An assessment framework for the performance of a living lab

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Why assessing the performance of a living lab?

Governments, businesses, research institutes and society are increasingly working together to solve complex social problems, for example how dairy farming in low lying peatland areas can deal with climate change or how to make the production of French fries more sustainable. Such collaborative platforms are often called living labs. In living labs stakeholders learn together by exploring the barriers and possibilities for transition and to co-create appropriate and viable solutions. Participants of these living labs would like to assess the performance of their living labs while it evolves and whether it still meets the needs and expectations of the participants. Others, such as the financiers, would also like to know how the living lab performs.
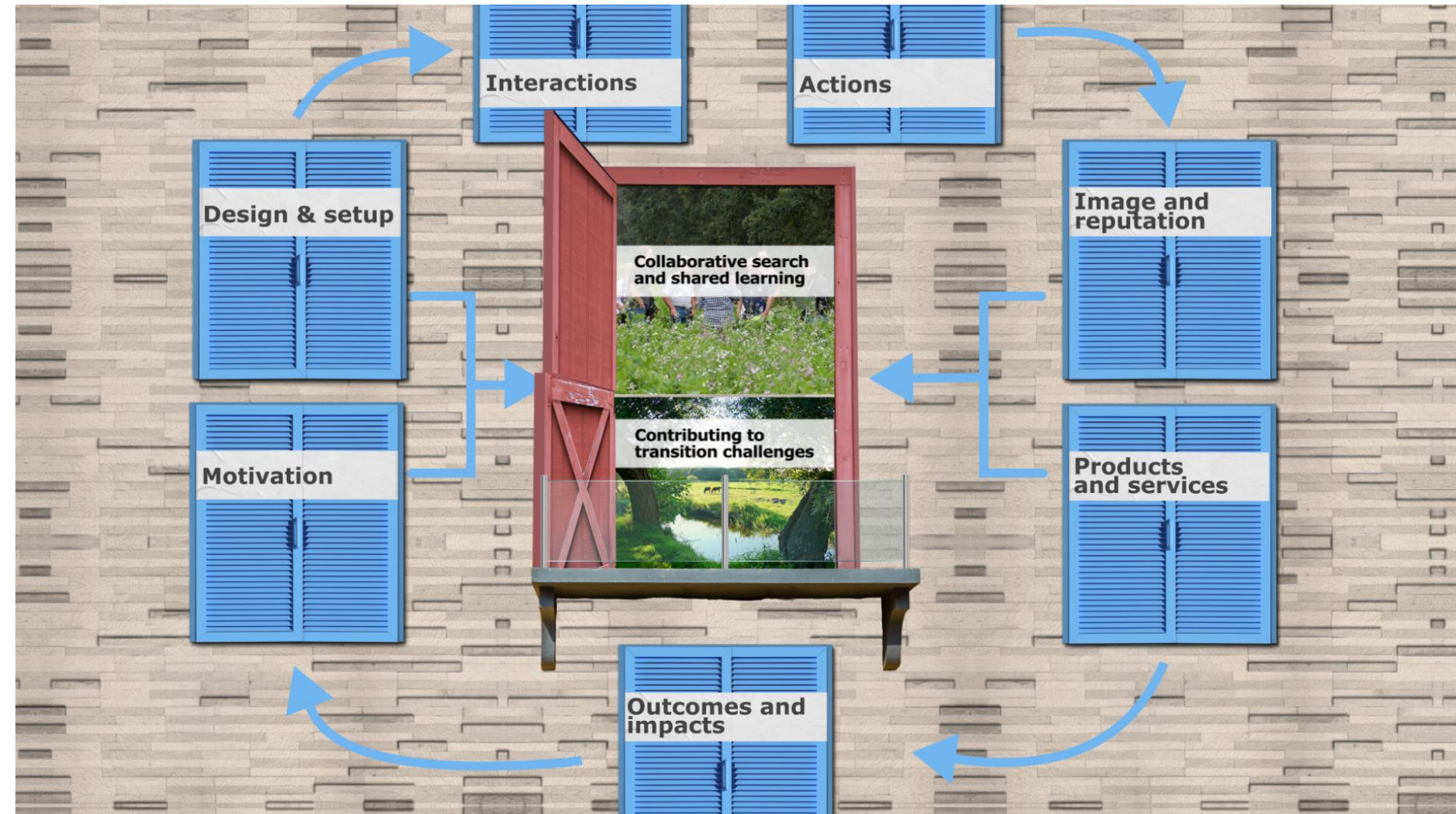
What encompasses the assessment framework?

In the centre of the living lab are the two main processes that the lab wants to facilitate:

- Collaborative search and shared learning
- Contribution to transition challenges

The framework encompasses 7 aspects that are considered to be important for the performance of the living lab; motivation for the lab, design and setup, interactions, actions, image and reputation, products and services and outcome and impact.

Reviewing these 7 aspect will enable the living lab to assess opportunities for improving the performance of the living lab. Each aspects has several abilities that can be assessed.

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The abilities included in the framework

Motivation

- What is the origin of the living lab and what is the motivation of the participating parties to contribute to the transition challenges. This quality is important to consider but cannot be judged in the same way as the qualities below.

