

Assessment tool

Conditions for a Living Lab






Intro

This is a practical tool for assessing the conditions for a Living Lab. On the one hand, the tool can be used to assess the suitability of a given situation for the Living Lab approach and on the other hand, the tool can be of service in choosing a suitable setting for starting a Living Lab. Also, the tool can provide insight into the expected challenges and points of attention when setting up a Living Lab in a certain situation. The Tool was developed based on the monitoring and learning of the Living Labs as part of the project Agrilink

A Living Lab is a multi actor open innovation processes bringing together public and private users and stakeholders to co-create, validate, and test new services, business ideas, markets and technologies in 'real-life' contexts. It is a valuable and popular approach in innovation processes. Due to its popularity the approach is nowadays applied to a variety of situations and challenges. This tool aims to better inform the decision to start a Living Lab and to contribute to more precision in applying the Living Lab approach to appropriate conditions. In this way the aim is to increase the chance that the Living Lab approach realises its potential to strengthening the Knowledge and Innovation systems. The tool presupposes a good basic understanding of the Living Lab approach. In case you want to develop this, please have a look at the E learning on Living Labs at <https://www.agrilink2020.eu/e-learning-for-living-labs/>

The target group of this tool consist of living Lab initiators, those actors who would like to start a Living Lab or who want to explore if a Living Lab could contribute to working on a certain challenge. These can be a policy maker, an innovation broker, a community worker or a researcher. It may be that this Living Lab initiator later also takes on the role of LL facilitator, but it may be also be a policy maker who wants to determine whether funding a Living Lab is appropriate in a certain situation. The tool does assumes that the Living Lab initiator has a challenge in mind and knows the stakeholder field .

The Tool introduces of four main conditions which have shown to influences the functioning and effectiveness of a Living Lab. For each condition simple assessment questions are given with suggestions how to deal with different outcomes. More than a tool to measure, it is a checklist that supports one's own assessment. It is not the pretense that these 4 conditions are comprehensive. By assessing these four conditions the Living Lab initiator can form a good picture of the suitability of a certain situation for a Living Lab and develop an d take appropriate action.



Complexity of the Challenge

This refers to the challenge to which you want the Living Lab to contribute to. Understanding the level of complexity of the challenge is relevant for anticipating the ease or difficulty of running a Living Lab. It is important that the challenge is complex enough to justify Living Lab and harmonious enough to allow collaboration. The questions below help to assess this.



Assessment questions

Do stakeholders agree about the **direction** of change?

Do stakeholders agree on the possible **solutions** to the challenge?

Is the challenge in **alignment** with the private interest of the end user?

Yes

A bit

No

If none of these conditions are met, it places high demands on the facilitator. When stakeholders have different ideas on the direction of change, it is advisable to integrate an exploratory negotiation phase before the actual Living Lab start. If diverse ideas exist on the possible solutions it is important to reserve enough time and select appropriate tools to allow participants to come to agreement which solution will be further developed. When the sustainability challenge conflicts with the direct private interest of the end user is a tricky situation for a Living Lab because this approach assumes some harmony to co-create working together. One can include a preamble with activities for raising awareness of the sustainability challenge and each's role in solving it.

1

Enabling Setting

This condition refers to the level of support and latitude for experimentation, both is required for a Living Lab to flourish. It is important that the setting of the Living Lab allows space for experimentation and sufficient commitment of the stakeholders. The questions below help to assess whether the setting is supportive of a Living Lab.



Assessment questions

Is there room for experimentation and **flexibility** in outcome of the process?

Can enough **resources** be mobilised for the process?

Are the consequences of **failure** acceptable?

Are the main stakeholders willing to **commit** long enough?

Yes

A bit

No

If these conditions are not well covered in the preparation of the Living Lab it creates undesirable hurdles and bumps in the Living Lab process. It is important to consciencely check these requirements and organise them as much as possible. It is important to take time to organise the Living Lab and also identify these enabling actors as part of the living Lab. A preparatory phase as part of the Living Lab process. Liaising with another project can be an efficient way to improve resource availability. However this may compromise the room for experimentation and flexibility. Here committing long enough with the sister project. If this conditions cannot be met, it should be seriously questioned whther to start a Living Lab at all.

2



Energy to Move

Running a Living Lab requires that actors want to work together on the challenge. It requires a quit high dedication from all involved. The energy to move is expressed in the capacity and willingness of stakeholders to engage in the Living Lab. It is important that stakeholders recognize their interdependence and acknowledge that different types of knowledge or expertise contribute to solve the problem. Below the questions to assess the energy to move.

Assessment questions

Do the stakeholders experience a sense of **urgency** to change?

Do the stakeholders have the **capacity** to engage in the Living Lab?

Do stakeholders recognise their **interdependence** in solving the challenge?

Do stakeholders **trust** each other enough to collaborate?

Yes

A bit

No

3

Without energy the Living Lab will stumble, lose momentum or not function at all. The complete absence of any one of these aspects can make it impossible to organise a Living Lab process. However, inspiring and maintaining energy to move is a key and integral task in any Living Lab. A thorough understanding of the initial sense of urgency, appropriate capacity, perceptions of interdependence and trust is an important requirement for designing the Living Lab process. Taking time to build trust and including deliberate exercises or explorations can help to creating an increasingly energetic and safe ambiance as basis for the co-creation process.

Proficient facilitation

The role of the facilitator is key to the success of a Living Lab.. The facilitator needs relations, leadership, skills and experience to provide guidance and at the same time be open to unexpected opportunities for learning and innovation. Facilitating a Living Lab requires balancing leadership and attained mandate with a curious and flexible attitude. Below the questions to reflect on these aspects:



Assessment questions

Does the facilitator combine **leadership** with curiosity and flexibility?

Is the Living Lab taking place in the **influence** sphere of the facilitator?

Does the facilitator have access to diversity of **methods** and tools?

Is the facilitator able to select appropriate tools in **unexpected** situations?

Yes

A bit

No

4

This condition is the most easy to influence. Given the important role of the facilitator the selection and preparation deserves due attention. Experience is valuable especially for the unexpected situations that can be expected in any Living Lab process. But constructive relations, social skills and an attitude of serving leadership seems to be the most important selection criteria. If the facilitator has little experience in facilitation, skills and methodology can very well be developed through training and practice. The E course on Living Labs can be a good start. Since each Living Lab is a learning experience for all involved it is advisable to find a colleague facilitator as sparring partner for peer-to-peer learning along the way.

Checklist

Do stakeholders agree about the **direction** of change?

Do stakeholders agree on the possible **solutions** to the challenge?

Is the challenge in **alignment** with the private interest of the end user?

Is there room for experimentation and **flexibility** in outcome?

Can enough **resources** be mobilised for the process?

Are the consequences of **failure** acceptable?

Are the main stakeholders willing to **commit**?

Do the stakeholders experience a sense of **urgency** to change?

Do the stakeholders have the **capacity** to engage in the Living Lab?

Do stakeholders recognise **interdependence** in the challenge?

Do stakeholders **trust** each other enough to collaborate?

Does the facilitator combine **leadership** with a curiosity and flexibility?

Is the Living Lab taking place in the **influence** sphere of the facilitator?

Does the facilitator have access to diversity of **methods** and tools?

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For more background on Living Labs and Agrilink:

<https://www.agrilink2020.eu>

