TRAINING AND REFLECTION MODULE FOR PROFESSIONALS AND STAKEHOLDERS

R&I Policy Lab handbook

In a nutshell

Setting up a policy lab can be a starting point for changing the food system. This handbook will guide you through the process of setting up a policy lab and to help you solve challenges you may encounter along the way.

What for?

To explore and understand the food system
To work with my community on transforming the food system
To improve R&I policy coherence and alignment.

How long?

Applying guideline can take several months or years

For whom?

Intermediaries of change / food system transformation

Created by

ZonMw

Something to share?

Leave us a comment about this tool on the platform.

This tool was developed as part of FIT4FOOD2030 project see this tool and others on the FIT4FOOD2030 Knowledge Hub.

Date of creation: November, 2020

What will you gain from this?

This document is designed for a variety of stakeholders with an interest to be a change agent in food system transformation. Being a policy lab coordinator offers the person in question the chance to influence national policies on the food system by working in an innovative, out-of-the-box manner. Furthermore you will enrich your network and knowledge about the views of different actors in this network substantially.

Prior knowledge required

Coordinators of labs preferably have an interest and a background in working with a wide variety of actors (from the food system or in general). You should be familiar with the relevant policies and (internal) politics, and ideally already are known in the field. Users of this document can be working for governmental organisations, universities, funding organizations, or NGOs, for example.

POLICY LAB HANDBOOK

Introduction

You are probably reading this because you want to make a positive change to the food system. Making use of the policy lab instrument can be an effective way to create this change. This handbook will guide you through the process of setting up a policy lab and provides support to solve challenges you may encounter along the way.

In the FIT4FOOD2030 project, 11 Research & Innovation policy labs were established across Europe. The aim of these policy labs is **to increase the impact of R&I on the transformation towards a future-proof food system.** System change is difficult to achieve inside established, routine policy-making structures and circles. It is a longer-term process of participation, discussion and experimentation out of which a new, sustainable system can emerge.

To bring about systemic changes, policy labs build a network of diverse stakeholders, making a point of also including the unusual suspects, who would normally not be involved in policy discussions. Together the stakeholders analyse the current food system and related R&I landscape, identify barriers and opportunities and work on innovating food-related R&I policy, which includes making it more coherent where necessary. The policy labs work at a national or regional level, depending on how responsibilities are divided in a country.

The way the food system and R&I system function are highly dependent on their regional or national context. Therefore, there can be no blue print for how to establish and run a policy lab. The purpose of this handbook is to provide a framework, practical advice and **links to tools** developed within the FIT4FOOD2030 project, which you can customise to your own context. Moreover, the handbook shows examples from the policy labs that ran in the FIT4FOOD2030 project: Austria, Basque Country (Spain), Estonia, Flanders (Belgium), Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Romania and The Netherlands.

FIT4FOOD2030 has shown that R&I policy labs, as a novel instrument to system transformation, can be used effectively in many different settings. We sincerely hope that the concepts and experiences presented in this handbook can inspire you to run a policy lab to contribute towards sustainable, healthy and fair food systems.

The FIT4FOOD policy labs aimed to innovate their R&I system to increase its impact on food system transformation, and the handbook is written from this perspective. However, the policy lab instrument can also be used to address other complex societal challenges (such as climate change, antimicrobial resistance, energy transition) and/or from other angels than R&I (such as thematic policy).

Figure 1 The Fit4FOOD2030 R&I policy labs

FIT4FOOD2030

Our current food systems are not sustainable and are facing a number of complex and persistent challenges, such as the loss of biodiversity, climate change and diet-related diseases. An urgent transformation towards a sustainable and healthy food system for all is needed and requires evidence-based knowledge and innovations to guide and accelerate this system change.

The EU FOOD2030 policy framework, developed by the EC's Directorate- General for Research and Innovation, describes how current R&I practice is not adequate to meet the challenges the food system faces. It aims to improve the impact of R&I on Food System transformation.

To achieve that, the FIT4FOOD2030 project ran for three years from November 2017 to support the European Commission in the development and implementation of FOOD2030 and its action plan, by creating a sustainable, multi-stakeholder platform, through mobilizing a wide variety of stakeholders at the level of cities, regions, countries, and Europe. The main aims of the network are strengthening R&I policy and programmes, building competences for food systems R&I and raising awareness.

For more information on the FIT4FOOD2030 approach view this video. It shows project coordinator Prof. dr. Jacqueline Broerse explaining why problems in the food system are persistent (despite a lot of money having been spent to solve them) and how a system transformation as envisioned by (FIT4)FOOD2030 is needed to solve these problems.

FOOD SYSTEMS

Food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded. The food system is composed of sub-systems (e.g. farming system, waste management system, input supply system, etc.) and interacts with other key systems (e.g. energy system, trade system, health system, etc.). Therefore, a structural change in the food system might originate from a change in another system; for example, a policy promoting more biofuel in the energy system will have a significant impact on the food system.
FAO, 2018

What is a policy lab?

The concept of the policy lab, also called policy innovation labs, already existed before FIT4FOOD2030. Policy labs usually aim to tackle complex societal problems, which more traditional governance structures are not managing to solve.

Traditional, authority-centered governance works mostly through hierarchy characterized by central master plans, etc. Network-centered governance, as promoted by policy labs, focuses more on promoting, enabling and partnering and is characterized by a **shared vision, cooperation, flexibility, and continuous learning**. These are new requirements that need new capacities, the development of which the policy lab can support.

Although the word 'lab' may suggest a mere focus on research-like experimentation, the actual aim of labs is to create connections between experimentation ('research' in the widest sense of the word, across disciplines) and practice. Policy labs are set up as a **participatory and experimental space**. This space takes the form of a series of interrelated, interactive meetings or workshops with dedicated topics and methods, offering the structure in which policy innovation can take place. During these workshops, diverse stakeholders work together towards alignment of policies and programmes and explore novel ways of policy design. They typically run for several years, and can focus on different objectives, depending on the particular setting. The policy lab process is inherently **reflexive and adaptive** based on learnings and insights that come out of the discussions along the way. The process and outcomes cannot be set in stone beforehand.

A policy lab contributes to:

1) **Transformation capacity at system level**
   - Achieving a common orientation and helping facilitate coherence of strategies and actions of diverse stakeholders – based on a shared long-term vision, along with processes and mechanism of reflexivity.
   - Along aspired impact pathways that will enable to operationalize transformations and build strategies and policies for implementation and valorisation.
2) **Better integrated policy communities**
   - Improved information and collaboration between different actors (policymakers, departments, scientist, businesses) and areas (agriculture, health, R&I, etc.)
   - Coordinated actions (emerging consensus, improving the environment to be more supportive towards system change)
   - Enabled linkage between national, regional and possibly international developments
3) **Concrete outcomes and outputs resulting out of impact pathways**
   - Policy briefs, novel day-to-day practices, dedicated programmes.
   - Novel regulation, governance structures, pledges or collaboration agreements

Policy labs in FIT4FOOD2030

The **main goal** of the FIT4FOOD2030 policy labs is to **increase the impact of R&I on food system transformation**, specifically by improving food-related R&I policies. To achieve this, they create a **dialogue** between national (and/or regional) stakeholders from different parts of the food system, including science, industry and society, to explore knowledge questions/gaps and novel ways of policy design. Key aspects of the labs are a holistic approach and Responsible Research and Innovation.

