

LiFT Case Book

LiFT Leadership
for Transition

Hosting Collaboratories: Insights and learnings from different cases

Editors: Iris Kunze, Elke Fein



4. Case Study on the LiFT Collaboratory in Almedalen (Visby/Gotland, Sweden)

By Bettina Geiken, Elke Fein

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LiFT Collaboratory in Almedalen (Visby/Gotland, Sweden)

By Bettina Geiken, Elke Fein

Hard facts:

<i>Date:</i>	7 July 2016
<i>Place:</i>	Almedalen Festival, Visby – Gotland – Sweden
<i>Context:</i>	The event was part of the overarching initiative “Good dialogs of Almedalen - Meetings needed for the World”)
<i>Topic:</i>	The UN's Agenda 2030 – Can a positive vision help us achieve sustainability faster?
<i>Participants:</i>	70 participants (50 participants stayed for the whole day)
<i>Host:</i>	Initiativ Samutveckling (iS!), a Swedish initiative to bring mindfulness into socio-political dialog, with a strong quality and focus on the “Art of Hosting”
<i>Facilitators:</i>	Jonathan Reams, Björn Rabethge, Alexandra Wolk, Elke Fein (introductory part)
<i>Duration:</i>	1 day (4 sessions à 1,5h)
<i>Time frame:</i>	9.30-12.30, 13-16 (30 min lunch)

Specific challenges

- LiFT was in charge of a 1-day event which was part of a 1 week long initiative of the hosting organisation which, in turn, was embedded in a huge yearly event bringing together politics and society in Sweden.
- The local host was not the case giver. The case giver was a consulting firm promoting the implementation of the UN Sustainability Goals in Sweden, yet lacking previous experiences with similar kinds of processes
- Except for some experts, the participants were not known beforehand, some joined spontaneously as they were passing by
- Setting: A big tent set up in a bumpy, uneven schoolyard, lacking the usual conference room infrastructure

Main Learnings

- The host should also be the topic owner and be committed to the outcome of the event.
- The case giver should have a broad enough perspective to be able to transcend their own stake and interest in the outcome of the event.
- The case giver should be clear about what to expect in a Collaboratory and have a basic knowledge and familiarity with collaborative methods.
- If there are several hosting parties, ongoing and intensive alignment work ahead of the event is crucial.
- A good quality of hosting is crucial for a good process; hosting needs to be adapted to the specific setting and expected set of participants.
- The choice of experts must match the given topic or challenge: broad and complex topics require the ability to hold complexity. Experts must be known to the facilitators before the event.

- To get a true dialogue going, and even more so to generate meaningful solutions, a certain degree of diversity of participants and a minimum extent of vested interest in the topic on their end are important
- In unexpected situations, the most important skill is to stay present, to sense into the group/field, to trust the process and to frame any unexpected event as an opportunity to add value to the overall process.
- Relatively homogenous groups tend to be able to effectively self-organise and focus in the open space session, even under time pressure.
- A number of micro-level learnings on hosting logistics will be outlined at the end.

A. Preparation and context of the Collaboratory

The place and its relation with the topic

The Collaboratory took place as part of the „Almedalen Week (Almedalensveckan)“, a unique gathering in Visby on the Island of Gotland (Sweden) which has first been initiated by the then prime minister Olof Palme in 1968 in order to foster dialog between citizens and policy-makers. By now, up to 30-40.000 people gather at the Almedalen Week every year to discuss and exchange about developments in Swedish politics and society. All political parties represented in the Swedish parliament are present at Almedalensveckan. Their participation in seminars, press conferences and speeches form the basis of the Almedalen forum. Besides all important media, NGOs, business leaders and activists are also present.

The event is open and free for anyone to participate. This also means that participants may come to sessions late, leave early or stay by the door. Therefore, generally speaking, most of the 3 800 events during the week do not last longer than one hour. In fact, it took our hosting organization, Swedish LiFT partner Initiativ Samutveckling, a great deal of negotiation with the organizers of the Almedalen forum to be able to offer an event that had a duration of a whole day, instead of the usual 1h format.

About 40 000 persons participated in the Almedalen Week 2016, according to official statistics. 3 794 events were held by 1 756 unique organizers. 22 percent of these were NGO's. On average, a little more than 10 participants took part per event. Only 3 percent of all events were held in English or English/Swedish. Our event, in English/Swedish was announced both digitally and in the printed program. The digital invitation had been seen by 2300 visitors.

