



PRACTICE ABSTRACT NR. 51

Facilitation in Living Labs

Facilitation is the process of making something easy or easier in order to achieve an aim. It is usually done by an independent person, or facilitator, designing and running a meeting or events for participants to understand their situation and develop new ideas and practices. In environmental contexts, facilitation is often associated with helping to resolve conflicts or disagreements such as how land should be managed or how water resources should be allocated. In AgriLink, facilitation is understood more broadly as a process of inquiry or learning about complex situations. This framing enables new ways of thinking about and 'doing' facilitation. In particular, the Living Labs themselves are seen as a form of facilitation that brings together diverse stakeholders (including researchers) in more open and inclusive processes of co-learning. The Living Lab can help facilitate learning about the 'whats' (what are/should we do?) and the 'whys' (why are/should we be doing it?) as different contexts and the needs of the stakeholders determine. While there is a dedicated, 'official' facilitator within each Living Lab to help design learning events and provide direction and advice, the participants in the Living Labs can also ease learning and commit to designing new forms of practice with other participants. Facilitation requires several skills, not least the ability to develop trusting relationships with other participants, an understanding of group dynamics, good communication skills and a willingness to engage with other peoples' framing of situations, interests and concerns. In turn, this requires the use of a range of participative techniques and tools, such as diagramming, that support these skills and promote learning and insights.

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KEY WORDS:

#facilitation #learning
#stakeholders #skills
#Living Labs

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Facilitation is a common practice and it often happens without being noticed because it has been ‘built into’ everyday lives. However, when a range of individuals and organisations engage with each other, with different understandings of a situation, expectations, and ways of working, a more overt form of facilitation is often required. A professional facilitator might be employed or the group self organizes and identifies facilitators from its own members to help the group define and achieve its goals. A facilitator must be trusted by those being facilitated. In Agrilink, this has been achieved by facilitators being open, inclusive and adaptive according to the needs of stakeholders and contexts. While it is usual to talk of facilitators as people, it is also important to be aware that facilitation can take the form of institutions or social structures or norms which give participants permission to question and develop new ideas and practices in a ‘an accepting and safe’ space such as a Living Lab. As a result, there are many links between facilitation and knowledge brokering, learning, social networks and innovation as explored in several Agrilink [Theory Primers](#) and also [Practice Abstracts](#). While all facilitation is purpose and context dependent, further information on facilitation can be found by enrolling on a free short course from the Open University: [Facilitating group discussions](#)



ABOUT AGRILINK

Agrilink is a multi-actor project funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. It brings together 16 partners from 13 countries, including universities, applied research institutes, advisors and consultants from public organisations, private SMEs, a farmer-based organisation and specialists in communication and distance learning.

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This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 727577.

All the Practice Abstracts prepared by the Agrilink project in the EIP-AGRI common format can be found here: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/agrilink-agricultural-knowledge-linking-farmers>