

# LIVING LABS AND MULTI-ACTOR PLATFORMS IN RURAL AREAS

On the 13 and 14 June 2022, the two-day event *Living Labs and Multi-Actor Platforms in rural areas* was held in Pisa, Italy. The workshop was organised by three projects - DESIRA, MOVING, and SHERPA - which are all focused on exploring innovative ways to engage rural communities in sustainable development.

The workshop aimed to bring together practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to share experiences and reflect on how to consolidate methods and concepts around the Living Lab (LL) and Multi-Actor Platform (MAP) approach. Participants shared their experiences of implementing LL and MAP approaches in different contexts, highlighting successful strategies and lessons learned.

Overall, the Living Labs and Multi-Actor Platforms in rural areas workshop was a valuable opportunity for stakeholders to exchange knowledge and ideas, and to develop a shared understanding of how to promote sustainable development in rural areas. This report provides a summary of the key themes, discussions, and outcomes of the workshop.



## FOREWORD

**Gianluca Brunori**

DESIRA coordinator, University of Pisa

This workshop responded to the need for reflection that emerged from research involvement in multi-actor groups such as Living Labs Multi-Actor Platforms, Practice Groups, Operational Groups, and many others. All of them endeavour to link policy, practice, and research. They support a better understanding of complex systems, improve adherence to users' needs, decrease the time-to-market of innovation, provide legitimacy and increase the relevance of research. The need for reflection focused on three main aspects: how to improve multi-actor groups' transformative power, how to improve multi-actor group-based research methodologies, and how to assess the activity of Living Labs.

In particular, the workshop was centred upon the following questions: to what extent is knowledge generated in Living Labs scientifically robust? How to conciliate methodological rigor with adherence to participants' needs? How to use the data gathered through Living Lab activities for scientific purposes? How to give credit to Living Lab participants in scientific publications?





## **THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS: WHAT IS THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH TO SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE?**

**Guido Caniglia**  
University of Pisa

Sustainability science needs more systematic approaches for mobilising knowledge in support of interventions that may bring about transformative change. Numerous examples from inter- and transdisciplinary projects show this clearly. In the talk with the title: “The devil is in the details: What is the contribution of participatory research to scientific knowledge?”, Mr Caniglia contended that we should learn how to generate and value forms of action-oriented knowledge for sustainability. These are kinds of knowledge that emerge when working in integrated ways with the many kinds of knowledge involved in the (1) shared design, (2) enactment and (3) contextual realisation of change.

The pluralistic and integrated approach Guido presented rejects technocratic solutions to complex sustainability challenges and foregrounds individual and social learning. Using examples from his research in sustainability education as well as in transdisciplinary sustainability science, he emphasised the importance of: (1) Experimenting through action between plans and emergence, (2) Generating understandings through multivocal processes, (3) Balancing pluralism and integration for action-oriented knowledge (4) Theorising as contextual and action-oriented assembling.

Mr Caniglia argued that research institutions devoted to sustainability should focus more on creating the conditions for experimenting with multiple kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing to foster sustainability-oriented learning.



## **WORDS FROM HORIZON 2020 PROJECT SHERPA: SUSTAINABLE HUB TO ENGAGE INTO RURAL POLICIES WITH ACTORS**

**Olivier Chartier**

SHERPA coordinator, ECORYS Belgium

Rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy. Rural areas play a crucial role in finding solutions for Europe's challenges with regard to nature, food, energy and social cohesion. However, in policy and research, rural perspectives and interests are often marginalised or ignored. The SHERPA project aims to gather knowledge and opinions that contribute to the formulation of recommendations for future policies relevant to strengthen EU rural areas. The main vehicles are the 41 Multi Actor Platforms (MAPs) that operate as science-society-policy interfaces. They aim to engage citizens, researchers and policymakers in debates at local and EU levels for the formulation of modern rural policies and research agendas. The MAPs are monitored by a dedicated monitor who uses our M&E tool. Spaces for exchange foster joint analysis and learning between MAPs. The M&E so far shows that MAPs can drive transformative change via four routes: 1) policy 2) rural dialogue, 3) connecting people and realities and 4) concrete action. Instead of research, MAPs are about learning, co-construction of meaning, translating insights and connecting realities. It is a sensitive balancing act to combine a clear common objective and principles with flexibility and room for experimentation to fit the diversity of rural realities. The second phase, M&E, focusses on understanding precisely how added value is created for the different actor groups, and how SHERPA is making rural voices heard in order to realise the EU vision of stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas in Europe.