Concrete **outcomes** or products of an R&I policy lab can for example be new tools for research funding or a dedicated holistic R&I programme. In this process, **additional advantages** that may have an equally important impact are created, such as increased awareness of the food system approach, (improved) interdepartmental cooperation, a broader and more inclusive stakeholder network, insight in other views and interests.

The FIT4FOOD2030 Policy labs were able to (as of May 2020):

- Build vibrant multi-stakeholder networks
- Create awareness and a sense of urgency about increasing the impact of R&I to contribute to the food system transformation
- Increase the understanding and use of the food system concept
- Gain political support for food system transformation
- Establish new or improved inter-departmental contacts between ministries, and/or funding agencies
- Connect with different existing relevant initiatives and to increase the alignment and scaling of food system change
- Acquire funding for innovative research calls on food system transformation

Furthermore,

- Participants from workshops organized by policy labs were generally very positive about the workshops and there was a lot of interest to join the labs; and
- Some policy labs were able to put integrated food policies on the government's agenda as a consequence of working on food systems R&I, or have outcomes of the policy lab taken up in national strategies.

Why set up an R&I policy lab to support food systems transformation?

The current way of producing, processing, transporting, consuming and wasting food is not sustainable. Examples of complex, persistent and very serious problems our food systems face and contribute to are:

- loss of biodiversity;
- climate change;
- malnutrition, including overweight & obesity, and related (chronic) diseases;
- food waste.

These issues are threatening our health, economies and ability to live on this planet.

The societal challenges connected to the food system can be referred to as a 'wicked problem', which is defined as: "a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve for as many as four reasons:

- incomplete or contradictory knowledge
- the number of people and opinions involved
- the large economic burden,
- and the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems".[1]

Changing food systems is therefore not an easy task. It requires a consistent **systemic approach**, in which multiple actors and disciplines work together towards a common goal, even though they often have competing interests and approaches.

[1] Rittel, Horst. "Dillemas in General Theory of Planning." Policy Sciences, 1973: 155-169

SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND POLICY ALIGNMENT & COHERENCE

A **systemic approach** is about viewing a problem or challenge within a greater whole, rather than in a vacuum; It means taking a holistic view. For food systems this means the inclusion of both **horizontal dimensions** (e.g. different fields of action, such as environment, health, infrastructure, and education) and **vertical dimensions** (e.g. all different stages of the food value chain). A systemic approach is needed to **better anticipate unexpected and undesired side effects** of measures or interventions in one part of the food system on other parts of the food system. A systemic approach enables to identify leverage points of change, trade-offs and potential for synergies.

In light of the systemic approach, **policy coherence** is an important component. Policy coherence is defined by the OECD as the systematic promotion of **mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies**, creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives. In other words, ensuring that policies from various departments and agencies strengthen each other, and especially avoiding that policies counteract. In order to make policies coherent, they need to be mapped and aligned with each other.

Even though **Research & Innovation** can and should be a catalyst for a transformation of the food system, delivering necessary knowledge and solutions, current R&I practice has several problems of its own, such as:

- **Fragmentation into disciplines** with relevant research and innovations scattered across different domains, and little support for interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research.
- **Low involvement of citizens and end-users** in R&I programmes and projects.
- An **emphasis on open calls, or fundamental research**, which makes it difficult to address specific societal challenges. This relates to shortcomings in the so called 'policy-science' interface – mapping the knowledge questions in thematic policy arenas and to work towards dissemination and valorisation of developed knowledge.

Policy labs can be used as a tool to improve the R&I system, to increase the impact of R&I. One important way to address the described problems of R&I systems is by operationalizing **Responsible Research and Innovation**.

An important benefit of an *R&I* policy lab is that it focuses on innovations and finding solutions, and can therefore function as a **'safe space'** for discussions between stakeholders with potentially conflicting interests or from different policy disciplines like agriculture and health. Thinking together about the desirable future and knowledge needs to reach this envisioned future can prevent conflicts arising around tradeoffs that are inherent in complex thematic policy issues, e.g. limiting the type of antibiotics that may be used for livestock to avoid antibiotic resistance, which is a threat to human health.

Multi/Inter/Trans – disciplinary research, what's the difference?

In a multidisciplinary approach two or more disciplines provide their viewpoint on a problem from their perspective. Therefore, there is little interaction across disciplines.

Interdisciplinarity, on the other hand, combines two or more disciplines to a new level of integration suggesting component boundaries start to break down. Interdisciplinarity is therefore more than a simple addition of parts but includes the recognition that each discipline can affect the research output of the other. Two or more discipline perspectives transcend each other to form a new holistic approach. The outcome will be completely different from what one would expect from the addition of the parts

In a transdisciplinary approach, research moves beyond the bridging of divides within academia to engaging directly with the production and use of knowledge outside of the academy. It enables the input of both scientific and non-scientific stakeholder communities and facilitates a systemic way of addressing societal challenges.

RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH & INNOVATION (RRI)

Responsible research and innovation (RRI) is an inclusive approach to R&I, to ensure that diverse societal actors collaborate during the R&I process. It aims to better align both the process and outcomes of R&I, with the values, needs and expectations of society. Feeding these insights into the R&I process in a pragmatic and realistic way can contribute to developing innovations that are valued and used broadly in society. Furthermore, as RRI involves stakeholders early in the R&I process, it helps to identify the changes that are needed across the food system and what competences are required in the various actors to make the innovation successful. Important principles of RRI are: diversity and inclusion; anticipation and reflection; openness and transparency; responsiveness and adaptive change.

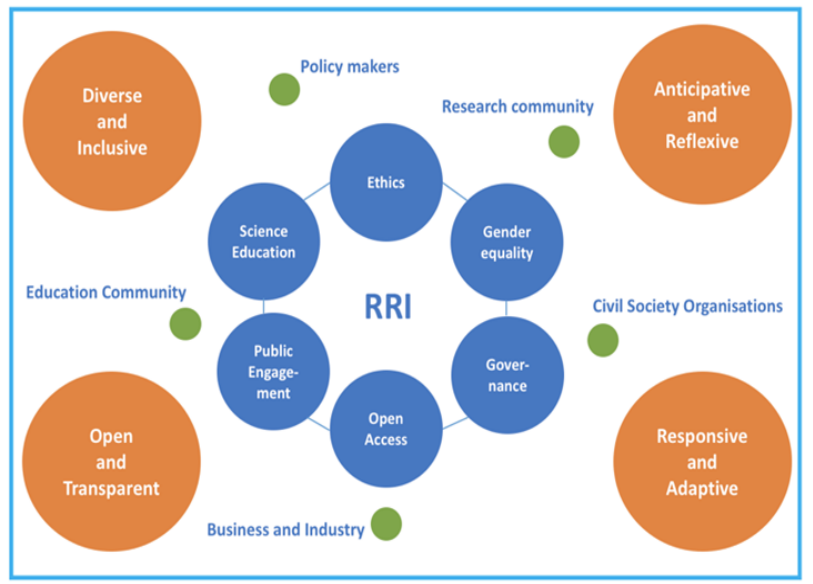


Figure 2 Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI). Model retrieved and adapted from RRI tools

Who initiates and runs a policy lab?

A policy lab is usually initiated by a **problem owner** of a complex societal challenge. In the context of policy, the problem owner is usually an organization that operates at local, regional or national governmental level, such as a ministry, research institute or municipality. Within this organization a **coordinator** should be appointed. This coordinator should ideally be in a position to ensure that the results of the lab are taken into consideration at the decision-making level, where they can feed into policy, regulation or day-to-day practises. Since the responsibilities for different aspects of the societal challenge usually lie within different institutes or organizations, getting support from these key actors from the start is desirable.

