

CoP Compact – Session Summary 19.6.24

The Nærheden & SESAM Living Lab Approach

Exploring the co-creational power of young people in a local community food context



Bent Egberg Mikkelsen, Copenhagen University, 19 June 2024

Case description

Introduction to three concepts of knowledge transfer:

- **Constructionism** – not to be confused with *constructivism* (internal cognitive processes) - argues that children develop their new knowledge by constructing physical and manipulative materials, like blocks, displays, prototypes and robotics kits. As such it has the potential of developing Youth Based Solutions
- **Food System Literacy** striving for deeper understanding by providing the tools, methods, knowledge, skills and capacities that will enable children to influence, change and design better and more just future food systems.
- The **Living Lab approach** – actually incorporating the above by applying the principles of user-co-creation, multi-actor approach and real-life environment thereby giving the school a role as local community changemaker
- The **Nærheden Local Learning and Living Lab (2030 Cities)** considers school commitment and PR as key aspects
- The **SESAM LL approach** is a university mentor-supported and uses project-based learning & talent scouting

Take-home lessons

- Schools with **true commitment** are considered as especially qualified for living labs, arguing that without such up-front commitment, efforts are likely to fail, risking valuable time and staff resources. The hypothesis/statement provoked a number of critical questions as participants felt that all schools should be considered as likely candidates for the living lab approach. In the experience of the Nærheden Local Learning and Living Labs, however, schools which did not show clear signs of cooperation and pro-active involvement were clearly not reaching the goal and Bent argued that the limited resources could better be used to provide full support to the willing. One post-session thought in this context: it might be useful to apply a strategy of different ambition levels, e.g. high-level agenda setting with those schools of full commitment; a reduced level for mid-level commitment and an entirely different approach towards schools not willing to engage: eventually invitation to a training/promotional event with specialized experts and a long-term strategic approach. Much can be learnt from diffusion theory.
- The SESAM LL approach put emphasis on the **role of external mentors** from both university/research as well as business/enterprise as part of a three-months based 'learning flow'. In many school learning approaches, the existing staff of teachers takes on the role of preparing the 'sustainable food' lessons. This is partly due to their passionate commitment which is a main driver at these schools. However, bringing in external staff from research and business must be considered of great value and potentially of high impact as such experts bring in a wide range of practical experiences around sustainable food and are likely – depending on personality, however – can report from 'real-world' applications. Obviously, bringing in such mentors requires a different organisational setup which might be difficult to implement outside of (funded) project opportunities. The role of external mentors should hence be addressed at the wider societal level with input by policy and business to ensure that the added value of such a construction is widely acknowledged.
- Another interesting dimension of the SESAM LL approach is the concept of **talent scouting** which targets especially at engaging more girls in classical boy-dominated science activities. Also, this aspect received some critical response from participants since it put scientific capacities relatively high on the ladder of competences and seems to thrive on a more traditional view on gender-related issues. Bent felt that just reading sustainable-environmental leaves children with rather pessimistic/depressing facts and figures. Against this, practical experiments in science has provenly led to increasing enthusiasm of (female) pupils. On the other hand, one might argue, that soft-skills related to food (taste, cooking, growing) might extend the horizon of all children.

Discussion

- Livia **inquires** about the rationale behind favouring only schools with clear commitment, arguing that one of the **main** barriers in the transition towards a more sustainable food system is the fact that **not all stakeholders/schools are ready** to take responsibility.
- Dirk reminds of the '**Whole School Approach**' which seeks to involve all dimensions, be it in terms of knowledge transfer, be it the physical environment of the school – but simply also all schools in the process of Living Lab teaching.
- Reiner wonders about the target group 'schools and teachers'. In his experience, the headmasters of the schools are not really the most important players, but **school organizations and ministries** are more crucial when it comes to trigger to change in the long-term.
- Dirk reports about explicitly **resistance on the side of some schools** illustrating the polarization of society when it comes to issues such as sustainable development and especially the role of food. In some cases, contacts at schools react defensive as they feel that food should not be a matter of scientific interventions at schools.
- Bent points out that the view that the state is considered to mainly offer a welfare system and that **food is still mainly a domain of family responsibility**.
- Livia is puzzled about the view of science is a male (boy's) domain when it comes to talent scouting. The principles of **quality and equity** should be applied throughout and examples with disadvantaged children have shown that a broad and inclusive approach is the stronger one.
- Reiner wanted to know about the role of theory in this LL approach: is there a focus on data collection? Bent explains that they follow a clear **inductive approach** with (1) practice experience, (2) then theoretical implications and (3) applications for solutions – this when measuring protein contents or nitrate in soil and food while monitoring the food environment.

Attendees

Andreas Exner	RCE Graz-Styria
Livia Cepoiu	University of Graz
Anant Jani	Heidelberg University
Geoffrey Kwala,	Uganda Permaculture Consortium
Reiner Braun	os4os
Kathy Belpaeme,	City of Oostende, LL
Dirk Wascher	SusMetro

Further reading/Annex

- Seymor Papert 1999: [Eight Big Ideas Behind the Constructionist Learning Laboratory](#)
- [Jean Piaget \(ELT\): Cognitive Constructivism.](#)
- [The FREIRE Project](#)
- [John Dewey's Theory of Learning](#)
- Cities 2030: [The Local Learning & Living Lab \(L4\) - exploring the co-creational power of young people in a local community food context](#)
- Youth Based Solutions – [Examples](#)
- Copenhagen University [Summer School 2024: Food Place and Innovation](#) – Aug 2024
- https://intellectdiscover.com/content/journals/10.1386/ijfd_00049_1
- <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-995X/3/2/49>

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