

LiFT Case Book

# Hosting Collaboratories: Insights and learnings from different cases

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## Introduction

### Contents:

The chapters of the case book are provided separately for download:

0. Introduction and comparison of the cases
1. LiFT Collaboratory Trondheim 2014
2. LiFT Collaboratory Vienna 2014
3. Collaboratory Rastatt 2016
4. LiFT Collaboratory Almedalen 2016
5. LiFT Collaboratory Trondheim 2016
6. LiFT Collaboratory Ecovillage Sieben Linden 2017
7. Mini-Collaboratory at an academic conference in Rotterdam 2017
8. LiFT Collaboratory Šibenik, Croatia, 2017
9. LiFT Collaboratory Summer School and Facilitator Training 2018

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# Introduction

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## What is a Collaboratory?

The **Collaboratory** is a collaborative multi-perspective, multi-stakeholder dialogue forum that has been co-developed by LiFT partner Katrin Muff from Business School Lausanne (Muff, 2014). It is designed and facilitated in order to constructively engage a broad range of relevant actors in a collective process of inquiry around important and complex social challenges. Based on Scharmer's Theory U, Bohmian Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry, Dragon Dreaming and other methodological sources, the Collaboratory allows for conducting such deliberation and decision-making processes in groups of various sizes within reasonable periods of time (from half a day up to several days). It does so by supporting the participants in dealing with the challenge in question in a constructive, co-creative and solution oriented way. The process is designed to invite participants to get involved as whole persons and to take responsibility for the results. While keeping the focus on the core challenge in focus, the format runs participants through several phases of a co-creative laboratory at the end of which they have the opportunity to design tangible projects emerging as outcomes of their process. For more detailed information about the Collaboratory see Muff 2014 and the LiFT Methods Book ([http://leadership-for-transition.eu/?page\\_id=629](http://leadership-for-transition.eu/?page_id=629)).

Combining action research with action learning, LiFT has worked with the format of the *Collaboratory* for over four years in various contexts and settings. By applying and experimented with the Collaboratory process, we studied how stakeholder involvement around burning complex issues of our times can best be facilitated in differing contexts based on integrative (integral) methodologies.

## Purpose and goals of this book

The purpose of this book is to provide concrete examples of how the collaboratory method can be applied in practice. Given that every hosting context is different, users need to adapt the format to the needs and setting in their specific environment. While some more general ideas and criteria about what to consider and to take into account when planning a Collaboratory are outlined in the **LiFT Methods Book**, this book presents single cases which serve as illustrations of what a similar adaptation can look like. It shall support you, the reader, in developing a sense for important specifics to be mindful of when hosting a collaboratory process, such as specific resources, challenges and constraints and how to deal with each of them.

This book tells the stories of nine different Collaboratories which our LiFT ([Leadership for Transition](http://leadership-for-transition.eu))<sup>1</sup> project team has designed and facilitated between 2014 and 2017. It thus illustrates some of our most important learnings about how the format can best be adapted to specific situations and the challenges posed by them.

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<sup>1</sup> After completion of the first EU Grundtvig funding period from 2013 till 2015 with 4 workshops, LiFT transformed into a Strategic Partnership (Erasmus+) including two more partners. This second LiFT partnership hosted and documented another six transnational stakeholder workshops in six countries.

We think that it is important to learn from concrete cases, because the Collaboratory is not a method, the hosting and facilitation of which can be learnt from a textbook, i.e. applied just by following a general structure or set of rules. It is essential to adapt the general process to the specific context of the hosting community, to the topic in question and to stakeholder situation on site, in order for it to be able to develop its full power and to achieve a more large-scale impact.

Based on the ideal-typical Collaboratory structure described in the Methods Book ([http://leadership-for-transition.eu/?page\\_id=629](http://leadership-for-transition.eu/?page_id=629)), this book focuses on empirical examples that discuss how the general, ideal-typical structure and process have been modified in the individual cases portrayed in the following chapters.

### Experiences of different LiFT Collaboratories

We have experimented with the collaboratory method between 2014 and 2017 in ten larger and a decent number of smaller events, mostly hosted by LiFT project partners in different locations in Europe. As part of this, we collaborated with partners and local hosts who were open to our experiment. The first Collaboratory of the LiFT 2 project which was conducted in Luxembourg took place early on in the project, before we had developed our documentation and evaluation model. It is therefore not evaluated as case study here, but rather documented as a multi-media resource via the LiFT or A4F [website](#).

### Evaluation and Documentation process

While the first four LiFT workshops (which have been part of an earlier Grundtvig Learning Partnership) have not been documented systematically, the EU Strategic Partnership allowed us to document and evaluate our Collaboratory events more thoroughly. The results and insights are presented in this book. The documentation process consisted of four different phases:

- (a) generating categories for observation and preparing the observers,
- (b) gaining empirical data by observation and interviews,
- (c) team reflections on individual perception,
- (d) processing the data and writing the reports.