On the actual day of the LiFT Collaboratory, July 6, there have been more than 450 events going on at the Almedalen Forum, all focusing on the issue of sustainability according to official statistics, which together attracted 1 700 participants. It is therefore a remarkable result that the day long LiFT event, also focusing on sustainability, attracted 70 participants, 50 of whom stayed for the whole day.

The Collaboratory took place as part of the overarching framework program called *“The good dialog of Almedalen – Meetings needed for the World”* hosted by our Swedish LiFT partner Initiativ Samutveckling (iS!) together with a number of like-minded Swedish initiatives. The LiFT team therefore tried to create a good alignment with this hosting context by being present the whole week itself, and by hosting a couple of smaller “appetizer events” in this context, serving also for marketing the larger Collaboratory itself.



Hosting Organization(s)

The hosting organization was our Swedish LiFT partner **Initiativ Samutveckling (iS!)** (Initiative for Societal Co-Development, <http://samutveckling.se>) from Stockholm. Besides, iS! brought in a co-host as the case giver for this event, since iS! itself focuses mainly on method and processes, namely facilitating collaborative dialogs, rather than on specific topics. It had been in touch with the “**2022 Initiative**” (<http://2022initiative.se/>) and its founder and chairwoman, Helena Lindmark for some time, and considered it to be a suitable and worthwhile focus for a Collaboratory.

Initiativ Samutveckling is an independent non-profit organization with the mission to act a catalyst for a more conscious society. It is a loose network of people who, to varying degrees, wish to become involved in the development of society. iS! is a cultural association which contributes to social sustainability and the development of political culture by hosting what they call “good conversations” in society and the political realm. Good conversations as intended by iS! are conversations where human beings interact in authentic dialogues and active listening and include perspective taking, self-reflection and social inquiry.

The association is run by volunteers, many of whom are trained psychologists, experienced facilitators and/or have a background in gestalt work. This helps iS! to co-create a social climate which allows the diversity of perspectives to be respected, not least in politics. It offers venues and hosts spaces for people who wish (and see the opportunity) to simultaneously grow personally and contribute to the development of society as a whole, as well as to that of a more inclusive culture. iS!’ main method for



doing this is called “Iscafe!”, a word game referring to its acronym, and also meaning “ice” in Swedish. By organising and hosting open meetings with good conversation on various themes, iS! wants to help to melt the ice between groups of stakeholders that often don’t talk to each other in constructive ways. This can happen in small and larger premises, in libraries and, once a year, in the context of the Almedalen forum.

Initiative Samutveckling being mainly dedicated to facilitating good conversations, it served as the local host, but – this was an experiment in LiFT – not the topic giver at this event. Since there was no burning issue at a specific enough level at the moment in

time when the LiFT collaboratory was planned, the idea came up to invite an external topic giver. Initiativ Samutveckling was in contact with Helena Lindmark, a visionary social entrepreneur who did have a burning issue around the UN Sustainability Goals – “Agenda 2030”, which also included aspects of social sustainability and working towards a more inclusive society. This topic therefore seemed to fit well with what iS! was looking for, and so it was decided to host the Collaboratory with Helena Lindmark’s Initiative 2022 as the case giver.

Issue at stake/concern/main focus

Sweden currently has the lead in implementing the UN’s Agenda 2030. This opens up huge opportunities and was also perceived as a responsibility to be a role model in view of successful implementation while creating a win-win-win situation for all stakeholders. The Agenda 2030 thus challenges Sweden to use its collective brainpower, resources and talents to create the world’s first sustainable welfare state. This was the background for choosing the following topic and guiding question for the Collaboratory:

UN's Agenda 2030 – Can a positive vision help us achieve sustainability faster?

Helena Lindemarks' vision was to inspire the decision makers in Stockholm, Sweden's capital, to hold a global conference in 2022 in order to encourage the world's nations on the journey to reach the UN's Agenda 2030 goals already in 2022 and advance Sweden's nationally proclaimed targets for sustainability. In the year 2022, it will be exactly 50 years since the first global conference on sustainability was held, also in Stockholm, in 1982.



