

Fact Sheet for living labs, research infrastructures, agroecology networks and similar open innovation arrangements

Lessons Learnt from the ALL-Ready Pilot Network

Summary and background

The **pilot network** provided a testbed for real-life experimentation in structuring and operating the future European Network of Agroecology Living Labs and Research Infrastructures. It applied co-creative and participatory methodologies, bringing together 20 pilot members spanning 13 partner countries, that identified as Agroecology Living Labs, Research Infrastructures or other open innovation arrangements. The pilot network **lessons learnt** outlined below serve as recommendations about the opportunities and potential barriers for the future network to consider in order to contribute to the agroecology transition in Europe.



All-Ready pilot network members visiting one of the Open Labs of Occitanum Living Lab, called Open Lab VITI at Le Mas Numérique in France, Photo: ÖMKI

Problem

Establishing the future European network presents multifaceted challenges, including achieving geographical diversity, balancing user scale and maturity, harmonizing varying scopes of activities, ensuring compliance with agroecological criteria, coordinating co-creation and research activities, and fostering collaboration among diverse entities. Due to its specific focus (agroecology) and approach (co-creation), there is little guidance available.

Solution

Before the launch of the future European network, real-life experimentation in the form of a 'pilot' is needed to learn how the problems identified are addressed and how the network's foundations (objectives, structure, communication, operations, activities, methods, etc.) are co-created with the stakeholders. Through testing, monitoring, and

evaluation, the ALL-Ready pilot network provided a set of lessons learnt that can support the building of the future network and potentially similar endeavours.

Benefits

The successful pilot network creation in ALL-Ready offers valuable lessons for replication and upscaling. These insights contribute to making project results more robust, fostering strong collaborations, and strengthening agroecology initiatives. Key benefits of pilot networks include:

- **Effective Tool and Recommendation Testing:** The pilot network served as a valuable small-scale testbed for refining project concepts, tools and recommendations through experimentation and feedback, ensuring practicality, robustness of results and scalability for broader implementation.

- **Enhanced Cross-Collaboration:** It established strong connections and cooperation among agroecology-focused living labs, research infrastructures, and open innovation arrangements across Europe, facilitating knowledge sharing, and networking.
- **Empowering Agroecology Initiatives:** The members of the network have collaboratively learned new methods and tools with the help of the network. They were able to adapt and use these in their living labs and research infrastructures, thereby improving their practices.

*"Participating in the network was very inspiring. It helped to reflect on my own LL by learning from others. Some of the results we produced will be very helpful for the further development of our own activities." **

*Statement from a pilot network member

Selected lessons learnt from the pilot network

Diversity Enhances Perspectives and Experiences: Instead of fixating on one dimension of diversity, like end-user groups, prioritizing diversity in various aspects among organizations (e.g., geography, experience, size, etc.) proved more informative. This approach amplifies diverse perspectives and enriches the collective experience, yielding valuable insights.

Strategic Stakeholder Engagement Plans Foster Ownership and Efficiency: Creating network-wide engagement plans is crucial for leveraging stakeholder expertise. Such plans foster inclusivity, ownership, efficient measurement, and optimize members' impact within the network.

Flexible Engagement Formats for Enhanced Member Involvement: Tailor formats to the cause, stakeholders, and participation levels. Identify and address barriers, like time constraints, for active participation. Include formats like peer exchanges, webinars, workshops, and visits for engagement.

Tailoring Content for Continuous Engagement: Aligning activity content with members' needs is essential. Integrating practical research on agroecology within network activities is highly recommended while maintaining continuous capacity-building (tailored to agroecology) for the members.

Practical recommendations

Ensure Member Diversity on Different Levels: Consider geographical variations as a priority, alongside variations among key end-user groups, sizes, scales, and scopes to optimize effectiveness and relevance.

Implement a stakeholder engagement plan for the future network, ensuring effective resource utilization, involvement in relevant activities, and fostering inclusivity, ownership, and measurable impact.

Prioritize Co-Design: Prioritize co-design with a similar-sized group for efficient collaboration within the future network. It streamlines input gathering, revision, and feedback, providing a practical approach given resource and time constraints.

Align with Member Needs and Initiative Type: Consider members' diversity, stakeholder facets, and nuanced interests when designing network activities, research, or capacity-building content. Ensure that content closely aligns with members' specific needs to optimize engagement. Customize activities based on the initiative type (Agroecology Living Labs or Research Infrastructures) to enhance engagement. Recognize living labs' preference for interactive sessions and provide in-depth discussions on specialized agroecological topics for research infrastructures.

Involve Key Stakeholder Representatives: Engage representatives from key stakeholder groups from different living labs / research infrastructures in co-creation and content planning to advocate for network members' perspectives and ensure inclusivity and comprehensive representation.

Further information

PILOT NETWORK

- Check here for the detailed definition and characteristics of the ALL-Ready pilot network (<https://www.all-ready-project.eu/all-ri/pilot-network.html>)

FURTHER READINGS

- Deliverable D3.1 The Stakeholder Engagement Plan, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8153976>
- Deliverable D3.2 Report of the ALL-Ready Pilot Network Experiences, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8163876> (second version to be published in early 2024)
- Deliverable D3.3 Booklet on overall stakeholder recommendations for the implementation of the future European Agroecology LL and RI Network (to be published in early 2024)

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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Authors: Antonia Riedel, Korinna Varga, Ana Frelih-Larsen

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