Design and setup

- Being relevant. Does the living lab address both the relevant topics in view of transition challenges as well as the topics relevant for farmers and other stakeholders given the (additional) challenges they face because of transition related polities and regulations, etc.

- Being resourceful. This is about being able to secure resources (time, funds, knowledge, network) needed to organize the living lab-related processes.

Interactions

- Being connected. This is about being connected to other actors (outside the LL) and other initiatives and developments because of their role in relation to pertinent transition challenges.

- Being in it together. This is about having good relationships between the partners in the living lab and creating opportunities so that participants feel shared ownership over aspirations, processes and outcomes.

Actions

- Being practical & propositional: Are concrete steps and activities undertaken to keep the partners motivated and involved.

- Being responsible: does one consider the quality, possible side effects, long-term effects and compromises between different values of stakeholders related to the activities of the living lab.

Positioning and reputation:

- Being known: the reach of communication and providing appropriate information for relevant audiences.

- Being acknowledged: is strategic communication undertaken and is the relevant audience informed of the relevance, efficacy, and quality of the LL's contribution to transition challenge.

Products & services

- Being generative. The ability to bring forth concrete products and services.

- Being motivational. ability to engage people in LL activities and to motivate target groups into exploring and considering new practices.

Outcomes & impact of the LL

- Being effective: the effects of the living lab in terms of social, economic and environmental outcomes and impacts, and to review both anticipated and unintended effects and trade-offs.

- Being adaptive: are implications of findings from monitoring and evaluation translated into adaptive actions to better contribute to the transition challenges.

How to apply the assessment framework?
For each ability questions have been formulated that the participants of the LL can answer (see table 2). One can undertake quick assessment or an extensive evaluation. The assessment can be undertaken for one ability or undertake a full assessment.

Table 1. Example of a Quick scan of a living lab

Given the pertinent transition challenges to which it connects, given the relevant conditions of the context, given interests and needs of key stakeholders, is the LL functioning well in terms of…	Key indicators To be determined in line with the specific context of the living lab. Key question: what would indicate that this is the case?	State of affairs of capabilities (in terms of readiness or in terms of performance)				
		Not at all	Inadequate	Adequate	Much	Very much
Being responsive and relevant						
Being resourceful						
Being connected						
Being in it together						
Being practical and propositional						
Being responsible						
Being known						
Being acknowledged						
Being generative						
Being motivational						
Being effective						
Being adaptive						

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Table 2. Performance questions for each ability of the living lab

Collective capability	Key performance questions
1. **Being relevant**	▪ Is there a shared understanding regarding which transition challenges are addressed by the LL? ▪ To what extent are these transition challenges reason to collaborate in the LL? ▪ To what extent is the LL relevant to the challenges that key stakeholders (e.g. farmers/businesses) face because of transition-related ambitions? In which landscapes and chains will the LL be relevant? ▪ What are concrete aspirations of the LL in terms of contribution to addressing the transition challenges?
2. **Being resourceful**	▪ Are those stakeholders involved, who are relevant for the transition? ▪ To what extent is the LL able to mobilize and secure resources for the LL? ▪ To what extent is the LL able to appropriately organize/facilitate core processes of the LL?
3. **Being connected**	▪ Is the LL appropriately connected to other initiatives that address the transition challenges in complementary ways? How is the LL embedded in larger networks? ▪ To what extent is the LL appropriately connected to stakeholders that matter in relation to the LL ambitions?
4. **Being in it together**	▪ To what extent is the LL able to facilitate good relationships among the participants and stakeholders? ▪ To what extent is there a felt shared ownership of aspirations, processes and outcomes of the LL among the participants and stakeholders? ▪ To what extent are decisions made jointly?
5. **Being practical and propositional**	▪ To what extent is the LL propositional in terms of putting forward concrete actions, options and opportunities? ▪ To what extent are activities aligned with the aspirations? ▪ To what extent are the proposed actions considered feasible and useful by key stakeholders?
6. **Being responsible**	▪ How are long-term implications of actions and proposed options assessed in an anticipatory way for planet, people and profit? ▪ To what extent do participants live up to their mutual commitments and shared values?

Collective capability	Key performance questions
7. **Being known**	▪ How well informed are relevant stakeholders about the (intentions of the) LL?
8. **Being acknowledged**	▪ How useful or innovative is the LL according to key stakeholders? ▪ How credible do key stakeholders consider the LL to be in terms of what it is proposing?
9. **Being generative**	▪ How productive is the LL in terms of concrete outputs that are in line with aspirations of the LL? ▪ How significant and useful are products and services generated and provided by the LL?
10. **Being motivational**	▪ To what extent is the LL capable of motivating stakeholders to engage in its activities? ▪ To what extent is the LL influencing/inspiring changes in practices among LL participants? ▪ To what extent are actions and proposals of the LL inspiring/motivating/enabling further/wider change of practices beyond the LL? ▪ To what extent is the LL able to overcome difficulties and complications and move on?
11. **Being effective**	▪ What are social, economic and environmental impacts of the LL? ▪ Are effects in line with the intended contribution to addressing transition challenges?
12. **Being adaptive**	▪ To what extent is there room for adaptation of courses of action (set-up and activities) of the LL?

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