A challenge within all organisations, though maybe more prevalent in governmental ones in particular, is that nothing stays the same for a long period of time. It is important that initial support for the lab is maintained throughout the process, which can be especially challenging in times of elections or if central persons within institutions change position. As the coordinator, it helps to be known in the national or regional food scene, yet not as someone holding a dominant position with too many self-interests as this may deter certain stakeholders.

What capacities and skills are needed to run a policy lab?
Ideally, a policy lab should be coordinated by two people from different governmental organizations. This supports a systemic approach but also ensures continuity, in case a coordinator moves to a different position. It should be people who are familiar with the relevant policies and (internal) politics and with enough (formal and/or informal) influence to garner support for the policy lab and further implementation of the outcomes. It is helpful if the policy lab coordinators have complementing skills in project management, policy development and stakeholder engagement.

EXAMPLES from the FIT4FOOD2030 labs:

The policy labs in the FIT4FOOD2030 project received formal support in the form of a commitment letter from at least two ministries or regional departments before the start of the lab; and the coordinators of the policy labs were (with one exception) governmental officers representing two different departments or related institutions. Experience from the FIT4FOOD2030 project has shown that these requirements are valuable for the success of a policy lab – though also that maintaining the initial support for the lab requires a continuous effort and should be monitored carefully.

Required resources to run a lab

To run a policy lab you need to take into account a number of costs. The majority of the costs are staffing costs. In the FIT4FOOD2030 policy labs, the amount of time spent by a coordinator on the policy lab is 1.5 days per week on average. In practice, the time spent per week differs throughout the process, depending on the scheduled activities. The time required to run a policy lab also highly depends on the extent to which the lab activities are synergetic with the other tasks of the lab coordinator.

Besides staffing costs, possible travel expenses for the coordinator(s) and funds needed to organize the activities, such as meeting locations, catering and facilitators, should be taken into account. These costs will of course vary per country. In FIT4FOOD2030, personal capacity building of the coordinators was provided by the project with a series of training sessions – in case of future policy labs outside of the project structure, external coaching or other types of training are recommended to support the coordinator throughout the process.

EXAMPLES from the FIT4FOOD2030 labs:

In case of the **Estonian** policy lab, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Rural Affairs both signed the letter of commitment to run a policy lab in Estonia. The policy lab is coordinated by the Ministry of Rural Affairs together with the National institute for health development. The Estonian policy lab coordinators see the policy lab as a great opportunity to bring together the competences of these two ministries.

In the **Irish** policy lab The Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine and Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation committed to the Irish Policy Lab. Both organisations dedicated a coordinator to the lab. The coordinators report as a direct benefit of this collaboration to have a better insight in what type of projects are funded in each other's organisation and how to put processes in place to enable a better knowledge flow.

GETTING STARTED

How to start a policy lab?

In the following sections we will discuss the different stages the FIT4FOOD2030 policy labs went through in order to build a sustainable network that has **transformative capacities** for research and innovation (R&I) on food systems. It is all about creating a **dialogue** between national (and/or regional) stakeholders involved in the food system, including science, industry and citizens to explore novel ways of policy design. This involves **identifying** and **motivating** relevant stakeholders, organizing effective meetings and making sure that the policy lab results in concrete outcomes and usable end products.

Labs proceed in four main phases with key activities: (1) system analysis and awareness, (2) visioning and developing pathways; (3) experimentation & innovation, and (4) continuity & legacy. In each of the phases, lab coordinators prepare and undertake **key activities** such as stakeholder meetings (see steps below) in their national or regional areas and then analyse the results to design the next phase.

For each of the phases and the associated network activities, **external support** – either by professionals in the field or peers with certain expertise – is an important element, as well as thorough preparation. In FIT4FOOD2030, lab coordinators participated in regular meetings for training (e.g. on leadership, meeting design, stakeholder engagement, pathway building) and learning across the labs, which helped them to organize the meetings and run the lab.

Since all policy labs are operating in different contexts and have different scopes and possible pathways to stimulate transition, **it is not possible to work with a one-size fits all methodology and facilitation script**. Therefore, this handbook is meant to inspire you and to provide a framework to get you started with your own policy lab. Part of the training materials have been incorporated in this handbook and the tools that it refers to, as well as the lessons we learnt from running the labs in FIT4FOOD2030. However, it might still be advisable to organize support for coordinators of future labs from coaches in the own country that are familiar with transformation processes, or to consult experts on specific elements. Many of the FIT4FOOD2030 lab coordinators also had a small core group, made up of people from their organisations and/or committed stakeholders from the network, that they consulted regularly with throughout the process.

Figure 3 the policy lab honeycomb

The honeycomb in figure 3 shows the **various phases** of the policy lab, with its series of interrelated meetings with dedicated topics. The bright green hexagons show the general themes and the dark green hexagons show the themes for stakeholder meetings, while the blue indicate the underlying goals. Below you can find information about how to go through these phases step by step.

FLOW

STEP 1: SETTING UP A STAKEHOLDER NETWORK

STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING THE FOOD / R&I SYSTEM

STEP 3: ENVISIONING A DESIRABLE FOOD FUTURE

STEP 4: EXPLORING AND DESIGNING PATHWAYS

STEP 5: EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW APPROACHES

STEP 6: EVALUATION AND ANCHORING ACHIEVEMENTS

COORDINATOR TIPS

As a policy lab coordinator, you play an important role in the (project) management of the policy lab, e.g. organizing and designing key processes, timelines and activities for the progress and success of the lab.

A key aspect in the project management is to ensure that you stay connected with the **higher hierarchy** that supported the initiation of the lab and to maintain their support for the lab and the outcomes of the lab. Central is building and maintaining relations with your **stakeholders**, and to inspire them to work with you and the network on improving the food system through R&I. Always keep the **interests** of your stakeholders in mind: what's in it for them? Always try to be **unbiased**; it is vital to be open to ideas from all your stakeholders.

During multi-stakeholder dialogues, you as a policy lab coordinator could function as a **facilitator** (or moderator), though you can of course also enlist the help of a colleague who is good at this or hire a facilitator.

FACILITATOR TIPS

The facilitator is responsible for handeling the policy labs workshops/ events. The faciltor can, but doesn't have to be the same person as the coodinator. The facilitator has an important role to play to ensure the active participation of all the participants in the given time frame while also reaching the workshop goals.

As a facilitator you need several skills and competences, such as verbal and non-verbal skills, negotiating skills, flexibility, and leadership. You need to create an environment in which all participants feel secure, are able to speak up and give their perspective on issues being discussed. This means that you may have to stimulate some participants to speak more often, while preventing other participants from speaking too often or too long. It also means that you will need to avoid discussions on issues that are not directly relevant.

A brief guide with facilitation tips is provided here:
https://knowledgehub.fit4food2030.eu/facilitatorstips

STEP 1: SETTING UP A DIVERSE STAKEHOLDER NETWORK

Why?

Involving a wide variety of stakeholders is essential to develop a broad understanding of the food system and related R&I, and create a collective vision of the desired transformation in order to set the scene for later discussions on impact pathways and experiments. And of course, having many relevant actors involved in the lab process helps to ensure broad support for the outcomes of the lab and their implementation. You want everyone to actively participate to identify together the main challenges and knowledge questions in the transformation of the food system. So in order to successfully build a transformative network, you must carefully consider who to involve and how.

STAKEHOLDERS

A commonly used description for stakeholder is: *An individual, group of individuals, or organization that is affected by- or influences the realization of visions or aims of a particular organization or process.*

How?