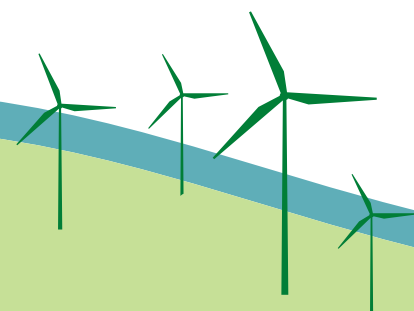
## **WORDS FROM HORIZON 2020 PROJECT MOVING: MOUNTAIN VALORISATION THROUGH INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND GREEN GROWTH**



**Mar Delgado**

MOVING coordinator, University of Cordoba

Sustainability transformations require unprecedented levels of collaboration, coordination, learning, and commitment across disciplines, knowledge systems, sectors, and scales. Novel transdisciplinary and participatory approaches are needed to enable collaborative development of actionable and solution-oriented knowledge. Here we shared our 20-month experience of the H2020 MOVING Project with a transdisciplinary community of practice (COP) that includes 23 regional multi-actor-platforms (MAPs) from 16 European countries and 1 additional EU level MAP. MOVING Project's objective is to build capacities and co-develop policy frameworks across Europe for the establishment of new or upgraded/upscaled value chains (VCs) that contribute to the resilience and sustainability of mountain areas. MOVING COP is understood as a European-wide science-society-policy interface, engaging stakeholders (actors related to the VCs in the area, policy makers, researchers, organisations, businesses, and authorities) around resilience in the future of mountain regions and their value chains. It aims to generate innovative responses to the challenges that mountain value chains are facing and to contribute to the next generation of policies for mountain rural areas. We explore a COP/MAP methodology for knowledge integration across diverse perspectives. Additionally, we apply a Monitoring and Evaluation Tool to gradually analyse the evolution and performance of the COP/MAPs. By involving the MOVING COP in the co-design and validation of the research outputs during the four years of the project, we aim to carry out: 1) Participatory vulnerability analysis of the land use systems where strategic VC assets are produced; 2) Participatory appraisal of vulnerability and performance of the VCs; 3) Participatory comparative assessment and critical benchmarking of the VC clusters; 4) Participatory multi-level foresight analysis at regional, cross-regional, and pan-European levels; and finally, 5) Participatory policy analysis and roadmap to create a conducive environment to enable the repertoire of strategic options.



# EXPERIENCES COMING FROM THE LIVING LABS AND MULTI-ACTOR PLATFORMS



## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN BELGIUM

Daniel Van der Velden (ILVO)

The Living Lab in Flanders became particularly relevant during the DESIRA research process, as the questions on monitoring ammonia emissions are closely tied to a wider political-environmental crisis around ammonia emissions. The Flemish government is seeking to reduce emissions of ammonia, especially from the livestock sector which is the predominant emitter of these pollutants. This has created the potential for a tense atmosphere in the Living Lab, with friction arising between different actors (e.g., governments, nature organisations, farmers). However, the Living Lab had actors from the livestock industry (farmers, farmer organisations, agricultural input companies) as well as actors from research institutes and the government. By selecting this set of actors for the Living Lab, tensions were kept in check, as the actors largely overlapped in their views on the livestock industry and on the issues around ammonia emissions. This was a strategic choice in order to have a productive Living Lab and to be able to discuss potential issues in the roll-out of more intensive monitoring of ammonia emissions. This also meant that the discussion was kept on the topic of the impact of digitalisation and increased monitoring, contributing to the DESIRA outputs.

## DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY FOR BEEF CATTLE PRODUCTION SECTOR, LATVIA

Mikelis Grivins (Baltic Studies Centre)

The last decade has been a turbulent time for the beef sector. The sector has gone through substantial structural changes (export growth, emerging direct sales, the establishment of an auction house, etc.), shifts in consumer preferences, and contextual socio-economic and political turbulence. The use of digital tools and digital marketing might help farmers overcome the emerging challenges. The Living Lab (LL) has been discussing exact solutions that might support representatives of the sector.