The UN development goals

The hosts/case giver's relation to and stake in the issue

In Helena Lindmark's vision, four areas are interlaced into one integrated force at the envisioned "Stockholm Conference +50" in the year 2022: A more functional society; increased wellbeing; a healthier environment due to less climate impact; stronger economy and brands. However, according to the case giver, while being a bold vision, information is not enough to inspire people to organize a global meeting on one of the most important questions of our time. This, so she held, also requires reflection in a competent and meaningful context, as well as influence on the political level. Her goals in view of the Collaboratory were therefore threefold: to experience new, more co-creative ways of engaging people, to create visibility for the topic and the vision, as well as to build momentum and generate influence on the political level.

In hindsight, some questions arise with regard to the suitability of the method in view of the topic described. Even though we can imagine that the question "How can we amplify our work towards the UN Sustainability Goals in order to achieve them faster, namely already in 2022?" can be a suitable and precise enough guiding question for a Collaboratory in principle, this would require a context and stakeholder setting that actually matches the task. Unfortunately, it turned out that this was not what we had in Almedalen. The vision appeared to be less of a shared vision than rather the personal vision of the topic giver. While this doesn't have to be a problem in itself, what made it a problem was the difficulty to assemble a suitable set of sufficiently diverse, relevant stakeholders around it who would have been able to adopt and own this vision and to actually join forces around it.

In this situation, the Collaboratory appeared more and more as an event for promoting the case giver's personal agenda. However, it seems a bit of a juxtaposition to take a method designed for engaging diverse participants in an open-ended way, and with the aim of co-creating a joint vision around a certain topic – and to actually use it for promoting the pre-existing vision of a single entrepreneur, while the stakeholders themselves might not actually be involved in follow-up actions. The risk thus appeared to rather serve the "ego" of one person than putting the creative potential and the intelligence brought forward by the Collaboratory process in service of a broader vision serving the community or society as a whole.

Participants and their degree of familiarity with process

Activities the hosts have engaged in to invite participants and experts

The announcement and marketing of the whole program was done through the host's network and social media channels in Swedish. The programme was equally promoted through the Almedalen program booklet, the Almedalen App and on the official Almedalen homepage. The LiFT events were announced in English. On site at Almedalen itself, the program was promoted through large program boards and folders updated day by day. As indicated earlier, Initiativ Samutveckling and its partners hosted a week-long program for „Good conversations“ during the Almedalen week, of which the Collaboratory was part. In addition, several members of the LiFT project also conducted a few 1,5h events at the beginning of the week. Part of the motivation to do this was to have additional marketing opportunities to invite participants into the larger Collaboratory event.

The experts who had been chosen to open the fishbowl session during the Collaboratory have mainly been invited through the network of the case giver, Helena Lindemark.

Target group, (stakeholders, participants and experts)

One of the challenges we perceived was the requirement of a relatively high level of expertise or knowledge in order to have an educated conversation about the vast issue of sustainability and Agenda 2030 goal. Therefore, in principle not all participants would be able to enter that conversation at the necessary depth. Yet the very set-up of our workshop as part of the Almedalen event was such that people just passing by could come into the tent and be a part of the collaboratory. While we don't have exact numbers about how many participants actually followed our invitation and how many just walked in spontaneously, we did receive a considerable number of declarations of intent to join in advance.

For the LiFT project, being also a research project exploring the aptitude of the method in diverse circumstances, it was a highly interesting challenge how to integrate this possible “mismatch” and still navigate the process such that it produced at least some tangible results.

While the collaboratory method is designed to productively work with a great amount of diversity, i.e. participants holding very different world views and perspectives about the topic in question, the event in Almedalen rather represented the other end of the spectrum. Based on our observations, the group of participants who attended the workshop was characterized by a comparatively large degree of homogeneity, with a rather strong basis of shared values and perspectives. Our sense was that the people who were attracted to the event tended to think in similar ways and share certain worldviews (such as post-modern, ecological, pro self-reflection, mindfulness and dialog). The diversity, which is an asset in an ideal-typical Collaboratory process, was ultimately not very strong here. Both aspects (the relative homogeneity and the differing levels of expertise) had an influence and shaped how things worked and moved. A more in-depth reflection follows in the next chapters.