Setting up and maintaining a stakeholder network can be divided in two important steps

1. Stakeholder identification
2. Stakeholder mobilization/ engagement

In the context of the food system and food systems R&I you should think of stakeholders from all areas of the system, such as aqua- and agriculture, food processing, retail, (public) health and the general public. Also think about the different roles in these areas, like policymakers, funders, researchers, farmers, citizens. Try to think out of the box, and perhaps also invite behaviour scientists and lawyers. For example, including lawyers from the beginning of the R&I process could prevent the development of innovations that cannot be implemented due to regulations. In addition, their expertise is needed if you would want to suggest changes to regulations that form a barrier to innovation. Also ask identified stakeholders about their view on who should be part of the network.

Stakeholder identification is about identifying relevant organizations and their perspectives, but also about finding the “right” person to involve in your policy lab. It is key that the persons that you want to involve in the network, feel that they are a stakeholder; in other words, they must feel linked to the subject of the policy lab (e.g. the food system) and/or be motivated to transform it to become sustainable, healthy and fair food systems. Ideally, the people that you involve have a position within their network from which they can consult and influence a broader group of people. You can use the guiding questions and the matrix to start your stakeholder mapping and identification process.

GUIDING QUESTIONS STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION

First ask yourself …

- What does your existing network look like?
- Who can help you to identify and involve a broader range of stakeholders?
- What/where is the conversation about food systems and related R&I?
- Are (in)formal networks already mapped?
- Are there good examples of stakeholder engagement in other policy fields, or organisations you know?
- What is the position of your organisation in the discourse?

Take a broader look …

- What are the stakeholder groups in your country or region related to food systems and/or R&I?
- Who are the most essential stakeholders for realizing a transformation in R&I on food system, without whom you cannot succeed?

Filling out the matrix below could give good insight in what expertise your stakeholder network is lacking.

	Agriculture/ Food production and distribution	Oceans	Food production and distribution	Health	Environment	Other
NGO/CSO						
Business						
Policy Maker						
Knowledge centers (incl. R&D inst.)						
Funding agencies						
Consumers/citizens						
Other						

Figure 4 stakeholder mapping matrix

Stakeholder mobilisation/ engagement

You not only have to be able to identify relevant stakeholders, but also to convince them to be part of the policy lab and to invest time in the lab and to make sure that you keep them engaged. In this light it is important to think about the perspective of the stakeholders that you have identified. Which groups are already very active around food systems thinking and/or within the research and innovation fields? And which groups are almost never represented? Which groups could 'make or break' your initiative? These types of questions provide you some insight in the level of engagement you may expect at the start of your collaboration and provide you with strategies how to maintain or improve the level of engagement (read further stakeholder engagement box). When trying to involve different stakeholders, be aware that the reason why you would like them to take part in the network might not necessarily be a driver for them to join. It is therefore important to think in advance about the interests of the stakeholder; why would they engage in your policy lab, what's in it for them? Try to connect to the goals of the stakeholder. This may also influence the way you approach or invite stakeholders to participate in the lab. Keep in mind that stakeholder engagement is a continuous process: people may change jobs or priorities, so you might have to reassess how to engage a person or organisation along the way.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

You need to find the best strategies and tools to engage and communicate with each stakeholder (group). You need to identify relevant stakeholders and manage their involvement in the most appropriate way depending on how active and influential they are. To help you, you can use a stakeholder engagement strategy matrix like this one:

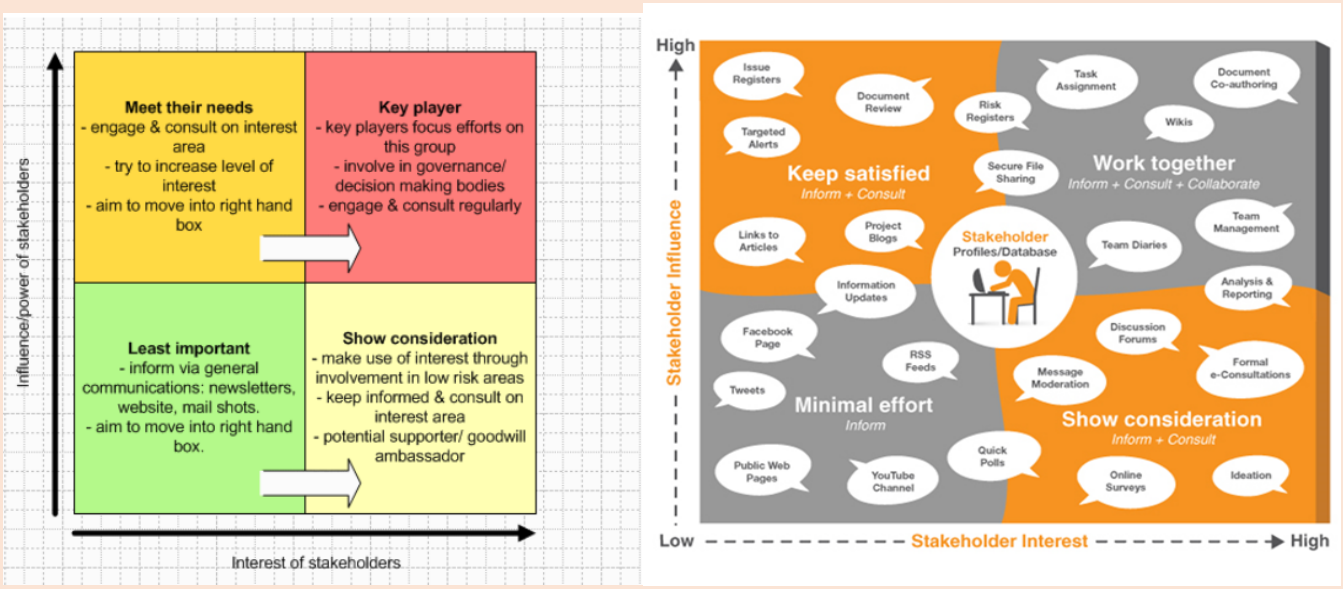


Figure 5 stakeholder engagement matrix

Source: Stakeholdermap.com, Kahootz - Transforming Public Sector Stakeholder Engagement - Effective Digital Channels and Strategies

Certain groups who might not feel that they have a direct interest in the goal of your policy lab and/or have scarce resources can be challenging to reach. In the FIT4FOOD2030 policy labs citizens, farmers and SMEs were experienced as 'hard to get' groups of stakeholders. You can use the tips & tricks to start thinking about how to familiarise yourself with these type of stakeholder groups, how to identify these groups and how to get and keep them involved.

EXAMPLES from the FIT4FOOD2030 labs:

In order to reach and engage a broad group of stakeholders from industry, the Romanian policy lab organized one of their early meetings back-to-back with a large food industry event. This proved to be a successful strategy.

TIPS & TRICKS

- Become familiar with tools for system and stakeholder analysis and to strategize for actor mobilization. There is a guide available on Tools and Training for Setting up a Transformative Network. A stakeholder analysis template is also included in this guide.
- Make use of existing networks, such as consumer organizations and already established initiatives and committees on (parts of) the food system and related R&I.
- Ask stakeholders you newly engage with if they know of others who should be involved → the snowball method.
- If you are not getting anywhere with a certain contact person from an organisation or initiative you would like to get on board, perhaps you could ask around and see if someone knows anyone else in that organisation who might be more interested. Find allies.
- Having a core group with the right stakeholders is a way to connect different parts of the food system.
- Look for start-ups and innovators; engage with a city lab, science shop and/or food policy council within your country, if they are there.
- There are methodologies, like citizen panels, that offer a structure for the involvement of citizens and can also foresee in some training or support for them to get familiar with the content/context
- Would you like to get more insight into target groups of policies? This radio podcast from the BBC shows an approach where experts from various disciplines are put into direct contact with the target group while brainstorming about solutions.