For the introduced solutions to be effective, an effort needs to be made by all representatives of the sector. However, this is not always possible for several reasons. Firstly, the skill level and the level of technical sophistication of existing solutions adopted by farms are very different. Secondly, the goals of farmers differ. Finally, several agreements need to be achieved among farmers on how various aspects of the sector are interpreted. On many occasions bridging the gaps between the farms is a challenging task.

## GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS (GIs) AS TERRITORIALISED LIVING LABS: THE CASE OF TÊTE DE MOINE PDO IN SWISS JURA

Luca Piccin (Origin for Sustainability)

The literature on the development of GIs shows that strategies vary greatly from one country to another, subjecting stakeholders to sets of requirements and constraints that require access to a great deal of technical, socio-economic, cultural and legal information. In each case, the success of the approach is based on a collective construction, anchored in a territory, involving multiple forms of knowledge which makes innovation possible. This experience proposed to approach the collective construction of a GI as a territorialised Living Laboratory, following the European approach of Living Labs, which considers "a Living Lab as a set of methods and a milieu for leveraging user-technology reactions and interactions in the innovation process". The case of a Swiss mountain cheese, Tête de Moine PDO, constitutes an original example of collective valorisation in which a plurality of actors, from the final consumer to the producer, mobilise around a set of common territorial resources.



The contribution from this LL proposes to discuss how the processes of qualification of products of origin, as negotiations of boundary objects can create participatory platforms that allow rural communities to define virtuous development paths both for their economic and social capital and for the preservation of their human and natural resources. Looking back at the Tête de Moine qualification process, this success is due to a series of factors: i) the introduction of an innovative culinary device - the Girolle - which favoured the appropriation of the product by the final user; ii) the collaboration of the actors of the value chain, who were able to coordinate themselves on a local scale, but also outside the productive territory; iii) the key role of the product specifications as an intermediary object, which enable a multitude of heterogeneous entities to 'hold together' (definition of the product, its composition, its method of manufacture, its characteristics as well as the methods of sensory verification and validation of its commercial identification according to a procedure defined by a national legal basis, sometimes reinforced by a supranational level such as European regulations on quality schemes).

The originality of the Tête de Moine qualification process lies in the fact that it involves downstream end users around an innovative culinary device, and upstream it involves the collective construction of the territorial capital, starting with the coordination of the actors in the production area. It is this double movement that allows us to say that the development of this PDO cheese is the result of a territorialised Living Lab.

## **MANAGING A LIVING LAB WITH A PRIVATE-PUBLIC INSTITUTION: THE EXPERIENCE OF CONSORZIO TOSCANA NORD IN DESIRA**

Livia Ortolani (AMIGO)

The Living Lab Toscana Nord was built in the framework of the DESIRA project with the aim of exploring the possibility of digitalisation to contribute to the ordinary land management activity carried out by the Consorzio di Bonifica Toscana Nord in a rural area of over 360.000 ha. The network of actors involved in the Living Lab is both internal and external to the public institution at the core of the Living Lab activity. The management of the Living Lab is carried out with a two-level approach: a couple of key contacts within the Consorzio exchange information with the DESIRA research team and discuss with them, before involving the whole group of actors, or some of them, in specific workshops and other targeted activities.

## **ALIGNING STRATEGIES FOR TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGES IN RURAL AREAS THROUGH LOCAL MULTI ACTOR PLATFORMS**

Sandra Karner (IFZ, Graz)

In the scope of MOVING, there is a local so called 'Multi Actor Platform' (MAP) in the Austrian greater region of Weiz, aimed at addressing prospective climate change challenges through transformative change. Although there is a general awareness of this need among regional stakeholders, existing initiatives lack the representation and integration of a broad variety of actors in order to enhance a joint vision of how to tackle climate change challenges. Formal linkages exist between the 'Regional Climate and Energy Model Region' and the LEADER region by means of board members, and also in terms of the joint topic of renewable energy. However, attempts to develop stronger integration of strategies and transformative actions by addressing differences in interests, views, values and power seem to be very modest. On the contrary, strongly pronounced boundary work and gate-keeping carried out by key actors inhibit the development of plurality for the sake of preventing conflicts and not questioning established power relations. By setting up the MAP, we aim at an intervention, which puts a stronger focus on linking and integrating perspectives



and interests of existing climate change related activities in the region. On one hand, the platform links with already existing structures, on the other hand, it is supposed to create a new space for the engagement of a broader variety of stakeholders (potentially with conflicting interests as well). This functions to jointly elaborate more integrated strategies to tackle climate change challenges, which better align and integrate existing climate change related initiatives with regional development, and the sheep farming sector. The presentation reflected on the process and challenges of setting up the MAP in the region of Weiz, and the implementation of co-creative MAP activities.