Degree of familiarity of the hosts and participants with the U process or similar facilitation methods

The hosting organization, Initiativ Samutveckling, is very strong in facilitation methods based on mindfulness, yet was not part of the substantial preparation process due to a tradition within LiFT that the local host is liberated from facilitation tasks in order to be able to focus on hosting logistics. The case giver, in turn, was not familiar with the U-process or similar processes, nor were most of the experts that the case giver had invited. There has been very little time to introduce both of these groups to the method before the event, partly because the LiFT team did not get access to experts ahead of the event. As far as the participants themselves are concerned, our sense was that most were quite used to mindfulness-based and collaborative methods – or at least very open and willing to engage in similar practices.

Preparation phase

The case giver had already been working on the issue for a long time, and the Collaboratory came in at a moment where the case giver intuited that a methodology such as a Collaboratory could create new and innovative solutions and approaches towards an acceleration of the UN 2030 Sustainability Goals. She also saw an opportunity to drastically enhance the visibility of the 2022 vision and initiative in a context such as Almedalen.

In the months leading up to the Collaboratory, the coordinator of the LiFT project undertook about 4 skype calls with the local issue owner, together with members of the design and facilitation team, in which the local host (our LiFT partner) did not take part. In fact, there was comparatively little communication between the latter and the case giver during the preparation phase. Yet, the design and facilitation team was also in conversation with the local host, which mostly happened separate from the alignment process with the topic giver. In a collaborative inquiry the LiFT team explored what was and what wasn't possible in the overall setting of Almedalen to make this collaboratory a success, together with the case giver and the local host.

In the conversations with the topic giver, LiFT gave input concerning the method and the importance of briefing and preparing both the topic giver herself and the designated "experts" concerning the Collaboratory process at Almedalen. The major challenge here was that the case giver and the envisaged stakeholders had very little previous experience in participating in, let alone facilitating these kind of multi-stakeholder processes.

Those experts who had been suggested to the LiFT team by the case giver beforehand received a brief outline of the collaboratory process by email, presenting the overall methodology, as well as the requirements with regard to their contribution during the event, how and when to intervene, for how long etc.

Apart from the online preparation meetings during the months preceding the Collaboratory, the LiFT facilitation team held organisational team meetings on Monday (4 July, 2016) for checking in with the local hosts from *Initiativ Samutveckling (iS!)* and on Wednesday (6 July, 2016), including also all other partners from the LiFT team to fine-tune everybody's roles and tasks. On the same Wednesday, the day before the event, the LiFT facilitation team also conducted a several hour meeting with the case giver, the hosting organisation and some of the expert stakeholders, including some of the experts designated to open the fishbowl conversation to align with and prepare them for the collaboratory of the following day. Unfortunately most of the key experts who would intervene during the first phase of the Collaboratory (Fishbowl) did not show up. One explanation for this could be that our format being quite different from the "standard" meeting format in Almedalen, consisting of 1,5h slots with a mostly „top down“ agenda, those key experts might not have realized the importance of such a briefing meeting in the context of a collaboratory.

At the same time, some of the experts (among them influential speakers) were only confirmed by the case giver a few days before the Collaboratory or even on the very day of the event. This made it difficult to get in touch, let alone to do preparation and alignment work with them. Some of these people had confirmed their participation, but were not yet able to indicate at what time they would be there, whereas the collaboratory would start off with an expert round first thing in the morning. This created a clear tension for the process. Not only was it impossible to brief those experts in any way, it also meant that the LiFT team was not able to recognize these experts on the day of the event and thus, to welcome them in appropriate ways as the case giver herself was quite busy and partly engaged in other conversations on site.

Other relevant context / background information

The initial intention of the hosting organisation with inviting LiFT to Almedalen was to participate in the week-long forum and to provide a space for conversation and dialogue rather than just listening to speeches endlessly. When we decided to try to hold a collaboratory during the Almedalen week, LiFT and in particular the Swedish LiFT partner, Initiativ Samutveckling, had to make use of substantial negotiating skills in order for receiving permission by the organizers of Almedalensveckan to stretch and go beyond the regular structure of the overall event which is characterized by 1,5h time slots. Ultimately, the best that could be achieved was to propose four such time slots of 1,5 hours each in a row, but the workshop could not last longer than 1 day. This was posing strict time constraints onto the Collaboratory. It also became clear that this was clearly stretching the balance of what Almedalen normally does.

