

B08: Living Labs: Reflecting on the structuration of transformation; addressing impacts, replicability and scalability - Case Studies (2/4)

Session Chair: Julia Backhaus, Julien Forbat
Room: B: Omnia, R: Auditorium (max. 108)

Operationalising Food Systems Transformations within Living Labs of the Healthy Food Africa Project

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A growing number of voices are highlighting the need to change the overarching structure of food-related policies and practices. However, transforming these policies and practices to better support nutritious and healthy food systems outcomes is a complex task. The idea that knowledge should be created or collected not to merely understand the world or how people think, but to actively contribute to sustainable transformative practices in the real world is becoming increasingly important. Hence, Living Labs are often seen as test beds for these sustainable transformative processes. The Living Labs approach has been extensively used as a potential tool for co-production of problem articulation, problem analysis, the identification of solutions and their implementation. Ideally, in a Living Lab, policy-makers play a key role in the transition from knowledge creation to policy implementation.

Nevertheless, despite these unique characteristics which make living labs ideal for food system transformations, it is still unclear how living labs actually function in real-life contexts. Multi-stakeholder platforms in Living Labs have been criticised as just talk or idle chat platforms that are cut off from decision-making about important issues. Such criticism is based on concerns about the lack of political will to genuinely integrate outcomes from multi-stakeholder platforms in Living Labs into policy implementation. How to move from talk (knowledge creation) to action (policy implementation) or how to connect policy with practice in a Living Lab has not received enough attention in existing literature on sustainability transformations. Therefore, what is needed in different real-life contexts to make living labs more effective, inclusive or just from a sustainability angle? To address this knowledge gap, this study utilises experiences with Living Labs for food system transformation and innovation in 10 localities across Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Zambia, Benin and Uganda) within the framework of the Horizon2020 Healthy Food Africa project.

The key finding is the need for Living Labs to create shared visions between citizens and policy-makers at an early stage in the co-creation process. This will merge top-down policy actors with bottom-up understandings and approaches. This finding contributes to enhancing the capabilities of Living Labs in making meaningful contributions to healthy and sustainable food system transformations. It provides greater clarity on processes that address imperatives and mobilise the drivers of effective place-based governance for sustainability in Living Labs.