## **DIGIFARMTOUR : THE EXPERIENCE OF A CROATIAN LIVING LAB**

Ozren Hrsto and Silvio Simon (Ministry of Agriculture, Croatia)

The Adriatic region is along the coast of Adriatic Sea, is a touristic area covering four (out of six) counties from Istria to Dalmatia. In 2018, 63% of tourists visiting Croatia stayed in the area of the Living Lab. Agricultural production is characterised by a large number of small family farms. One third of farms is specialised in permanent crops (mostly olives and grapes), another third in keeping animals (mostly sheep), and the rest are mixed farms. The majority of small family farms are rarely market-oriented and have a low level of development. In the Croatian Adriatic region, Living Lab had the not-so-easy task of exploring how to connect sustainable small farmers with tourists and consumers, involving public institutions, tourist boards, hoteliers, private landlords, local governments, local farmers, farmers' organisations and LAGs. The project decided to go in two directions: first support the creation of short supply chains between farmers and tourists visiting the area covered by the Living Lab. And the second encouraged coordination between tourist providers in planning the tourist offer at the local and regional level using digital tools. The main questions to address were: How can digitisation contribute to availability of local products, recognition, flexibility and standardisation of local small-scale products and services? How can digitisation contribute to strengthening the connections?

Due to the pandemic, the Living Lab had to organise two workshops online that were originally intended to be organised face to face. In these workshops, there were fewer participants than expected, and therefore limited discussions. These was a lack of enthusiasm and the course of the workshop itself was quite slow. The Living Lab concept was new to all of the participants. In the online version the moderators could not sufficiently activate the participants. Dynamics of the workshop were not as the facilitators expected. A physical workshop was organised on September 24, 2021 in Poreč. The workshop was attended by 14 members of the LL (representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Institute of Agriculture and Tourism, the ICT sector, farmers and the tourism sector, local government). Face to face experience is a must, as online workshops are challenging. Although all members became interested in LL activities, no additional tasks were performed.

## **COLLABORATION PLATFORMS AND THE UNCERTAIN LEGACY OF TIME-BOUND EU PROJECTS**

Teresa Pinto-Correia, Catarina Esgalhado and Maria Rivera (University of Évora)

There is a growing interest from the EU Commission on multi-actor projects. Different projects have been employing different formats and designations of linkages between stakeholders. For example, SALSA was a H2020 project that studied the role of small farms in food systems, and aimed to create a dynamic community of practice in each studied region (including a variety of actors linked to the territory, such as cooperatives, associations, SMEs, researchers and local administration) to be sure all dimensions of the small farm's contributions were considered. NewBie was also a H2020 project, a Thematic Network, where working with stakeholder-led steering groups was key to the strategy of implementing news forms of collaboration at regional level. MOVING is a Horizon Europe project where the methodological approach is designed around a growing multi-actor platform in each of the 23 Reference Mountain Landscapes, and alongside one at EU level.







Regardless of the name and configuration these collaboration structures take, their overall aim is to increase the impact of research and incentivise innovation. From the experienced obtained through our participation in these three projects, we take two key lessons:

- a) It takes time to build a trusting relation between stakeholders that allows for close collaboration and co-construction, The use of existing long term network relations is necessary if the collaboration platform is to work in a productive way from the start of the project, If no such network exists, the 4 or 5 years of a project does not allow for this trust relation to be built.
- b) Activities for project impact and co-construction of knowledge happen while the project is running, usually led by the project team, The appropriation by other stakeholders is hard to achieve, especially when the human resources financed by the project step away, which risks the project legacy being a non-dynamic outcome with no further development.