#### **These phases are shortly introduced below:**

- (a) Based on our experience from the first Collaboratories, we developed a set of categories which we saw as relevant to observe and study in more detail. The aim was to take a more “objective” view, ideally from outside observers, onto the design and facilitation process to independently evaluate the Collaboratory events. Those categories included the character and quality of cooperation and communication between facilitators and hosts in preparing the event, the expectations before and perception after the event by the participants, the experience of the facilitators, the room settings, the schedule including changes, the group process and contact between facilitation and participants during the Collaboratory, as well as to what degree the aims of the respective workshop were met and if there were results and follow-up events.

- (b) We invited team members, colleagues and trainees to systematically observe and document the mentioned aspects and dimensions of the Collaboratory process in each of the events we have hosted since 2015. The data and insights were generated by participant observation work of 5-10 observers at each of the Collaboratory events in order to capture different layers of data. As well, interviews with participants, local stakeholders and facilitators, and group calls contributed to the analysis and understanding of what had happened at each event.
- (c) In immediate debriefings after each Collaboratory, we discussed and reflected the data collected by the observation team and interviewed participants and host about their perspectives.
- (d) On this basis, finally, the case studies were written up in a reflective process of merging, compiling and evaluating all of the available kinds of data by LiFT team members who have attended the respective events.

The purpose of our observation was to evaluate the Collaboratories we hosted in methodological regard, in order to learn from each event, to improve our design and facilitation skills and to make available these learnings to others who wish to make progress on their own issues by applying the Collaboratory method. We thereby wanted to better understand and learn more about the potentials and challenges of conducting Collaboratories in different contexts, including the implications for different hosts and target audiences.

Indeed, documenting, evaluating and presenting the cases have greatly supported our own learning process in understanding and conducting Collaboratories. Shedding light onto previously implicit dimensions and adding additional layers of reflection into the processes and their outcomes has also fostered our team building process.

For instance, we have learned that understanding such a group process requires many more layers of observation and evaluation than just capturing the outcome in terms of successful spin-off projects. We also tried to capture subtle dimensions such as the space for trustful and co-creative interaction, the synergies amongst people in the group and the overall group process. While this was rather challenging, partly due to the subjective dimension to it, our joint team de-briefs together with the respective hosts helped a lot to work towards shared perspectives and understandings of things. Finally, the joint cumulative knowledge was iteratively applied as we moved through the different Collaboratories.

### **How the cases are presented in this book**

The case studies gathered in this book roughly follow a general comparative structure to allow for maximum insight and learning. When describing the Collaboratory cases we especially focus on a number of particularly relevant following aspects:

For a comprehensive overview of the specific challenges and learnings from each case, each chapter starts with a summary which covers:

- (1) some hard facts about the respective context, such as location, hosting organisation, duration, number of participants etc.
- (2) the specifics and extraordinary conditions, including specific resources, as well as challenges, and
- (3) the main learnings we gained from the respective case.

**Then each report goes into more details about:**

- the respective hosting situation,
- the preparation phase,
- the process itself as seen from the perspective of the participants, the host and the facilitators,
- the facilitators' interaction with the participants,
- the group process and inclusion/exclusion dynamics,
- the quality of communication,
- the general atmosphere during the process.
- Furthermore, interviews with participants have been conducted, looking at the degree to which the process and facilitation were perceived as helpful for achieving the goals of the respective workshop.
- Finally, we look at the lasting impact of the event on the hosting network and ask to what degree it helped achieve the set goals. We also asked the host about follow-up projects and other results a few months after the Collaboratory.

### **Overview and characteristics of the different cases**

Among the seven cases described in detail in this book, some have been happened during the first funding phase (LiFT 1.0), the majority during the LiFT 2.0 project. Furthermore, we describe some other Collaboratory events that various LiFT team members have facilitated beyond the official EU-project. One Collaboratory case (Šibenik, Croatia), we do not present as a chapter like the others, but in form of learning material on an interactive learning platform. Finally, we also offer a report from the train-the-trainer course that has been offered for the first time during the LiFT Summer School in July 2018.

