

## Place-based Social Innovation Through Living Labs – Written Responses to Live Audience Questions

Responses by: Hugo Steben and Jean-François Jasmin

*Q: Practically speaking, how do you shift the focus from user “centered” to user co-led? Including the community stakeholders at the beginning and all the way through the process including evaluation?*

### **Hugo:**

There's no silver bullet for that, but rather a collection of actions that can be deployed at the strategic, tactical and operational levels. Here are some of the actions that can be undertaken:

- The four main stakeholders representing the public, private, research and user/community sectors have to be mobilized from the onset and be active participants in all key phases of the initiative (defining the sandbox, governance, etc.).
- Living Labs will usually be anchored around a Charter which puts on paper its vision, mission, guiding principles and governance among other things, but has the explicit purpose of enshrining the users' perspective as the core pillar of the initiative.
- A disproportionate power can be given to users on specific issues. In the case of the Acadie Lab for example, agricultural producers are the sole stakeholder who defines priorities and identifies the experimentations to be undertaken.
- Living Labs are facilitated initiatives. The facilitation team should not only be competent but be neutral and perceived as so by all stakeholders, and be accountable not only to specific stakeholders, but to the stakeholder coalition as a whole.
- Living Lab processes (the 4-step iterations as well as the spiral) being geared around the users' and community's adoption parameters is key in preventing that the focus deviate towards solutions and their features.
- The first step of the 4-step process is critical, in that if its outputs are strongly oriented towards users' issues, needs and mental models, it becomes harder to get the rest of the process to deviate from this focus.
- Wherever humans are present, power dynamics quickly come in the picture. It should be a critical priority of the facilitation team to make sure that users are established as being legitimate and on an equal footing as the other stakeholders. If this mental model is not established in the first stages of the initiative's deployment and that underlying power dynamics aren't addressed, structural solutions such as governance structures, processes and charters will be rowing against the current.

### **Jean-Francois:**

One of the elements that characterize the transition from a user-centered to a user-driven approach is the presence of users at the steering level of the process. It is quite normal that a Living Lab (LL) does not have an automatic representation of users in the committees that think about its governance at the

beginning of an LL. Nevertheless, with time and maturity, it is desirable that users have a role to play at this level.

Users can at any given time play different roles at project level which give them the opportunity to drive the process. They can:

- Explore the needs
- Co-create solution/concept/device
- Validate hypotheses/functions/needs/usages during user testing
- Analyze test results
- Recommend and or decide on strategies and paths to follow

They are not only invited as testers of a solution, they co-create the solution

*Q: Would living labs work for approaching solution for affordable housing issues?*

**Hugo:**

Absolutely, and there are Living Labs focused on these issues in operation as we speak (for example: Waterloo Affordable Housing Living Lab or browse through the directory of ENoLL Living Labs here: <https://enoll.org/network/living-labs/>). As mentioned during the webinar, Living Labs can address a wide variety of issues, as long as we're talking about complex issues and are focused on matters of adoption.

*Q: (On the model included at the end of this document) Why does step 4 not include outcomes measurement?*

**Hugo:**

Outcomes measurement can be done, but it won't happen at the same scale and time horizon.

The 4-step process' objective is to generate learnings at a precise moment on specific parameters of adoption. It's not a scale and time horizon at which outcomes can be measured.

We could be looking at outcomes measurement at the scale of the Living Lab as a platform/structure, and/or at the level of outcomes generated over time by the solutions that have been deployed after they've been through the Living Lab. However, attribution won't be direct as Living Labs aren't meant to be responsible for a social innovation's outcomes, but rather to reduce the risk that an innovation will not be compatible with its environment.

*Q: I'm not sure if this is the case for Hugo and Jean-Francois' experience in the Quebecois context, but in Ontario, social innovation labs tend to rely on almost exclusively on the "donated" time of its participants. How have Hugo and Jean-Francois made sure that participants remain engaged all the way through the long social innovation lab process – particularly when they're not being paid to participate*

*(or their employer is losing some of their time as a kind of in-kind contribution)?*

**Hugo:**

On the specific question of financial retribution:

From a theoretical perspective:

- The stakeholder's (i.e. the members of the platform's coalition) primary motivation should be intrinsic and/or based on the value they will gain from the experimentations' results (here, refer to the KSB value model), and financial retribution should be used to overcome obstacles to participation.