## **DOING DIGITALISATION RESEARCH WITH LIVING LABS DURING COVID-19: THE CASE OF THE SCOTTISH CROFTERS**

Leanne Townsend (James Hutton Institute)

In the Scottish Living Lab we worked with a remote rural crofting community on the West Coast of Scotland. Our Living Lab was composed of crofters and stakeholders responsible for supporting crofting practices. Crofting is a type of small-scale agriculture with livestock. Diversification and pluri-activity is common, given that crofting alone rarely provides an adequate household income. Activities with our Living Lab were made difficult by the arrival of Covid-19. The community is not easy to reach digitally, and broadband connectivity had only recently been installed before the pandemic hit. Fully virtual meetings were therefore not possible. However, we found that members of the Living Lab underwent a rapid digital learning curve, because they had to embrace online tools in order to stay connected with the community. This brought a number of benefits including new markets, networks and collaborations as well as access to e-health services (for both humans and livestock) and educational opportunities through e-learning courses. Digitalisation also brought a number of challenges in this period, e.g., excessive tourism due to the promotion of the region on social media channels, as well as persisting intra-rural digital divides caused by uneven digital skills and access.

## **THE LIVING LAB AS A FORMAT TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES IN THE SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT**

Eleni Toli (ATHENA RC)

The optimisation of use of water resources, the development of recovery mechanisms and water reuse patterns pose prevalent targets for the sustainable water management and water-smart transition of rural regions. The planning of these activities can be bolstered through the committed involvement of stakeholders that extends to the business, societal and governance spectrum of a region. At the same time, digital transition stimulates the tendency to extend research beyond the boundaries of a 'silo' environment, and towards real life settings that form systems of dynamic interactions. Therefore, by expanding in this upcoming digital era the Living Lab approach can provide a complementary methodology to build bottom-up a 'field lab' to inquire, validate and test operational solutions, policies and sustainable plans for water-oriented problems. The Sustainable Water Management Living Lab' that operated in the region of Trikala in central Greece, provides a case study of how Living Lab practices are analysed on the basis of increasing of the collaboration between the regional water management authorities, allocating roles and responsibilities in the monitoring and management of water supplies, as well as effectuating the adoption of digital tools to increase administrative coordination and raise public awareness.

## CAN LIVING LABS EFFECTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO DEVELOPING SCIENTIFIC OUTPUTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS?

Sylvain Quédeville and Olivier Ejderyan (FiBL)

Living Labs place stakeholders at the core of the research and innovation process. This increases stakeholders' empowerment but also raises a key question as to whether the evidence collected can effectively contribute to scientific outputs that can be translated into relevant recommendations for policy-makers.

In the Swiss DESIRA Living Lab scenario, workshops were conducted with stakeholders and 5 categories of policy recommendations were elaborated: (1) communicating about the advantages of digitalisation; (2) developing an environment that enables more open innovation; (3) integrating digital specialists in teaching, consulting and agricultural journalism; (4) improving the economic conditions of digitalisation; and (5) encouraging a further diversification of rotations and agricultural activities.

The diversity and concreteness of the recommendations elaborated by stakeholders indicates that Living Labs can effectively contribute to scientific outputs that are potentially relevant for policy-makers. Working with stakeholders in future oriented workshops enables to focus on concrete matters derived from simple but realistic storylines, helping stakeholders and farmers to reflect on tangible solutions. In addition, these solutions are directly connected to the needs of the involved stakeholders, thus increasing their potential relevance and likelihood of success if they were to be implemented. At the same time, the contextualised nature of the solutions limits generalisation across systems and regions.

## KEEPING LIVING LABS ALIVE DURING THE PANDEMIC: LESSONS LEARNT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MACERATA

Chiara Mignani (University of Macerata)

In recent decades in Europe, there has been a shift towards a more social role for universities. In particular, the 'triple' and 'quadruple helix' approaches to innovation emphasise innovation as the result of links between universities, businesses, policymakers and the local community.

