

AgriLink E-workshop - presentation

Living Labs for sustainable AKIS policies and AKIS policies for sustainable Living Labs.

The AgriLink H2020 project¹ will organise an online workshop in June 2021 to open a debate on the relation between Living Labs and AKIS policies. **Advisors, policy makers, farmers' representatives and researchers are welcome to participate.**

1. Aim and rationale of the E-workshop

If one types in "Living Lab" in Google, the number of hits will be... Nine million and one hundred and twenty thousand. It's hot to experiment in a field lab, living lab, city lab, circular lab etc. So everybody seems to want to have a Living Lab... but why?

- Policy makers want to speed up development and uptake of innovation
- Practitioners (advisors, farmers...) can test innovations for complex problems in their own setting
- Living Labs (LL) are seen as an opportunity to support co-creation of solutions for societal / sustainability challenges that are often complex and need tailor-made solutions.

But...at the same time, there is an enormous variety under the label of LL, and many questions arise:

- Are LL really a new way of innovation? Or is it a new name for old initiatives in which farmers share experiences and discuss challenges?
- Do they indeed help to connect science and innovation with the great sustainability challenges of European Agriculture?
- Could LL be too complex or difficult to implement in certain (formal and informal) institutional settings?
- Is there space for an unexpected outcome and adaptive approach within policies supporting Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS)?

This question is all the more important in the context of the negotiation of the new European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This policy opens up perspectives for Member states to set up new forms of support to innovation in the agricultural sector, including Living Labs.

In this context, based on AgriLink's LL experience and findings, the aim of this E-workshop is to open a debate around two questions:

- what can LL, as approached within AgriLink, actually do for AKIS policies aimed at supporting a sustainable development of agriculture?
- conversely, how can AKIS policies support LL?

Before presenting the methodology and timeline of the E-workshop, we briefly introduce the policy context, AgriLink's project and our LL experience and findings.

¹ The workshop will be facilitated by Herman Schoorlemmer (WUR), Melanie Van Raaij (Innovatiesteunpunt), Damiana Maiz (INTIA), Héloïse Leloup and Pierre Labarthe (INRAE)



2. Presentation of the H2020 AgriLink project

The project AgriLink [Agricultural Knowledge: linking farmers, advisors and researchers to boost innovation] aims at better understanding the role of advisory services in farmers' decision making and at boosting their contribution to innovation for sustainable development of agriculture.

The key outcomes of the projects are:

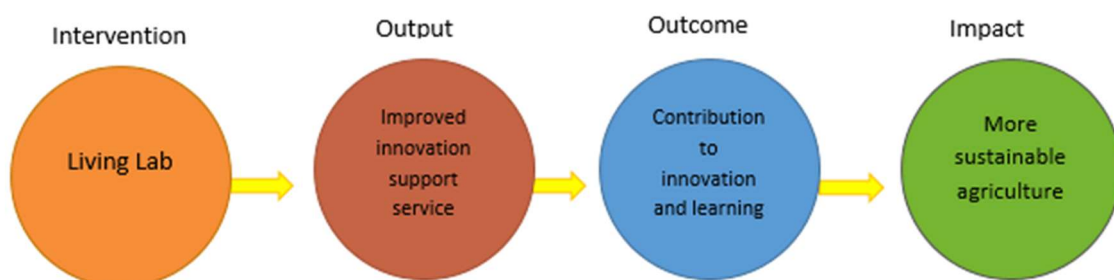
- a survey of more than 1000 farmers about their sources of advice in various innovation areas,
- six Living Labs in which scientists, advisors and farmers work together to develop new advisory techniques in response to particular industry issues,
- a comparative analysis of national advisory public policies and institutions,
- Interactive workshops to elaborate sustainable transition scenarios for farm advice.

This seminar aims at combining the outcomes of our study on Living Labs and on advisory and AKIS policies. By doing so, we aim at better understanding the reciprocal relations between advisory policies on the one hand and Living Labs on the other hand.