The following tables give an overview of the cases, each of which is outlined in one chapter of this book, together with a list of their topics, hosts and goals:

**Table 1: Overview of cases discussed in this book**

	Name, location	When	Topic of the event	Goal/ pupose	Initiator/ host
1	<b>Trondheim LiFT 1.0</b> , Norway	February 2014	Co-creating Collective Intelligence for Complex Challenges	Get to know the Collaboratory method	Center for Transformative Leadership
2	<b>Vienna LiFT 1.0</b> , Austria	November 2014	The Future of Organisations	Raise awareness for the topic, offer networking opportunities	Zentrum für integrale Führung
3	<b>Rastatt</b> , Germany	February 2016	How to best tackle the refugee crisis in Germany?	Foster societal dialogue on the refugee crises	Political foundation, Alfa party
4	<b>Almedalen LiFT 2.0</b> , Visby/Gotland, Sweden	July 2016	UN's Agenda 2030 – Can a positive vision help us achieve sustainability faster?	Facilitate intensive political dialogues fostering transition, inspiring Swedish politics	Initiativ Samutveckling, Initiativ 2022
5	<b>Trondheim LiFT 2.0</b> , Norway	September 2016	Adaptive Learning and Job Creation in the Digital Age	Support Scandinavian network for school-drop outs and alternative education	U:turn
6	<b>Sieben Linden LiFT 2.0</b> , ecovillage, East Germany	June 2017	Growing up in community	Developing more integrated ways of growing up in communities	Engaged mother, living in ecovillage, Ecovillage Network
7	<b>Rotterdam</b> , TRANSIT scientific conference, the Netherlands	September 2017	Organisational Forms in transition. Co-creative explorations based on learnings from social innovation initiatives	Exchanging best practices of organizing transition initiatives	LiFT team member Iris Kunze, who has also been a researcher in TRANSIT
8	<b>Šibenik LiFT 2.0</b> , Croatia	September 2017	Education for Sustainable Communities	Connecting educators for sustainability, building a new platform for transformative learning	LiFT partner Alliance for the Future (A4F)

The second table gives a rough insight into the specific pre-conditions we had to deal with in planning and facilitating the Collaboratory. This shall give you an overview which case might be an interesting example to learn from if you might plan you own Collaboratory for a specific host.

**Table 2: Collaboratory cases overview of characteristics and specifics**

Case items	1 Trond 1.0	2 Vienna	3 Rastatt	4 Almedalen	5 Trond 2.0	6 Sieben Linden	7 Rotterdam	8 Šibenik
Duration in days		2	4 hours	1	2 days	4 days	1,5 hours	3,5 days
Number of participants	2	75	55	50-70	~25	~60	25	~ 30
No. of facilitators	1	2	2	3	4	5	2	2,5
Preparation: contact with host, engagement and time resources	Preparation with LiFT team on site	Preparation largely happening by local team, alignment calls with LiFT	Host left preparaton to initiator and facilitator	Several online meetings with local topic holder	Several online meetings, intensive conversations with local stakeholders	Several pre-meetings host and LiFT team face to face and virtual.	Little, involvement of 2 experts	Several calls
Character and facilities of venue	Large seminar room in town	Part 1: Semperdepot (huge event hall), part 2: bright facilities at Impact HUB, catering	large bright conference hall, professional catering	Tent on schoolyard at the annual Almedalen festival	Archbishops palace, large hall and meeting room	Eco seminar house with accomodation and full board, embedded in community	Seminar room in creative conference space (former SPA)	Eco-bistro with catering in historical city center with small seminar room and roof terrace
Degree of familiarity with process work by participants	medium	medium	weak	Medium	Mostly little	Very high	Partly high	high
Degree of familiarity with each other by participants	low	Medium	medium	Low/unknown	Partly, network	High, community codes	Partly	Partly, network
Degree of expertise with topic by participants	medium	varying	varying	Partly low	varying	Experienced, personally involved, high	High; either as academic researchers or as involved practitioners	High, experts

Case items	1 Trond 1.0	2 Vienna	3 Rastatt	4 Almedalen	5 Trond 2.0	6 Sieben Linden	7 Rotterdam	8 Šibenik
<b>Specific Resources</b>	Interested group of participants, Katrin taking responsibility for design and facilitation	Very motivated local team, adequate venue	experience and knowledge of the facilitation team, catch box for icebreaker	Engaged local host	Good contact with local host, adequate venue	Engagement of host organization, collaboratory was the heart piece of a larger conference. Suitable location, seminar house	Engaged practitioners, interested researchers with meta-perspective	Very motivated participant group, easy to work with
<b>Specific challenges</b>	Make the guiding question concrete enough	Bridge the 2 parts (days) of the event, get people to stay for day 2	host was politically invlved (bias), collaborative methods not known	1-day event embedded in a 1 week long political state event, get people to stay for the whole day, host was not the case giver, case giver has own agenda.	Get sufficient stakeholders, how to engage quiet Norwegians, get people to stay for day 2	Different expectations of host, LiFT, participants, integrating children, community culture with own practices and habits, personal and emotional topic	Short time frame (1,5 hours), academic context.	Expertise of participants, (too) high ambitions of host/lead facilitator, lead facilitator had several roles at the same time