B. The Collaboratory preparation

The following sections are based on a combination of resources and materials, such as observation sheets produced by a group of observers (partly from being observing participant and from talking to or taking interviews with participants), feedback and reflections from members of the LiFT team, in particular the facilitation team, an in depth interview with the lead facilitator, as well as feedback from participants. In combination, they give a broader impression of the overall quality of the process, and thus provide a deeper layer of understanding, insights and learning.

Setting the stage and preparing the venue

The local possibilities and constraints in terms of what the venue looks like, what resources and practical challenges are present etc. should already be dealt with during the preparation of a Collaboratory. In the given case, the facilitation team has been in frequent contact with the hosting organisation iS! about the venue, the setting and available materials. However, as a general experience also from other Collaboratories, specific elements will hardly all be known beforehand, and some elements might also change in the last minute. This means that the facilitation team needs to be flexible enough to improvise with what is at hand in the moment.



The Almedalen Collaboratory took place in a huge outdoor tent with transparent parts (windows), which had been placed in the middle of a schoolyard, where all activities of iS! and its partner organizations took place during the whole week. The floor was the concrete of the schoolyard, a bit bumpy and sloping, which could cause a certain sense of sea-sickness when walking through the tent. Some chairs would also be leaning backwards due to the uneven soil. This is a typical example of practicalities that one would not immediately expect or think about when planning an event.

Apart from the tent in which the event took place, there was a big outside space in the schoolyard which could be used for the breaks (coffee and lunch). However, the team had to consider what to do in case of rain – in this case, the breaks would also have had to take place inside. Fortunately, this was not necessary, as sunny weather supported the event throughout the week.

Having only space available for the different phases of the Collaboratory required paying attention to how to organise a smooth transition of the furniture (mainly the chair setting) from one phase to another without interrupting the flow of the process. In the given case, the LiFT facilitation team asked the leader of the mindfulness group which was one of iS! local partners, to support this transition by a mindfulness exercise, asking the participants quietly pick up a chair and move into a small group configuration for dialogue (see below).



Also, there was only 1 flipchart available, so the facilitators had to use some of the plastic walls of the tent to put flipchart paper up. This worked well, also since since the group was not too big and there was enough space to also hang up all flipchart sheets from the different smaller working groups. With a bigger group of participants, this would have required further improvisation.

Other hard facts and challenges to be taken into account

Apart from these specific factors and elements of the setting, the particular context of Almedalen provided a number of challenges in view of the suitability of the method, some of which have already been discussed:

Specific challenges of the Almedalen Collaboratory

- the lack of experience of the case giver, most of the experts with similar collaborative processes, combined with the difficulty to brief experts appropriately beforehand
- the rather broad “one-person” vision as a starting point which had not been co-created and carried by a wider range of stakeholders
- the tension between the political goal of the topic holder (creating visibility and engagement by political decision makers for her vision to achieve the UN sustainability goals by 2022 instead of 2030) and the functional, methodological goal of the Collaboratory
- the levels of expertise and depth required to address the given issue adequately versus what was actually available among the participants
- the relative homogeneity of worldviews among participants (centered in postmodern values),
- the hosting context as part of a bigger event and the tension between the requirements of the Collaboratory and the “normal” format of sessions at Almedalen (the exceptional extension to 1 day versus 1,5h slots)
- the relative “lack of time” from the methodological perspective (one short day for the whole process)
- unknown number and composition of the group of participants

As to the number and range of participants, we did not have clear information beforehand in the form of registrations, since registrations are not part of the typical practice at Almedalen. Rather, participants flow in and out flexibly and often spontaneously. Given that this also happened at the LiFT

Collaboratory, the host did not put together a participant list either. However, the actual number of participants was around 70 overall.

Not knowing who the participants were (going to be), what their needs were etc. during the preparation phase of the Collaboratory, how did LiFT deal with this challenge?

Welcoming participants/stakeholders

The local host Initiativ Samutveckling went to great length to ensure a great hosting and welcoming culture throughout their presence at Almedalen. Every morning and afternoon several “vårds” (Swedish for host) would be outside the tent with the intention to welcome the participants and set the tone for “good conversations”. They would also guide participants joining later to their chairs. This practice was also implemented during the Collaboratory event. In fact, it appeared to be a very important element in helping the participants and the group to get acquainted with each other. Moreover, in a number of other Collaboratories held by LiFT where there was less focus on similar welcoming and hosting activities, some participants actually commented on the fact that they would have appreciated to experience a more intentional welcoming (see feedback from LiFT Trondheim 2016).