More info about the project: www.agrilink2020.eu

3. AgriLink's Living Lab experience

In AgriLink, six Living Labs (LL) were initiated and convened in Norway, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands/Belgium, Latvia and Romania between 2018 and 2021. In these LL, farmers, researchers, advisors and other actors were engaged in the co-creation and testing of new and improved innovation support services. Applying this approach in six different contexts and on different sustainability challenges (local food production, soil management, crop rotation, crop protection, access to knowledge, processing & marketing) provides a rich empirical basis for learning on new ways to support innovation and the facilitation role of LL.



In AgriLink, we followed the definition of a Living Lab according to the European Network of LL (ENoLL), 5 key elements must be present in a LL:

1. **active user involvement** (i.e. empowering end users to thoroughly impact the innovation process)
2. **real-life setting** (i.e. testing and experimenting with new artefacts “in the wild”)
3. **multi-stakeholder participation** (i.e. the involvement of technology providers, service providers, relevant institutional actors, professional or residential end users)
4. **a multi-method approach** (i.e. the combination of methods and tools originating from a range of disciplines including ethnography, psychology, sociology, strategic management, engineering)
5. **co-creation** (i.e. iterations of design cycles with different sets of stakeholders)

We included systems and design thinking and a thorough M&E process that answered questions regarding the efficacy, efficiency and effectiveness of the 6 living labs.

Lessons learned suggest LL vary in efficacy, efficiency and effectiveness in relation to four emergent conditions: complexity of the challenge, enabling setting, energy to move, and methodological preparation. Accordingly, a LL offers considerable potential for supporting innovation in agricultural practices where complex situations exist and there is a conducive setting for learning around a pressing issue recognised by stakeholders, which can be progressed through facilitation.

But LL are not a panacea for agricultural innovation and sustainability, and key challenges remain. These include: the investment in time and resources; the difficulties of establishing or blueprinting a ‘business model’ of a LL while retaining its essential open and exploratory nature and commitment to emergent outcomes; gaining funding for LL outside a research context; retaining flexibility and being responsive to stakeholder needs within resource constraints; limited stakeholder experience of co-creative processes; tensions with existing, sometimes commercial, relationships; and determining the focus of LL as understanding of the situation deepens. Nonetheless, key strengths of LL include: their flexibility and responsiveness to desired change; the relative ‘safety’ of their experimental spaces; adaptability to new conditions; potential for relationship and trust building; and the real-life context enabling rapid learning about possible interventions. These strengths hinge on the quality of facilitation to listen to stakeholders and promote learning rather than ‘control’ of the LL.



4. The policy context

The Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) is the organisation and interaction of persons, organisations and institutions who use and produce knowledge and innovation for agriculture and interrelated fields. The proposal for the new CAP Regulation has articulated a series of elements that make these systems key structures for effective knowledge exchange and promotion of innovation. Being a key moment in the negotiations for the new CAP post 2020, this workshop is an opportunity for relevant agents working in the AKIS to share their experiences and vision, as well as their future prospects. This will also be the occasion to present the main conclusions of the work carried out in AgriLink and explain how LL can contribute to the improvement of the AKIS.

The European Commission has proposed a European Partnership that aims to structure and support a network of living labs and research infrastructures that will accelerate the transition towards agroecology throughout Europe. This partnership is expected to be launched in 2023, the above-mentioned AgriLink LL approach could give new insights for the preparation of this network.

5. Methodology of the workshop

The workshop will be organised with two steps.

- First, between June 9th and June 23rd, a series of questions will be proposed on a Google Sheet. The opportunity will be offered to participants to elaborate answers and start a dialogue. Two rounds of questions will be used:
 - 1 The first series of questions will target the following question: But what can actually be expected from Living Labs? How can they contribute to enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of AKIS policies?
 - 2 The second series of questions will address a complementary issue: What role could AKIS and advisory policies play in a further diffusion of the Living Lab model for a sustainable development of Agriculture?
- Second, **on July 5th (14:00-16:00 CET)**, a webinar will be organised to present a synthesis of the contributions to the Google Doc and continue the discussion.