From a practical perspective:

- If your participation is key (strategic, intensive and over the long term), make sure that funding is secured, among other reasons because if funding for your participation is "out of pocket", any change in priorities or unexpected events will jeopardize your participation and thus, the success of the initiative.
- You don't want people to come for the money itself, but you don't want the lack of funding to be an obstacle to participation, so the rule of thumb is that if, after factoring in the value provided by the Living Lab, financing still is an obstacle to participation, funding should be thought of in a "cost-neutral" basis, i.e. it covers costs but is not a source of "profit".
- If the first thing some stakeholders talk about is "How much?", it should raise alarms : they might not understand the value provided or they wouldn't be participating for the right reasons. Probe further.

From an ethical standpoint:

- If you don't need it, don't ask for it. For example, if your organization acts as a funder or is well-funded, make it a priority that the other partners, who might not be in your advantageous situation, aren't going hungry.
- Especially if you're working with community organizations (which aren't the richest organizations on the block) and/or with less financially advantaged citizens, make sure that you're able to at least compensate for the costs of participation (transportation, food, ...) and ideally at least partially for lost revenues that they could've otherwise gained.

**Jean-Francois:**

Engagement over the long term is linked with the possibility to obtain the value sought by one participant. As participants share and acquire knowledge, their intention can be renewed with respect to what emerges in the process. That's why it is important to make those values explicit at the beginning and at different moment in the process.

The process has to be adaptable in order to cope with different factors that arise and can compromise the plan, but it is normal that people come and go and sometime come back to LL process.

It's also important to keep in mind that without having to pay for the involvement of a participant, it is strategic to compensate for their involvement (transport, food, etc.) and hold activities as much as possible during the free time schedule of the participants. (ex. if the users are single mothers, don't think of organizing workshops in the evening between 5 and 7 o'clock)

*Q: How do you get buy-in for living labs – maybe more specifically with more traditional institutions/sectors having them come open to breaking down power structures/valuing the expertise of community members?*

**Hugo:**

Build a business case around it:

- Outline how actual ways of working aren't generating expected results, and the underlying reasons for this underperformance.
- Demonstrate a good understanding of stakeholders' objectives, success factors and risks
- Illustrate examples of other Living Labs and how they've generated results. Don't just describe them, present testimonials from participants and stakeholders, making sure that you have testimonials from the people who played the same role as the people you are trying to convince (i.e. a government employee testimonial to convince a government employee)
- Lay down a realistic action plan, ideally divided into shorter iterations where we can take a step back with all relevant stakeholders, assess results and adjust accordingly.

From a political standpoint:

- Make sure that you understand your audience and adapt your messages/speak their language
- Prepare the ground: identify allies "on the inside" who will support and promote your initiative to key decision makers
- Make sure that you've officially confirmed all key stakeholders' interest and engagement
- In an ideal world, structure your financing and governance in a way that doesn't give any single actor a "life or death" control over the initiative
- If you still have a hard time convincing stakeholders to confirm their involvement in a longer term initiative, it's possible to design a smaller scale "pilot" phase, with an engagement that if some key results are met, they'll come back to the table to negotiate a longer-term and more significant involvement.

*Q: Are there any examples outside of Quebec of living labs and do these examples differ from the living labs in Quebec?*

**Hugo:**

It's hard to draw a clean delineating line between Living Labs in Quebec and Canada (where the field is still in its infancy) from Living Labs in Europe (where the ENoLL network has been active for quite a while).

Having historically been "invented" to solve issues of adoption around technologies and technological solutions, earlier Living Labs have been techno-oriented, and since the field of Living Labs historically emerged in Europe, we can see a bigger proportion of Labs in Europe that are techno-oriented.

In my humble opinion and on an anecdotal basis rather than based on validated data that, aside from the healthcare-focused Living Labs which have always been a big proportion of Living Labs around the world, the Quebec field has been more territorially anchored and focused on social innovation and territorial development. Is it because the actors at the forefront of promoting the approach (LLio and MIS being some of them) have this philosophical inclination? Maybe?

**Jean-Francois:**

There are several examples of living labs outside of Quebec. Most of them are located in Europe. The European Network of Living labs (ENoLL) association remains the best way to identify a wide range of objectives and fields of intervention of these LL. It's possible to say that ENoLL network is in continuity with a lineage of technological innovation LL, but not only. The Quebec LLs, like several other LLs in the Francophone LL network, focus more on socio innovation and territorial development LL, but not only.

