

# CoP Compact – Session Summary

## SUSMETRO FOOD2030 Unlock Strategy

### Unlocking the food system: lock-ins, barriers and opportunities from a Living Lab perspective



Aleksandra Jovanovic & Dirk Wascher, 18 September 2024

## Case description

- This CoP session drew on the results of a SUSMETRO-led co-creative workshop on the lock-ins, barriers and opportunities in city region food transformation during the Cities 2030 project's final event 'Agri-Food Justice and Policy Innovation' (Marseille, 20 June 2024) as part of the FOOD2030 Unlock Strategy under the CLEVERFOOD project.
- During the Marseille workshop, 13 food-related Living Labs (LLs) from Cities 2030 shared experiences on the lock-ins and barriers ("challenges") encountered in their Living Labs addressing city region food systems (CRFS) strategies.
- According to the draft strategy's working definition, lock-ins are systemic and keep the dominant food system in place (e.g. energy prices, world market, international policies), while barriers offer more action space for Living Labs to tackle (examples: internal organisations, communication, limited funding, lack of public engagement).
- SUSMETRO shared the results of the LL session with the CoP participants and later opened the floor for 1) a joint discussion on re-defining lock-ins and barriers and 2) a Jamboard session to classify Living Lab experiences in the light of lock-ins and barriers.

## Take-home lessons

- **With regards to the lock-ins and barriers experienced by the Cities 2030 Living Labs, several topics were identified by the Living Labs themselves:**
  1. *Food policy relevance:* as illustrated for the case of a City Region Food System (CRFS) in Haarlem, the lack of targeted financial funding – CRFS being no priority for governments – the latter being considered a lock-in at the level of municipality. In this situation, **building consensus around a coherent and inclusive food vision for city regions through food councils** appears as key to the process. In the light of food policy development, there lies an opportunity for LLs to push for the establishment or (further) development of Food Councils in their city regions.
  2. *Organization and communication:* "the lack of clarity in the role of the LLs stakeholders" and "the lack of a strong business model" were mentioned as barriers by LLs. These in turn prevent the upscaling of the Living Lab innovation activities. A possible solution to these challenges is **improving the level of confidence of Living Labs with regards to their operations**. For example, through training courses on e.g. management, writing skills, and leadership skills it is possible to empower people from the community to engage in LL activities and for the drafting of food policy briefs.
  3. *Context-based and cultural:* Future Food Living Lab (Italy) mentioned a socio-political **lock-in**: "the Living Lab being surrounded by communities where polarization and poverty are present and these issues are prioritized by the political landscape. Food inclusivity (improving access to healthy food) in these communities is not seen as a political priority." There is a sense of "mistrust" from these communities towards Living Labs and municipalities. The issue of trust, however, can be seen as a barrier as well if we perceive it as something that can be worked on. For example: more transparency about the Living Lab operations and the effects it will have on the surrounding communities.
  4. *Strategy concept and terms:* it became clear that a distinction between lock-ins and barriers allow wide space for interpretation and that (1) existing literature might offer useful guidance, (2) there should be practical advantages when defining their operational agenda (also: 'spaces for hope'), (3) as such turn this distinction towards a co-creational process between LL stakeholder.

## Discussion

- Aleksandra asked whether the definition of lock-ins and barriers are helpful. Dirk agreed that it is not easy to clearly discern what constitutes a lock-in vs a barrier. It comes to the question of how we can trigger positive change and define the action space of Living Labs.
- Anant wonders "if the definitions are too academic for Living Labs, being it more of an academic exercise rather than something practical. With regards to lock-ins: "what is the point of LLs knowing about these challenges, if they cannot change it? From a structural perspective, the awareness of lock-ins are practical for e.g. municipalities to change subsidies and policies. The barriers are more important for the Living Labs as this is something actionable and where they can make a tangible difference for."

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- Marie: "Interesting distinction and these definitions can be used in co-creation meetings to point that there are things that are out of our control because of the systemic barriers and that we should focus on what we do have control on. There are also many examples where we do have control on (the barriers). E.g. you can't change the policies directly (lock-in), but you can change the direction of policies (barrier).
- Marie elaborates on the structure and goals of SUSMETRO's Living Lab session: instead of just mapping the lock-ins and barriers (being a scientific exercise), the next step would be to jointly tackle the barriers to de-lock the lock-ins (making it a practical exercise)
- Andreas: "As an academic I think science is practically very useful. I think both the concepts of lock-ins and barriers are scientifically well-founded. It resonates with the definition of structure by [Bob Jessop](#): structure would be a lock-in and a barrier is related to structure. Barriers can be seen as elements of structures that are more amenable to change. Jessop argues that transformation needs to strike a balance: not too far away from structures, but also not too close (since then change won't happen).
- Catalina: "I have not directly worked with LLs to understand what their challenges are, but I can agree with Andreas on the importance of language to translate their problems. From other practical experience, I know the problem is to engage people. So, it makes sense to approach language in a way that LLs feel that they can take action. It helps shape more of a realistic paradigm vs. changing the whole system (utopic paradigm)
- Marie: "There is this concept [Circle of Control](#) with the circle of influence (could be seen as barriers) and the circle of concern (lock-ins). With the LL stakeholders, you usually don't have influence on the circle of concern. As Catalina said on the use of language, maybe the terms used in the Circle of Influence speak more the language of the Living Labs?"

See below for some highlights on lock-ins and barriers from the [Jamboard](#) session with the CoP participants:

- Dirk comments on the internal barrier proposed by one the CoP participants on the **continuity in funding**: is there an experience outside the EU funding on how to fund a Living Lab independently? How internal or external is the funding issue?
- Marie, who proposed the barrier, comments that it relates specifically to funding from municipalities. The budget planning for food projects depends on the elections (context: Belgium). So, you have the cycle of the Living Lab project that comes with a cycle of funding.
- Anant: "How do you sustainably fund a Living Lab? Funding requests are very heterogeneous, so how do you define a Living Lab and what are their funding needs? We should re-assess what the sustainable funding of a Living Lab means and how that looks like."
- Dirk: "In terms of LL project goals and agenda's being set, does anyone see barriers in this?"
- Marie: "I recognize this personally a lot, because you write a grant with certain boundaries and expectations, but then you have to work in a certain set-frame."
- Catalina: "There also lies a cultural message on what is perceived on what is healthy food and what is not."
- Dirk: "Strong cultural preferences/traditions could be considered as a lock-in for change in sustainable food behavior."

## Attendees

Livia Cepoiu – RCE Graz-Styria  
Reiner Braun – os4os  
Carina Bell Woolhead – Guldborgsund Municipality,  
Nadia Tonoli – Bergamo Municipality  
Catalina Leon Gonzalez - Sant'Anna

Andreas Exner - RCE Graz-Styria  
Anant Jani – University Heidelberg  
Thomas – UCPH  
Dirk Wascher – SUSMETRO  
Aleksandra Jovanovic – SUSMETRO

## Further reading/

- [Unlocking the food system: a co-creation session with 13 Living Labs from the Cities 2030 project](#)
- [Bob Jessop: Agency, structure, institutions, discourse \(ASID\) in urban and regional development \(researchgate.net\)](#)
- Circle of Influence
  - [Exploring a Team's Circle of Influence | Scrum.org](#)
  - [Retromat: Circles & Soup / Circle of Influence \(#29\)](#)

## Next CoP event

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