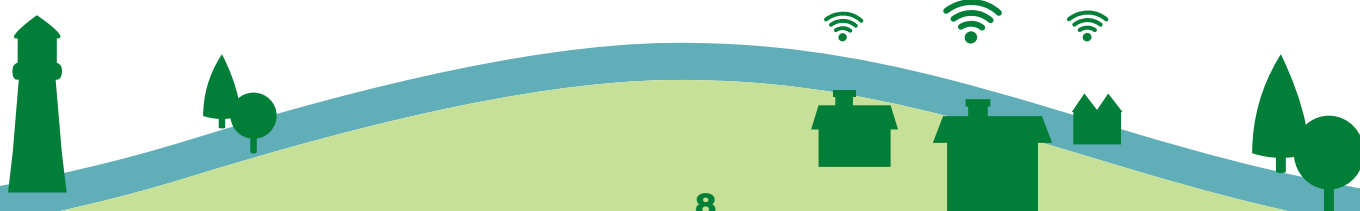
In this context, in the last few years the University of Macerata (UNIMC) has carried out several programs and projects in the agri-food, place branding and rural development sectors, facilitating the development of an open laboratory where the University and the students take part in and support the innovation ecosystem. Through a longitudinal case study, this contribution considers the collaboration that occurred in different contexts, namely in the field, at the University, in Italy and abroad.

Based on the concepts of Community-University Partnerships (CAPs) and Living Labs, the analysis focuses on the challenges and opportunities, and on the emerging and critical aspects that can contribute to shape the collaboration from a medium-long term perspective. The aim of this study is to understand in which ways Universities can play a central role in stimulating knowledge networks in rural areas, and how they can facilitate horizontal knowledge exchange and learning relationships beyond the local areas. To do so, elements such as trustworthiness, mutuality and commitment between researchers and stakeholders will be considered throughout the analysis.

## STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Isabel Jaisli (ZHAW)

Stakeholder engagement is a strategy for reducing the gap between research, practice and policy and can be an important factor to generate innovation. Experiences from two research projects in Switzerland (1. Gran Alpin case study within the MOVING project; 2. "Food system transformation Waedenswil") have shown the hurdles and key success factors for participation in the research context: mismatched interest and expectation have been identified as main factor for failure, while general motivation and available resources of a key person, as well as involvement from the very beginning of the project, is key for success. A major challenge stems from the misalignment between demand from funding and for effective participation. Participatory research implies a high degree of flexibility within the research process, which is often not provided from funding agencies.





## **ORGANISING LLS IN GREECE: THE CASE OF TRILOFOS AND GOUMENISSA**

Filippos Papadopoulos (American Farm School)

AFS, in its role as innovation facilitator has made two attempts to organise local producers and their communities in LLS around the concept of digitalisation. The first one, located in Trilofos Pierias, focused on vegetable producers fizzled out after the end of the first cultivation period despite the efforts of AFS to revitalise it. The second, in Goumenissa, focused on wine grape growers is developing under its own steam. The presentation analysed the local socio-political and economic factors that have led to so different outcomes and draw conclusions for similar future interventions.

## **TRACEABILITY IN THE ITALIAN WOOD-ENERGY SECTOR- A LIVING LAB ON ROLE AND IMPACT OF DIGITALISATION**

Eleonora Mariano (PEFC Italia)

Illegal logging is a global problem associated with deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity loss with significant negative economic, environmental, and social impacts. In response to this phenomenon, European Union has enacted the European Timber Regulation (EUTR), which requires economic operators to exercise due diligence to traceability verifications. These are mainly based on a “paper-based” approach, with implementation issues as a consequence. Italy is an interesting case study in this respect, since it is the biggest importer of wood-energy biomass worldwide, where tons of fuelwood without clear traceability are imported every year, and EUTR enforcement still lags behind. Here, a Living Lab involving stakeholders and key informants, carried out a participatory and open assessment of the impact of digital technologies on EUTR enforcement and traceability in the national wood-energy sector. Moreover, plausible future scenarios have been identified and discussed among Living Lab stakeholders.

## **KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY IN SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS - A HUNGARIAN CASE STUDY**

Gusztav Nemes (Rural Bt)

Eco-communities are important reference points for the ecological movement. They innovate, combine traditional knowledge with new technology, and show alternative, lived solutions to important problems of our times. Important questions are: How can such communities be established? What is needed to make them sustainable and flourish? How can they be supported? An Hungarian initiative, consciously aimed at supporting communities and individuals willing to turn their lives to a more ecological direction, tries to answer this questions.

