



WildFood

WildFood Project

Eating the wild: Improving the value-chain of Mediterranean Wild Food Products (WFP)

Practical procedures to design an innovative sustainable BM

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Executive summary

This document holds a set of points which need to be considered in practical procedures when designing in the innovative and sustainable business models. To some extent these points can be fitted into three key phases of living labs that were implemented within the Task 4.2 of WildFood project, where innovative business models for the wild food products sector were being designed. However, they were not meant to be strictly segmented according to phases of; (1) set-up of a living lab, the (2) co-creation phase, and finally (3) monitoring and evaluation of living labs. The points are described in a way so that anyone trying to design innovative and sustainable business models can use them as checkpoints to be considered. Moreover, references were made to the WildFood project in the context of living lab sessions that were implemented across partnering countries. Therefore, practical examples are highlighted as in how those points were addressed while trying to find innovative solutions to current business models within the wild food sector. This document also wraps up work package 4 of the WildFood project as it draws conclusions and outcomes from previous actions and resulting deliverables of Task 4.2.

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1. The aim of Creating new business models (Task 4.2)

The purpose of the second task of the fourth work package of WildFood project was to (1) investigate the current state of business models (BM) in wild-food products (WFP) sector, assess the shortcomings or potential solutions, then (2) to materialize that information within a series of living-lab sessions, where innovation of business models was to take place, and finally (3) to harvest the experiences and know-how gained in the innovation task within LL sessions and provide their synthesis as practical guidelines on how to design innovative BM. The latter action is captured within deliverable 4.5 (Report on practical procedures to design an innovative sustainable BM), which is presented in this report.

Information and data upon which this deliverable is based on was primarily collected during LL sessions, which were held in partnering countries, and some additional personal correspondence between individual project partners and the coordinators of the work package 4, SFI.

The elements follow the same steps as those highlighted in the previous deliverable D4.4 where three phases of living labs were defined and described, however they are not in framed in those steps specifically and are listed in an arbitrary way. Elements described in the following text are to be used as checkpoints which need to be addressed when designing innovative BM. We tried to integrate practical experiences that are relevant for each element and came up in LL sessions across projects within partnering countries.

2. Key elements to be considered in practical procedures of designing innovative business models

This section presents a set of elements that need to be considered when implementing practical procedures of innovation. These are complementary to the living lab process which was implemented in the WildFood project, because we tried to highlight those elements that proved to be significant when living lab sessions were prepared, implemented, and evaluated.

Defining the purpose

Clearly specifying the purpose of innovation process is a crucial element which sets the future work and to some extent also the potential success of innovation. This was something that WildFood project considered very seriously as partners held multiple work meeting among themselves to discuss and to pinpoint clearly what is the purpose of having living labs. In general, this is related to the problem or issue that we're trying to address, and a clear definition of what we're trying to solve also helps in defining the purpose of living labs. Before organising living labs project partners also had bilateral meetings with stakeholders from outside of the project. That helped in highlighting key issues the stakeholders are dealing with and which of those could be solved within the living labs.

Scope of innovation

Setting the scope of innovation procedure is critical as well because it helps to see what the context of the issue is. Scope of innovation involves several points like temporal and personal resources, legislative framework within which stakeholders are acting, and finally what are the needs of stakeholders. The latter is especially important because if we address issues that are truly relevant to stakeholders we can count on their active involvement. Otherwise, stakeholders might ignore our invitations to the innovation process, which could either stop the process entirely or provide results that are irrelevant and thus will probably not

be implemented.

Scalability and generalisation

Despite the fact that solution generated within innovation process maybe context-specific and perhaps not easily transferable two other settings, it's still important to consider the extent to which those solutions could be generalised onto higher spatial levels or even transferred into other geographical or socio-cultural circumstances. Ensuring generalisation can be challenging and requires thoughtful design of solutions. This aspect might be also discussed during living lab sessions where a larger number of stakeholders can think about issues that could occur when transferring suggested solutions into other settings. In some cases, only parts of the solutions can be transferred or generalised, which is also a promising outcome. In WildFood project we have considered this as we, especially in bilateral meetings between partners, have discussed possibilities of having the same solutions in different countries. This was especially relevant for neighbouring countries who often share similar socio-economic environments and ecological conditions, which are both important in the context of wild food products.