Navigating diverging priorities

In view of the tension between the political goal and the functional, methodological goal of the Collaboratory, the facilitation team chose to go with the realities of the given case, which meant to not own the unclarity of the hosting context but rather leave it with the hosts. It also meant to not own the process itself and its outcomes beyond what it could reasonably take responsibility for. Moreover, the facilitation team had to mitigate priorities and to engage in a process of adaptation in the making.

For instance, the facilitation team decided to accommodate some of the case owner’s wishes (even though these ran counter methodological concerns), to give space to an exhibitor on virtual reality during the breaks (even though his presentation was not directly connected to the issue of sustainability), as well as to a famous speaker on sustainability, Matthias Goldman (who would come in at an unknown moment during the day), or to a photographer (who would do fundraising for the charity which was supporting Helena Lindmark’s cause).

Part of our reflection on this situation is that while the Collaboratory is a format that can respond to this kind of diverging priorities to some extent, this nevertheless tends to reduce its efficacy. As a rule, responding appropriately is directly connected to the experience and ability of the facilitator or facilitation team to keep their calmness and trust in both the process and their own intuition no matter what.

Facilitation

The following description and analysis is based on a number of **sources**, such as minutes of the preparation meetings of the facilitation team, their facilitation script (before) and report (after), interviews with the facilitators, hosts and participants at the Collaboratory in Almedalen, as well as the observation protocols produced by those LiFT team members who held specific observer roles (for more detail see also the LiFT Case Book).

General methodological considerations

During the planning of a Collaboratory, LiFT has usually explored with all project partners (more precisely: all team members to be brought along by LiFT partners to an event), who among them might be interested in and suitable for taking what kind of role during the process, and what level of support they might need if they have less facilitation experience.

While considering beforehand who has significant experience in a certain area of facilitation and could create some kind of mentoring and apprenticeship support during the Collaboratory, this allows interested project partners to make their (first) experiences in facilitating. Each LiFT collaboratory has therefore included a certain level of capacity building activity, while making sure that somebody has been there before and knows what they are doing in case the process and/or the facilitation goes off track and a course correction in the moment might be necessary.

This is one reason why starting with the Almedalen case, team members have often worked on almost scripting the different facilitation parts in a joint way so that facilitators could rehearse how they might frame and formulate their interventions, and which considerations might be helpful or necessary for approaching this. This has been useful in three respects:

- a) the actual scripting puts you very much into a simulation of the situation and forces you to think it through in detail, while getting feedback on it from more experienced team members.
- b) Knowing that you have gone through this rehearsal process frees up a lot of attention, which is then available for the interaction between the facilitator and the participants in the actual moment of the facilitation.
- c) If the need to improvise arises, you have something to fall back on or improvise from.

This latter element was particularly important as in the Almedalen setting, it was likely that unforeseeable situations would arise and the facilitation team would have to improvise and flexibly adapt to them. In similar moments, the facilitators need to have the ability to stay calm and not have attention tied up on how the process works or what the next step could be. In fact, the most important skill of a facilitator is the ability to perceive and sense into the room and the people and to listen into the subtleties of the interactions. In other words, the facilitator has to be at a fairly calm inner place. If the mind is full of anxiety or nervousness about details, it is very hard to sense, hear or perceive. Another important element is trust. In the given case, many people were given many different tasks at the event. The facilitation team deliberately holds the trust that people are doing what they need to do, even though it might not be perfect or always exactly what the team imagined it to be.

General outline of the facilitation program:

Besides the general methodological outline of the Collaboratory method (see the [Methodology Book](#) for more detail), the facilitation strategy in Almedalen was guided by the challenges and considerations described above. These were especially the limited available time, the partly unclear and suboptimal hosting setting, and the desire to keep participants in the process for the whole day despite the comparative length as opposed to the usual Almedalen sessions.