Cold Mountain Shelter is a small community of young, educated, environmentally conscious lifestyle migrants. They produce food through permaculture, forest-agriculture, contour farming, extensive animal husbandry, etc. Their main product is knowledge on sustainable livelihoods. They organise courses, events, and exhibitions, run a yearly festival, and help to develop local and regional nodes of environmentally conscious communities. They also represent an important socio-economic trend, spreading fast in developed countries, trying to find links between innovation and tradition. This presentation demonstrated some of the preliminary results, using the value chain approach applied in MOVING, as well as showed the efforts made in engagement, mentioning both failures and successes.





## A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR LL/MAPS

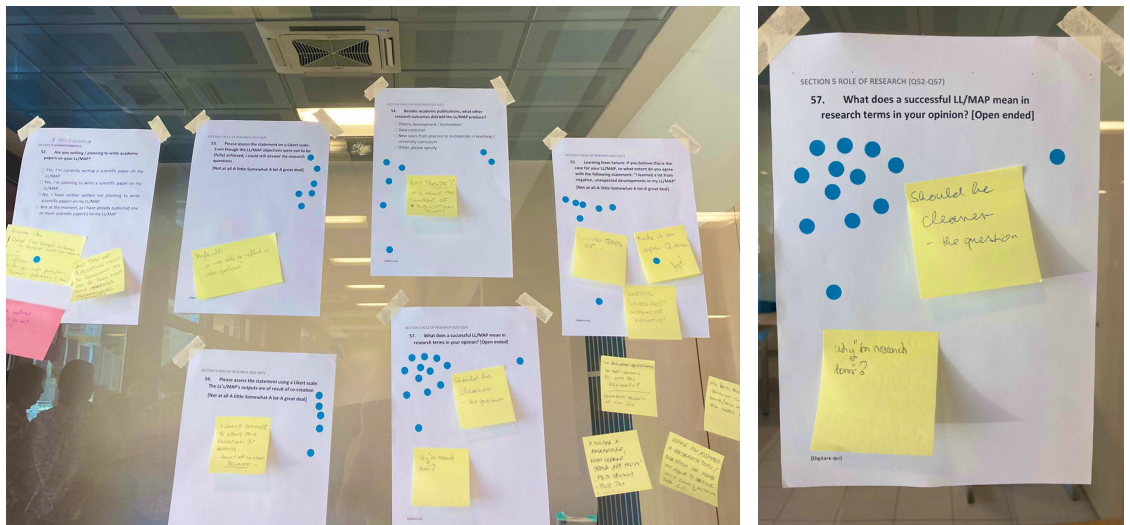
**Sabrina Arcuri**  
University of Pisa

Our two-day discussion came to a close with a final reflection on the research agenda on LLs. The general understanding is that, even though LLs are promoted as a research approach in many EU projects, and an increasing number of researchers agree on their potential in co-creating innovative solutions for addressing complex problems, there is still scattered evidence on their actual performance and impact. But what should we, as agri-food-rural researchers, focus on in the coming years to advance research on, and with, LLs? A set of relevant aspects emerged in response. One element is related to terminology and the need for definitions and ideally a typology based on a few, relevant criteria. The distinction between LLs and MAPs, both familiar terms in EU projects, needs further clarification as to their commonalities and relevant differences, and so do their qualities as concepts, approaches, methods, and spaces for transformational change. A critical point with LLs and MAPs is what kind of outputs and outcomes can be expected, whether they can be considered valid under academic criteria, and how to deal with the unintentional outcomes of LLs' experimentation. The capacity of LLs to advance scientific knowledge is questioned by a range of scholars who do not recognise LLs research as 'truly scientific', robust, and worth funding. At the same time, scholars acknowledge that their value lies in the potential for integrating knowledge(s). Understanding how to uncover this value and communicate it more effectively will imply 'making the invisible visible' (as earlier expressed by Dr. Guido Caniglia), learning how to translate the tacit knowledge created in the experiments into practical and scientific knowledge. The continuously emerging and unintended outcomes of LLs linked to the experimentation pose several challenges, too: how do we assess what emerge from LL activities and use it to respond to original research questions and needs? How do we measure the learning from experiments which may get out of control, although not necessarily in a negative way? Can we consider policy-oriented LLs as experiments, and what can we expect from this sort of experimentation? Learning, assessment, and expectations vs outcomes eventually bring to the impacts and evaluation puzzle: what are the best methods for measuring the LLs' impacts? And what are we talking about when we refer to the LLs' impacts – the social, environmental or economic impacts, in the short or in the long run? Do we evaluate the process, the outcomes compared to earlier expectations, or the transformative change? How do we account for the point of view of all the parts involved? Some of these questions, besides others, are addressed by all participants in the following part of the workshop.