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND

Why?

After having identified and invited the stakeholders you want to involve in your policy lab, the next step is to gain insight into the current food system and the R&I landscape. Policy labs in the FIT4FOOD2030 project aim to make a change in the food system via R&I. To do this, the policy labs needed **insight into the current activities, opportunities and challenges in both the food system and related R&I system**.

Understanding is an important group process in a policy lab. This process should reveal the views of all the stakeholders, to arrive at a picture that is as complete as possible. This is an important base to enable you to find leverage points towards transformation, including the position of various stakeholders towards such leverage points.

FIT4FOOD POLICY LAB 'MANTRA'

General steps to guide the R&I policy lab through the understanding and analysis phase or, as we like to call it, the policy lab Mantra:

• What is the Food System? What does it look like from global, European and country perspective? What are global/European/national trends relating to or influencing the food system?

• What are the main societal challenges related to the food system in my country? What can we do something about? What are our strengths and weaknesses?

• What are the knowledge gaps and research needs to tackle these issues and make transitions possible? Define through RRI, involving scientists, policy makers, industry and other stakeholders: What existing, relevant R&I agendas are there? What are the strengths of your R&I community?

• What does this mean for R&I policy? How does the policy-research interface work in my country? What changes are needed? What outcomes do we want?

How?

This is where you organize the first policy lab meeting with your stakeholders. To make sure that a meeting delivers the outcomes that fit with the phase your policy lab is in, and that you can build on in the next step in your process, good meeting design is crucial. What questions do you want to ask your stakeholders, what work methods will you use? Enlisting external help here can be key, for example from an experienced facilitator. FIT4FOOD2030 also has a tool available to help with meeting design.

To get started with the content, perform a thorough collective analysis of the food system:

- What does it look like?
- What is the main societal challenge?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses?
- Which policies are in place to influence the functioning of the food system?
- What are the knowledge gaps and research needs to make transitions towards a sustainable food system possible?

To get a comprehensive picture of the food system, it is important to involve different stakeholders in a process of system understanding to have the view from various perspectives and to better understand the role and position of different actors within the R&I and food system, including conflicts of interest.

Then it is time to map the R&I system. To do this it is important to create an overview of existing research agendas and research programmes.

- What type of research is funded?
- How is research funded?
- Is there a flow or connection between research in specific areas of the food chain?
- How is the flow of results from research through the Technological Readiness Levels arranged?
- Are the broader challenges of the food system taken into account when working on innovation to tackle a particular issue within the food system? For example, how can we reduce food waste, while providing healthy nutrition for everyone?
- Are all steps of the knowledge cycle funded, from basic science towards implementation?

This overview might reveal a lack of policy coherence, dominances of R&I in specific areas and areas with a lack of R&I activity. A possible conclusion of this analysis could for example be that it would be good to have more transdisciplinary research, but regulation or just the way funding is administratively organised between or within institutions hinders funding this type of research.

At the end of this process, when you have a comprehensive picture of your situation, it is important to check if you miss any stakeholder perspectives, since this exercise might have made you realise that you overlooked an area of the food system or an important actor within the food system or R&I landscape.

Tools, exercises & a mantra

In the FIT4FOOD2030 project several tools and exercises were developed to help policy labs through these first important steps, which can be found on the knowledge hub. The policy lab mantra was developed to make the first steps more concrete. An example of a useful tool is an overview of trends in the food system, accompanied by an exercise with trend cards. The trend cards can be used as discussion starter with your stakeholders and provide insight in the view of various stakeholders on the importance of particular trends with a view to the ambitioned food systems transformation. Another example is a database of national and European policies targeting certain groups and policy goals within the food system, including R&I policies. Policy cards have been designed to discuss these policies and how they relate each other.

STEP 3: ENVISION

Why?

Visioning a desired future can be an important stimulus for change. It can be the first step in creating a powerful strategy to achieve a desirable future or a particular purpose. With complex systems, and the transformation of complex systems, there is usually tension or conflict of interest between stakeholders and resistance to change in the immediate future. Envisioning the future (e.g. 10 or 20 years from now) is an efficient way to start dialogue between the stakeholders, because in the envisioned future, a lot of these issues should be resolved. When you have a shared vision of what you want to achieve, the engagement process becomes more meaningful for all involved.

Visioning sessions will provide insights to what extent the viewpoints of stakeholders are shared at a particular moment in time, and as such, where they can find each other for future collaborations and activities. A visioning process can also help to show the interdependencies between different factors that shape the future. During the rest of the policy lab process, the shared vision can serve as the collective dot on the horizon, guiding discussions and choices and helping to ensure all stakeholders stay focussed on the end goal.

EXAMPLES from the FIT4FOOD2030 labs:

The vision from the Lithuanian policy lab
Lithuanian citizens are provided with fully-fledged and nutritious food that is produced from sustainably grown products
enriched with most valuable active biological materials derived from by-products or from products that are no longer suitable for direct use as food.

How?

Because a high-quality visioning process takes time, a good preparation of the meeting is essential. In a visioning process, various stakeholders that are involved in the specific topic are brought together. This makes visioning a participatory tool to develop a shared vision of the future. Two central questions in a visioning process include: ''Where are you now'' and ''Where do you want to be in the future''.
The **aim** is to develop **written and visualized statements of long-term goals** and strategic objectives. Everything is possible: words, sentences, pictures, drawings, etc. The **outcome** of a visioning process includes some images that communicate in a very powerful way the preferred future and benefits of the future.

An example on how to start such a process is the following:

''Please close your eyes. Imagine it is the year 2030. It is a beautiful day. You sit down with some friends and you would like to eat something that is healthy and sustainable. The food system is future-proof. But in this future-proof system, how was your meal produced? Where does it come from? What kind of food is it? How does it look like? Where did you buy it? Who was connected to the production and distribution of your food? What role did you play?''

Tools & exercises

You can use the exercises given as examples in the FIT4FOOD2030 facilitation document on visioning as a basis for your session. For example, start with sparking participants' imagination and thinking about future-proof food systems, by telling a (meditative) story, such as in the quote above. The visions of your participants can thereafter be discussed and together, these can be merged into one **collective** vision. A different approach could be to take existing visions or scenarios as entry point to spark a debate on desired futures. It is important, as always, to really think about the design of the session beforehand in order to achieve useful outcomes. Also think of solutions if relevant stakeholders are not able to participate. An option is to gather their input with described exercises in bilateral interviews.

STEP 4: DRAFTING A ROADMAP

Why?

After you have established the vision of your policy lab with your stakeholders, the next step is to draft a roadmap to improve the R&I landscape, to work towards your vision. In this process policy labs identify **which steps and changes are needed to realise the collective vision of the food system**. From these identified steps and changes, it can then be discussed what these would mean for R&I and the R&I system: How can the R&I system facilitate the needed changes in R&I? Are there any limitations in the R&I system that hinder solving complex problems? For example;

- Does the current R&I system allow multi- and/or transdisciplinary research?
- Are there sufficient processes in place that ensure a flow between research programmes (from different departments or institutions) that target different Technical Readiness Levels as well as research programmes that target different domains of the food system?
- What changes in the R&I system are required to tackle identified limitations or to stimulate potential synergies?
- But also: what topics need to be studied, and in what way?