Stakeholder involvement

Importance of having stakeholders involved in the innovation process was already mentioned in previous section, but because it's so crucial for the success of innovation process – especially if we frame it as living lab sessions –, the way we involve stakeholders needs to be addressed carefully. Living labs are a highly participatory way of finding solutions, so having people with different expertise is crucial for providing relevant innovative solutions. In WildFood project, we have placed lots of care and dedication into, first selecting the most relevant stakeholders, then trying to involve them in the innovation process effectively, and finally to maintain the connections either among stakeholders or between project partners and stakeholders throughout the project. Having the right stakeholders is crucial because they can provide valuable information on past development, know-hows, and even future projections, especially if we are successful in involving stakeholders along the entire supply chain – as in our case of wild food products.

However, this element proved to be very challenging in wild food project as some project partners have struggled to involve a sufficient number of relevant stakeholders in their living lab sessions. This might be due to several reasons, one, stakeholders being a very small group of people dealing with the wild food product that was selected as a case of innovation. In addition to having a small pool of potential stakeholders, their reluctance in being involved can also be problematic. While the food product sector is in some cases a marginal one where actors can even be acting untransparent. Either lack of legislative framework or cultural background can push people dealing with wild food products towards the edge of legal activities (i.e. “grey zone of economy”). Obviously, this can make people reserved when invited into public events where the way they do their business might be uncovered. Some even don't want their business practises to be shared with others as that might decrease their competitive advantage.

Another viewpoint to be considered is the need for interdisciplinary collaboration. When issues that are being dealt with in the living lab sessions are those that are not focusing on a single sector but are multi sectorial in nature require stakeholders from different backgrounds to be involved. Only then sufficient amount of knowledge can facilitate looking for relevant solutions and finally selecting the optimal one. However, integrating diverse expertise, perspectives and methodologies can be complex and requires effective interdisciplinary communication and coordination. Therefore, it is crucial to have not only relevant stakeholders but also capable moderators that are able to navigate through different opinions and viewpoints to the direction of the final solution.

Funding and resources

Establishing and maintaining the innovation process requires financial resources for personnel facilities and in some cases to reimburse stakeholders' involvement. Having a project like WildFood is very critical as such frameworks can support having an innovation process undisturbed because of lack of resources. However, in some cases securing funding can be a significant hurdle particularly if the innovation process is expected to be very lengthy.

Responsibilities

Giving people responsibilities usually strengthens their involvement as they feel they have a real opportunity to contribute and do feel dedication to the overall goal of innovation. In WildFood project we have also assessed the roles that individual stakeholders might have in living lab process and we tried to place care into what will tasks of each individual be. We also tried not to be exclusive and to involve stakeholders in all phases of innovation, otherwise it might indicate unfair attitude towards specific stakeholders.

Frequency and flexibility

Implementing the innovation process, especially in a living lab format, involves iterative cycles of experimentation, evaluation, and refinement. This requires time, flexibility, and adaptiveness in order to accommodate the necessary number of events throughout which innovation process can be completed. In this respect WildFood project was limited to only two events per partnering country, and in those two events we needed to accommodate all three phases of the living labs. In some cases, the final, monitoring and evaluation phase was not implemented, not only due to lack of time but also to the fact that solutions which were provided through the innovation process were in fact not really implemented. Thus, forcing an entire evaluation face did not really make sense. Despite that, we have at least tried to hypothetically highlight most key elements of the evaluation and made our best to pinpoint the potential benefits of having solutions implemented in real life.

Learning and adaptation

There is a large body of information that can be collected through innovation process and all that data need to be recorded carefully in order not to miss or overlook any important suggestions / proposals given by stakeholders. Comprehensive reporting on innovation process is an element that can support facilitators of the innovation process to synthesise all the necessary information on possible and also optimal solutions. Then those can be transferred effectively to decision-makers and policy designers. If the outcomes of innovation process are comprehensively and clearly represented the end users (decision makers) it is more likely to uptake them in designing future policies. In WildFood project we have taken the necessary steps to record all living lab sessions in partnering countries in a unified format. The coordinating partner has provided guidelines, where sets of questions or discussion points were listed and defined, and those facilitated partners implementing living labs to navigate the discussion among stakeholders into the desired direction of designing innovative solutions. Those guidelines also served as reporting templates where partners could record the innovation process and also added notes of pros and cons living lab sessions.