## Developing a Living Labs / MAPS assessment tool







After several EU projects carried out in the last decade or so, our research team at PAGE has decided to take stock of the experience gained with LL approaches so far and to reflect upon it in a collective and systematic manner. We believe LLs/MAPs are promising in terms of their capacity to drive that transformational change needed to respond to the sustainability challenges of our time. However, we acknowledge the difficulties, related to collaborative approaches and multi-actor engagement in general, and the effectiveness of LLs as a method for creating robust knowledge in particular. We have therefore drafted a questionnaire, meant to serve on one hand as a sort of checklist for researchers involved in LLs/MAPs to reflect on while their work is ongoing; on the other hand, we aim at collecting evidence of the LLs/MAPs' experience through a survey to be run within DESIRA, MOVING and SHERPA projects. The questionnaire has been developed from relevant literature in the field of TD approaches and from the initial reflection made during a PAGE focus group on researchers' individual experience with LLs. Multifarious themes have expectedly emerged, which we tried to address in the questionnaire: objectives, actors, stages, activities, outcomes & impact, success, the role of research, but also more complex themes such as efficiency, effectiveness, ownership, flexibility, and recurrent issues like conflicts, trade-offs, negotiation, and data validity. We ended up with a set of about 50 questions - multiple choice, open Qs and Likert scale Qs - broken down in five sections, which we would like to discuss in a world cafe-like workshop. Any feedback received from participants will allow us to adjust the questionnaire in view to the future survey. A specific focus will be our discussion of the role that research could and should play in this type of collaboration and the value of LLs/MAPs approaches for agri-food-rural studies.



**Challenges identified when working with LLs and MAPs:**

-  Local actors engaged in LLs and MAPs are giving their knowledge for free. Members are expected to contribute to the project for a long period of time without expecting anything in return. In this sense, a new approach is needed: research frameworks should allow for these actors to be paid for their contributions.
-  There are groups that are harder to engage on these platforms, which can make the outcomes biased. In the case of SHERPA, engaging local citizens has been a challenge, while in the case of MOVING and DESIRA, it is finding a youth and gender balance.
-  Creating a trusting relationship between local actors and the project is a time-consuming task. A significant amount of effort is needed to develop reciprocal trust, commitment, and a shared vision, and given that these projects are time-bound, it is usually hard to achieve.
-  The interests of local actors and the interests of the project are not always aligned. This can lead to local actors disengaging after the first stages of the project. In addition, with the way proposals are built, it is difficult to design for open-ended, emergent and creative failures.
-  There is an unclear contract between local actors and project partners, which can lead over/under expectations, or communication issues.
-  Finding common indicators to measure tangible outcomes is challenging when dealing with different communities and actors representing rural diversity.

**Lessons learned and recommendations:**

-  The composition of MAPs and LLs is key. Success cases highlighted how important it is to identify and map key actors that can contribute to the dialogue in the beginning of the process. Identifying the means of communication more appropriate to engaging them in the early stages is also a factor for success.
-  Same thing happens with facilitation. Having a Local Innovation Facilitator who is known and accepted by the community, where a trusting relationship already exists, can enhance the process of setting-up these platforms.
-  Support from local authorities is needed to motivate local actors in engaging in these processes.
-  Creating a “local project” within the broader project can enhance that the community does not lose interest as the project evolves. We should talk directly with stakeholders involved, and understand the local social landscape (including hidden agendas and disagreements).
-  Agreeing on tangible outcomes in the conceptual phase, as well as establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, will allow researchers to keep track of the development of participatory approaches, and improve performance of these platforms.
-  Don't bother with communities that don't believe in themselves. If local actors lack a common vision and motivation, it will not be possible to engage them in the research project.

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