How?

The first step in drafting a roadmap is to take the developed vision and divide it into sub-goals you need to reach in order to work towards this aspired vision. For example, in order to achieve a vision of a healthy and sustainable food system in 2030, you will have to reach various policy, technological and perhaps social goals, such as a significant increase in the consumption of plant proteins, or clearer consumer information about the health and environmental impacts of food products. To start the identification process of your sub-goals, it can be helpful to **look into potential breakthroughs and best practices or showcases** (within your country or beyond the borders of your country).

Breakthroughs are a notable change to some previous point of reference, and can happen in any type of field: technologies, norms and values, cultures, financial structures etc. Examples of past breakthroughs in the context of food systems are the discovery of fire and cooking, canning and freeze-drying. In the policy lab, you need to think about what type of new breakthroughs you need to achieve significant changes in the food system.

Showcases can be defined as initiatives (key findings, good practices, networks, case studies, projects and movements) that have contributed, or are contributing, to food systems development and/or R&I development. Identifying and analysing showcases enables learning from experiences and will increase insight into how the effectiveness of measures, programmes, initiatives, etc. can be improved.

To identify the ambitioned breakthroughs and useful showcases in your policy lab, you can draw inspiration from existing overviews, such as those developed by FIT4FOOD2030. These are further explained in the tools and exercises section of this step.

Building on the breakthroughs and the showcases you can **develop the roadmap towards your vision**. List the different goals you want to achieve. It's good to formulate these quite SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound), for example: reducing food packaging waste by 75% in 2030. Then, you can start building 'impact pathways' towards these goals, which consist of the various pathway steps or building blocks that are needed to achieve it. What changes and measures do we need to get there? Then you ask yourself:

- Which knowledge and innovation is needed to make these changes? What knowledge gaps are there?
- How can R&I policy be more supportive of the kind of R&I that is needed?
- Which framework conditions are relevant and important?
- What are the R&I policy instruments that you have available?

- Which breakthroughs or knowledge needs can be worked on in parallel? Which are depending on each other?
- Who are the key players for each step in the roadmap?

By identifying and writing down these different steps, you start building the pathways for the different goals that make up your roadmap towards the vision. Also include developments that you think are relevant to a particular pathway, or questions that you perhaps don't have an answer to yet.

While designing this session on building a roadmap, think about who you should involve. You could involve the same stakeholders as in the visioning process, but if you lack specific expertise for certain pathways try to involve also these stakeholders. It might also be crucial to have people with a certain influence at the table.

EXAMPLE: PATHWAY "Automation as basis for new or renovated buildings"

Figure 6 Pathway to impact exercise

Tools and exercises

Within the FIT4FOOD2030 project, many tools and exercises were developed to help policy labs with designing a meeting for drafting a roadmap. A very useful exercise for drafting a roadmap is the **pathways to impact exercise**. In this exercise stakeholders are asked to build pathways for breakthroughs to achieve the aspired vision. They do this by breaking up the vision in several smaller goals, that contribute to the vision. Then, they identify R&I policy instruments that support this goal. R&I policy instruments can be economic means, regulation, information, or others. In the pathway they also think about societal engagement. Which stakeholders should be engaged and how should these stakeholders be engaged? For example, how can we involve consumers in this pathway step? Last, they identify trends or drivers that have an influence. If you would like to use this exercise in your own policy lab, you can use the facilitation document on experimenting within the policy lab.

FIT4FOOD2030 has also analysed past breakthroughs and developed insights in key barriers, enablers and favourable conditions to stimulate R&I breakthroughs. Furthermore, a report on potential breakthroughs has been made, including exercises on how you could identify relevant future breakthroughs with your network. The 'Tools and training guideline for identifying showcases and designing roadmaps for R&I breakthroughs' can help you with the identification of showcases and roadmaps for R&I breakthroughs.

The EC has developed Food2030 Pathways to impact – 10 identified areas of which it is expected that further R&I investments could play an important role to work towards a future-proof food system. The FIT4FOOD2030 project has built on this report and for each Pathways identified the R&I questions that need to be answered, as well as the enablers and barriers and the wider policy context.

TIPS & TRICKS

- The independent expert group from the EC on Food2030 published a recommendation on the role of R&I to work towards future proof Food Systems. This report also includes recommendations for various stakeholders, including national and regional governments. Please find the report here.
- The FIT4FOOD2030 consortium has identified several R&I breakthroughs that could move food systems towards Food and Nutrition Security and created Breakthrough Cards. You can use these as inspiration for your roadmap or you could identify breakthroughs yourself in your policy lab.
- You can set out a survey to collect input on showcases and breakthroughs in case not everyone can join the meeting.

STEP 5: EXPLORE AND EXPERIMENT

Why?

You have established a collective understanding of the food system and R&I landscape, worked together on a vision, and created a roadmap on how to work towards this vision. It is now time to move from talking to doing, and to put one or multiple things that you have been talking about in the lab into action. The idea behind the experiment is to **do something in a novel way**, and to **monitor and evaluate** how the experiment can contribute to a sustainable improvement in the R&I system, with the ultimate goal of increasing the impact of R&I on the transition to a future-proof food system. You can also think of the experiment in terms of a pilot.

Experiments can be related to the research content (what is being researched, e.g. addressing a topic in a systemic way), but also to how research is conducted and funded, and trying to solve barriers in the R&I system. Examples of experiments are:

- launching an innovative call to stimulate a systems or RRI approach;
- developing a holistic research agenda with stakeholders from different areas;
- improving the policy-science interface, ensuring more applied research takes place in order to solve identified challenges in a specific area;
- offering financial incentives for inter- or transdisciplinary collaboration.

How?

Start by deciding on promising ideas by **prioritizing the pathway steps in your roadmap**, for example based on urgency and feasibility. Look at the **R&I barriers and gaps** associated with your priorities, and think about how these could be translated into an experiment or a pilot. You also need to think about who you need for which part of this process. It might work best in your situation to do the prioritization with the large stakeholder group, but further develop and execute the experiment(s) with a smaller group, perhaps because specific expertise is necessary to work out an R&I experiment. If you opt for this, you should of course keep your broader stakeholder network in the loop while the experiment is being carried out.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Leading an experiment as a policy lab coordinator is not about providing solutions but creating good questions that reveal new dimensions. The aim is to create a new context that inspires people to start a journey of discovery and experimentation. Try to very gently frame an existing question in a new way, for instance by adding aspects such as ethical treatment of animals and fair working conditions of food workers. This new framing may move people from an initial sense of hopelessness or frustration to one of openness and curiosity to explore something different.

The experiment is an integral part of your policy lab process; it should follow out of, and build on, the ideas that were generated in previous meetings. What impact can the experiment have on your final goal and on your vision? Also think about practical feasibility; do you have enough time and resources to conduct such an experiment? The guiding questions listed below can help you to become more concrete while designing experiments.

When designing your experiment, it is important to already think about and discuss when the experiment can be regarded as successful and how you could evaluate if the experiment was a success.

Of course you need to be realistic, keeping in mind the current situation. You won't be able to transform the research funding system as a whole within the scope of your policy lab. This is about developing a comprehensive roadmap for change, and taking a first step of putting it into action. **So focus on what is achievable within the near future, while still maintaining the potential for long-term impact**. You could for instance think of selecting already funded research projects on your topic of interest and bringing these project groups together to stimulate exchange.

