creation process.

Results

The 18-month long co-creation process of the pilot network,, has enabled the efficient collection and validation of information and created space for ideation. Co-creation gave the members a sense of ownership and decision-making power over the activities which increased their participation. The iterative nature of the process helped members to evaluate their current LL / RI practices or ways of

thinking. Finally, the co-creation methods facilitated networking, which at its turn nurtures long-term collaboration.

One of the main lessons learned is that fun and interactive methods should be integrated in the co-creation process, otherwise workshops risk becoming “dry” or boring. Furthermore, resorting to online workshops only reduces the potential for co-creation and gathering quality inputs. Face-to-face meetings greatly improve the effectiveness of co-creation by providing a more open and personal environment for discussion and stimulating greater involvement in the exercises.

"Co-creation contributes to a shift from practice-based to system thinking."

*Statement from a pilot network member

Conclusions

The experiences in the ALL-Ready project showed that the involvement of all members in these processes facilitated learning from shared expertise which again further inspired members to experiment, adopt different LL / RI practices or to assess their practices from a different perspective. The co-creation enhanced the sense of ownership and facilitated decision-making. The combination of co-creation methods used in the workshops supported networking, which stimulated long-term collaboration. Finally, monitoring and evaluation of the whole co-creation process is essential and needs to be planned from the beginning to improve future co-creation processes.

Implications and policy recommendations

Purpose of co-creation

Always develop and maintain a shared vision and purpose among different stakeholders in the co-creation process, besides trying to find a solution to a specific problem. In the pilot network, the shared goal of pursuing a transition towards agroecology was a significant motivation for the members to get engaged in the process.

Diverse networks should be strengthened to accelerate innovation

Agroecology LLs and RIs in the pilot network are local or national networks themselves. The network functioned successfully because strong linkages between different sectors, research institutes and perspectives were formed. Such connections are essential for ensuring that new ideas are quickly turned into tangible solutions, thereby facilitating rapid innovations.

Build capacities for co-creation

Successful co-creation requires careful planning, trust-building, and continuous communication to meet the needs of all stakeholders. Therefore, working with experts in co-creation and allocating appropriate resources is necessary.

Develop policies to enable efficient co-creation

Build an adequate operational and financial environment to accelerate co-creation. Also, integrate the co-creation approach into policy-making processes (especially in relation to agriculture) to increase ownership and a sense of contribution to long-term policy decisions.

Evaluation of the co-creation process is a must

An adaptive monitoring and evaluation framework should be put in place at the beginning of the whole co-creation process involving all stakeholders to ensure that conclusions are drawn and required changes are identified.

Further reading

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About ALL-Ready: ALL-Ready is a Coordination and Support Action (CSA) funded by the European Commission (EC) with the aim of preparing a framework for a future European network of Living Labs (LL) and Research Infrastructures (IR) that will enable the transition towards agroecology throughout Europe. Based on the premise that agroecology can strengthen the sustainability and resilience of farming systems, the project will contribute to addressing the multiple challenges that they are facing today including climate change, loss of biodiversity, dwindling resources, degradation of soil and water quality.

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