3. Possible pitfalls when implementing innovation process

Stakeholders' satisfaction and lack of commitment

Involving stakeholders in later stages of innovation process, when the problems or issues are already defined, may pose a risk to their commitment for finding solutions. Should the stakeholders be unable to identify themselves with the problem at stake they will probably be reluctant to be involved because they will not see the benefits of participating. This of course will cause lack of their commitment in joint search of solutions.

Personal differences

Stakeholders having different expectations priorities and needs regarding the issues can decrease the probability of building partnerships. In that case, having a personal communication with those stakeholders which you can expect to have very different views from majority of participants can have a beneficial outcome because their prior expectations can be adjusted. It also helps to have realistic goals set for the innovation process.

Power imbalance

Inequalities among stakeholders in terms of their power can push or marginalise specific groups of stakeholders in a way that they cannot participate as they have hoped for. That will cause dissatisfaction among certain groups and can put an innovation process into halt. To overcome that issue those facilitating innovation process can implement different participation strategies as 'world cafes' or any other types that segments participants into smaller groups where probability of everyone having their say is higher. Careful selection of stakeholders is crucial, and emphasis should be given to how they are involved. Living lab format is a highly participatory way of working together and WildFood project has used that approach for that reason as well.

Opposition

In some cases, stakeholders may fear that working participatory will uncover their business practises, their competition weaknesses, and their network of customers or business partners. All of those can be delicate information that stakeholders may not want to share and thus they can even oppose the innovation process because of those reasons. Opposition can also rise from the fact that innovation process can introduce new actors which were up to that moment not present. That can increase competitiveness of the sector, and in turn can jeopardise established businesses. To prevent that those implementing living lab sessions might want to have prior discussions with stakeholders as it was also raised in case of power imbalances and personal differences. This can help detect possible problems and might help to avoid them.

Lack of cooperation between institutions

Cooperation between governmental institutions in academia is in many cases insufficient, which is an institutional challenge that might hamper the transfer of innovation outcomes to decision makers and designers of future policies. This can be very crucial because the gap between academia and practise is traditionally present in many countries and it's important to take precautions to bridge that gap. It is best to involve government bodies as stakeholders in the innovation process from the start. In that way they will feel that they are contributing to the solution that it is already harmonised with their goals. This can

increase the uptake of those solutions into the decision process.

Ignoring the context

Not knowing the social cultural economic and legislative background where the problem we are trying to solve persist will increase the risk of designing solutions which are irrelevant. All of those contextual elements are important and need to be considered. Some solutions might look promising as a design but can be largely inapplicable because the local setting does not allow it to be implemented. Unclear legislative framework that does not define stakeholders' rights, demands and duties, does not provide a solid environment for introducing novel solutions. This became clear as some innovation cases in the WildFood project came very close to implementation or were in fact materialized like the case of Italy, while in other cases the probability of suggested solutions to be realised is not as high, as in the case of Slovenia. In the latter example, legal framework needs to be defined first and then the proposed solution stands a real chance of being successful.

An important part of knowing the context is also acknowledging how the system of transfer of solutions into practise works in different countries. Various arrangements between professional organisations, landowners' groups, non-governmental bodies, and ministries are in place. Knowing those relationships is crucial for effective transfer of know-hows from the level of project onto the level of policy design. Ignoring that can cause great solutions being left in drawers and to never see their realisation in practise. This is to often the case but can be overcome by early involvement of governmental officials into the innovation process. Many WildFood project partners have succeeded in doing so.

Conceptual clarity

Living labs can provide the clear concept of participatory work among different stakeholders. WildFood project assured that this was done prior to having living lab sessions. Coordinating partner prepared written guidelines with clear definitions of key phases and argumentation of why those steps are important. In this way the outline of living labs was clear to both project partners and later to stakeholders participating in sessions.



The Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area will devise new R&I approaches to improve water availability and sustainable agriculture production in a region heavily distressed by climate change, urbanisation and population growth.



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