Or you could provide funding to build a network between these research groups. You may also explore new ways of reaching out to stakeholders beyond policy-making. What can be **novel and attractive ways and channels to communicate** with civil society, farmers and other groups that have usually a low engagement level in R&I programming and policy making?

In the design stage it is important to identify the relevant framework conditions for the experiment that you are conducting. Can the experiment actually be conducted as planned? If you are, for example, planning to launch a transdisciplinary call, check if there are any funding regulations that could hinder funding transdisciplinary research (e.g. a rule that only academic institutes can receive funding could hinder meaningful engagement of other stakeholders within a project).

TIPS & TRICKS

Agree with your stakeholders on expectations, indicators and monitoring. When is an experiment successful? How could the outcome contribute to a sustainable change in food systems R&I?

Experimenting is a combination of learning and doing to create something new. This may also involve failure on the way. An experiment in a policy lab can also be seen as **building a prototype** which can be easily changed, adapted and re-adapted as seen fit. It could happen that you find obstacles while or after you have conducted the experiment. In these cases, it is important to learn from this experience and include it in your findings or reports; could you take away these obstacles in the future?

At this point in the policy lab process, it is important to allow some time for the experiment(s) to take place before you can evaluate what was done, but not so long that you lose momentum and the connection with your network. So when you are designing your experiment, it is important to take into account that you should be able to say something about it, or draw some first conclusions after a year or so. This does not mean it has to be completely finished by then.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Who will be involved in the experiment(s) and how? Are all the necessary people (stakeholders) represented? Do we miss a group or person that are not typically represented (e.g. vulnerable groups)?
- What are the leverage points where you can make a change and increase the impact of R&I investments?
- How does the experiment relate to the vision of your policy lab (i.e. desirable future food system, how the system could work differently, the related R&I roadmap)?
- Experiments are about doing things differently. Which potential for change does the experiment have? What are the scope and degree of novelty involved with the experiment? e.g. compared to how things have been done till now.
- Change always involves risk. How much risk is involved in the experiment? A little, quite a lot? For whom?
- Are the central aspects of a systems approach and RRI reflected in the chosen experiment(s)?
- What would your policy lab like to get out of this experiment? How will this be monitored?
- Do you still need to align with certain stakeholders who were not yet involved in the discussion and/or decision about the experiment so far?
- Could the experiment be a starting point for successful diffusion or scaling up?
- How could the outcome contribute to a sustainable change in the food system and in food systems R&I?

EXAMPLES from the FIT4FOOD2030 labs:

In the FIT4FOOD2030 project, the policy lab of the Netherlands has launched a call for proposals according to the **sandpit model**. In a sandpit, a group of participants work together in a series of interactive workshops, taking place at the same location over 3-5 days. Sandpits have a highly multidisciplinary mix of participants, some active researchers and others potential users of research outcomes, to drive lateral thinking and radical approaches to address research challenges. The participants of the sandpit formed a consortium that wrote a proposal about how to work towards a future-proof food system. In the Irish policy lab a deliberative democracy event to support the identification of key challenges to provide direction to public investment in food & biobased system innovation is in preparation. The Italian policy lab struggled with citizens representation at their events and in is working towards increasing the voice of citizens in their work via structured online consultation.

STEP 6: EVALUATION AND ANCHORING ACHIEVEMENTS

Why?

Now that you have put your policy lab on the map and have conducted an or several experiment(s), it is time to evaluate the work that you have done and to make your achievements visible and your network and successes sustainable. After all, you don't want your results to end up on a shelf. To be able to continue the good work that you have done in the policy lab, it is important **to identify the lessons learned** and think about how your lab could continue in some form in the future.

How?

For the evaluation of the results of the policy lab, you could think about a number of things, for example: What changed in the period that the policy lab was active? What part of this change can be attributed to the work of the policy lab? How could the results of the policy lab contribute to the bigger picture? What are the lessons learned? Is there anything that you would do differently with the knowledge you have now? You could organize a meeting to discuss the outcomes and evaluate the policy lab together with your stakeholders. You could also send out questionnaires to the participants of the stakeholder meetings, or have bilateral talks with them.

While evaluating, also think about **how the results of your policy lab can be used/ further developed**. There are several ways in which your lab can be developed further and in which you can make it sustainable. Below you can find some ideas about how you can do this.

Growing

You can enlarge your policy lab by attracting more participants or funding. When a Lab is developed regionally / nationally, it is often in the form of an initiative or project. These can stay small but also attract growing numbers of contributors or participants. Growth is often achieved by increased visibility, professionalization and communication capacities from initiators as well as their ability to generate resources. You can grow your lab by either, enlarging the amount or type of stakeholders in your lab, or by enlarging the mandate or area that the lab covers.

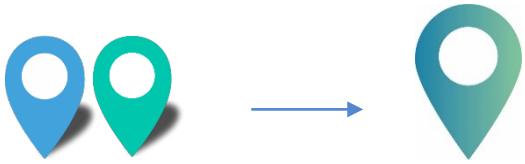
Replicating

Replicating refers to the translation of the ideas, models and practices of a policy lab into another context. Replication is often started by inspiration, for instance: individuals may pick up ideas from Lab activities and get stimulated to start a similar initiative. You can start replicating, by using the approach or the methods and facilitation tools in this handbook for other topics within your organization/ministry. You may also utilize the initial lab idea to "spin off" labs on specific topics such as food waste or food packaging.

Embedding

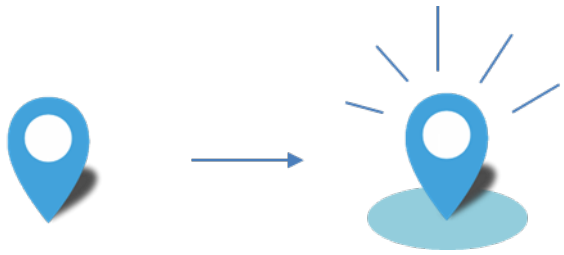
Embedding is another way to make your policy lab sustainable. By embedding we mean the institutionalization of a lab through structural anchoring in – for example – as a competence unit/team within an existing organization (for instance a funding agency) or transdisciplinary funding schemes. When a lab is embedded, it becomes mainstream, norm, routine or rule. Ultimately the embedding of a Lab also implies having achieved its transformative potential at a regional / national level.

Partnering



You can also partner up with another policy lab. By partnering, you gain advantages of pooling synergies and resources but also from identified opportunities for collaboration to increase impact. An example of a partnership that can be beneficial, is launching joint calls with other entities, or linking with other strategies with a similar goal, for instance Bio-economy.

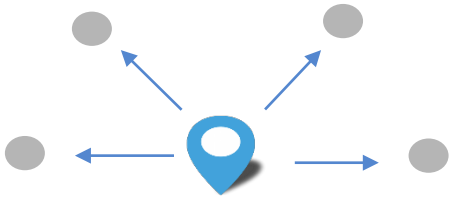
Instrumentalising



Instrumentalisation is the strengthening of a lab by exploiting opportunities in the governance context. Depending on the lab's ability to present itself in an attractive way and being able to navigate bureaucracy, it might tap into government resources or support to become more sustainable. You can for instance contribute the outcomes of your policy lab for political and policy processes, such as elections, or become a (legal) entity.

Scaling

Promising lab practices could be **scaled out** to other parties to test and refine. Encourage networks of people who are working on food system change to share information, horizontally across the system. This would imply going beyond the R&I domain and connecting with food actors in neighboring sectors such as health, (higher) education, or transport working on food-related challenges. Ultimately, you may even decide to co-design and launch a call with funding from several or campaigns involving industry and consumer organizations.



Scaling up successful lab practices to the system level means to ensure that results are sustainable (i.e. support what works with policies, administrative procedures, and resources). Engaging in cross-regional, trans-national activities and schemes can be a fruitful way forward. For example, establishing collaboration between regional/national funding bodies.

TIPS

- In countries with strong regional dimensions, the work of the policy lab should be performed both in regional as on national level, since the regions might have different approaches and therefore other roadmaps to impact and experiments are needed. To keep the lab going in future, the interaction within the network and the topic/ theme should be interesting for all the stakeholders – the urgency of the themes should be felt.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIT4FOOD2030 POLICY LABS

The Norwegian policy lab embedded their activities to an already existing Nordic network on Food Systems and Sustainability. In this way the lab coordinator easily received access to a great variety of stakeholders and the Nordic network was enriched with the perspective of R&I. The Romanian and Italian policy lab attempt to connect their activities with EU Structural Funds and National Research Plan (Romania) and National Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation of the ministry of agriculture (Italy) which can be seen as a mix between the partnering and instrumentalizing approach.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

In the space of the project period, all 11 FIT4FOOD2030 policy labs have had numerous impacts in the area of food systems and related R&I. As listed on page 6, they raised awareness about the existence and importance of the systems approach, built networks and new connections between people and produced concrete outputs such as the funding of transdisciplinary research projects and jointly developed holistic research agendas. At this point in time, it is still too early to say if and in what way the policy labs made a substantial contribution to making the R&I system in their countries or regions more impactful on food system transformation. Within the concept of 'wicked problems' it is also difficult to measure or claim definite success. But we can offer a few reflections on some of the overarching challenges we encountered in the project and possible ways forward for the future.

Political support

Ensuring and maintaining political support from different ministries has been one of the main challenges. In many cases, although there had been support in writing from multiple ministries at the start, the policy lab was closer to the heart of one ministry and it was difficult to have ownership from the other ministries. For most labs the ideal situation would have been the involvement of at least three or four governmental bodies, representing science, agri/aquaculture, health and/or environment. In practice, most labs have been able to improve the collaboration between two governmental bodies, which is in principle a step in the right direction, although this also had an impact on the direction of the lab activity and the shaping of the stakeholder network. Ways to try and maintain political support for the policy lab throughout the process could have been official reporting to higher hierarchy at set moments in time, ensuring small wins on the short term, keeping the lab connected to (changing) policy developments and ensuring that the policy lab coordinator has a good understanding of the underlying motivations of the higher hierarchy to support the policy lab.

Complexity of topics

The topics that the FIT4FOOD2030 R&I policy labs had to deal with are complex. They had the challenge to map and analyse two systems within their country or region (1) the food system and country specific opportunities and challenges, and (2) the way R&I is structured, programmed and financed, especially in relation to the food system. It can take a while for people to wrap their head around these two interrelated steps and everything they entail. The 'policy lab mantra' was developed to make these steps, and the order in which they should be considered, very concrete at the start of the lab. But the fact that you are talking about barriers, opportunities and potential changes in two systems keeps coming back throughout the process. Building up and grasping the knowledge about the formal and informal practices of these systems by the coordination team and the growing stakeholder network of the lab is difficult. This will simply take time and effort, and it is good to keep making explicit in the different phases that you are dealing with two systems and how they are connected.

Timeline

Building a network, building trust and working towards a joint vision for food system transformation is a time-consuming task. The timelines set out for the different steps of the honeycomb (see page) should allow for unexpected setbacks, though at the same time should not be too long to lose the interest of the stakeholders or to miss windows of opportunity identified by your network. It is a challenging task to allow the network the time to grow, to adjust for setbacks such as changes or uncertainties in policy directions due to, for example, elections or changes in the hierarchy. Within the FIT4FOOD2030 project the policy labs also had to take into account the timeline of the overarching project. Especially the second group of policy labs had limited time to go through the various steps as they started half way through the project. This gave little room for setbacks. And to make the challenge even more difficult for the labs, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the whole of Europe into lockdown in the final year of the project. This impacted the labs on various levels e.g. changed work priorities, difficulties to reach and connect with stakeholder groups and being forced to move into digital workshops, which required a different approach and methodologies. In addition, at the governmental level the pandemic can also negatively impact the window of opportunity for experiments or valorisation of experiments in funding programmes for example, at least on the short term. Of course, it is not possible to predict the arising of a pandemic, or that a minister of agriculture will be replaced twice over a short period of time. These examples do show however that it is likely that setbacks will occur and will affect your timeline.

Reaching the difficult to reach

It has proven difficult to include stakeholders in the policy lab which are not connected to the work field of the policy lab coordinator. It depends on the setting of the lab and the professional (and personal) network of the coordinator which type of stakeholder this might be. In the context of FIT4FOOD2030 the end users (citizens, farmers) as well as the industry (SMEs and/or bigger companies) were often defined as stakeholders that were difficult to reach or engage in the policy lab. Other ministries, covering a different policy domain, have also been mentioned. Connecting with these stakeholders and building a working relation is time consuming, amongst others due to the fact that it can be difficult to find common ground and come to mutual understanding of each other's needs and interest. It is especially with the engagement of these groups that there is a tension between the projected timeline of the (various phases of the) policy lab and the time needed to include this stakeholder perspective in the network. The experience in the FIT4FOOD2030 network however also shows that during the runtime of the lab it was possible to connect with groups that were defined at the start of the lab as difficult to reach. These were then able to add to the earlier work of the lab, leading to a more complete picture of the landscape.

Innovating R&I policy

The ultimate goal of the FIT4FOOD2030 policy labs has been to improve the impact of R&I on making the food system future-proof, by innovating the relevant R&I policies and making them more coherent. However, we have observed that so far that the emphasis in the labs has mostly been on better understanding the knowledge needs towards a food system transformation, for example discussing more interdisciplinary topics for research to address issues in the food system. So the emphasis has been more on *what* type of research needs doing, rather than looking at *how* research is conducted and finding solutions for systemic barriers. This might have to do with the complexity of how R&I functions, and how fragmented it can be. It might also be a question of time, because first you need to establish *what* you need from research in order to reach your food system vision, before you can explore *how* R&I policy could and should facilitate this. This underlines the importance of allowing enough time for the policy lab process, but also of good meeting design and thinking carefully beforehand what sort of outcomes you need from a meeting to move forward and how you can get there. Having said that, several labs have put experiments in place or have made important progress towards such experiments, which could become a showcase of how R&I investments could be more impactful.

A NICE SURPRISE

When the coordinators were asked at one point during the last year of the project what had surprised them, several replied that they had not expected that some of the, often quite creative, methods and tools offered by FIT4FOOD2030 for use in the policy lab meetings would be well received by their participants, who were sometimes quite high-level people. Therefore, they were pleasantly surprised that the participants were in fact enthusiastic about the new methods and actively engaged, leading to lively, interactive sessions.

Based on the experiences in FIT4FOOD2030, the policy lab is a valuable instrument to support system change, and for the coordinator of the policy lab a challenging, but rewarding, task which will enrich them on a professional and personal level. The impact of the policy lab will depend on the personal capacity of the coordinating team, the mandate it has at the start and throughout the runtime, but is also depending on external developments and the ability to adapt the lab to deal with these developments. Without a doubt though, the policy lab can improve the understanding of the importance of the food system, bring together a wide variety of stakeholders and work towards a better policy-science interface and improved collaboration and understanding between governmental institutes, as well as governmental institutes and other stakeholders.

Coordinated by:

VU VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM

Partners

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