To meet the challenge was to squeeze the full Collaboratory process, supposed to address a very vast and demanding topic, into just one day required specific improvisations. The team had therefore planned to implement only the most important Collaboratory elements, emphasizing certain components, while keeping a strict time regime and making sure the process allowed for going through the whole U in at least a satisfactory

The 4 main phases (1,5h sessions each) of the Almedalen Collaboratory in a nutshell:

- 1. Downloading** (Fishbowl) session: gathering information from a relevant group of experts to amplify knowledge in the room while also introducing and anchoring the topic and depth of conversation.
- 2. Dialog:** splitting participants into small groups to digest and process what has come up in the fishbowl.
- 3. Visioning:** inviting participants to move from a high level input into a high level integration. Envisioning the future by tapping into collective intelligence, then bringing new ideas back into the here-and-now and anchor them.
- 4. Prototyping:** Open space for co-creating and further developing ideas and initiatives that emerged during the former phases in view of generating substantial output and concrete next steps.

way. One of the strategies to do this was to limit breaks as much as possible and rather let participants self-organize their bio-brakes during group phases, to avoid congestion around the sanitary facilities and to save time. To save even more time and to keep the awareness and focus high, we added several mindfulness exercises like quietly moving the chairs between sessions as a transition between the downloading and dialog phases in a small group configuration. This was a successful and intentional way of keeping the quality of energy and flow without letting it disperse away into chatting and distractions. Including the core competence of the host (mindfulness work) into the Collaboratory is a good example for the flexibility of the method as used by the facilitator team.

For the same reason, a first harvesting after session 2 (small group work) was done through the facilitators collecting it from the groups rather than having the participants present it.

Only 30 min were planned for lunch, since wraps should have been delivered on time as an easy snack. To be able to adjust the program on sight, another 15 min. of slack time were added.

After lunch we expected that new people might show up. To integrate them, but also to restart the process for everyone, an orientation and a brief recap of the morning was planned before the guided meditation of the visioning phase.

The facilitation team was composed of Jonathan Reams (NTNU), Elke Fein (IFIS), Björn Rabethge and Alexandra Wolk (Evolution at work). As a leadership professor and coach, Jonathan took the lead in facilitation, focusing on framing, linking and integrating work at the overall level. Elke had quite some experience and was therefore actively involved in the design and opening of the event, and Björn and Alexandra found roles where they could take over specific elements, like dialogue groups.

During the preparation phase the team would take time to brainstorm around design and instructions, and how to give these instructions in the different phases of the Collaboratory. By doing so, each facilitator was part of and represented the collaborative effort and collective intelligence of the whole team of facilitators.

C. The Collaboratory phase by phase

The following section presents a comparative analysis between how facilitation was planned and how it actually worked out session by session, focusing on the specific challenges and how the facilitation team dealt with it. The overall guiding objective of this case study is to explore and extract learnings from this specific case about how the general methodology can be, has been and might (not) have to be adapted to specific case settings and why.

In each of the following (sub) phases three elements will be addressed:

- What were the specific challenges posed by the setting and how did the facilitation team chose to respond to this specific challenge?
- How did the facilitation team actually deal with the challenges during the process?
- What were the results? What worked and what not? What were the main learnings from this experience?

Session 1: Opening and Downloading

This session consisted of some time for informally getting to know each other, the introduction and the downloading phase of the event.

a) Getting to know each other

Specific challenges

In most of the previous LiFT Collaboratories, participants have been invited intentionally and came based on a decision to participate in this specific event. In Almedalen, a certain number of people had been recruited or invited to come through our previous marketing activities, and their participation was therefore intentional, but quite a number of other people came in as they were walking past and were drawn intuitively to the event.

This obviously added a certain amount of uncertainty to the welcoming and setting the stage at the beginning of the Collaboratory and generated the following questions:

- How many people will actually drift in off the street?
- When to start? Are they ready?
- Can we move more people in during the process? Or should we preemptively interrupt to do so?

How the facilitation team dealt with the challenge

“Before the actual start of the workshop those participants in the tent who are talking to facilitators or other participants, look at ease. They are laughing, having one on one or one on two conversations and are smiling. Participants sitting alone have a neutral look. They sit in the outer circle.” (Observation notes)

The day of the Collaboratory turned out to be a wonderful sunny day, and most participants (those who were invited, those who came intentionally and those drifting in from the street) were quite relaxed. Moreover, people were connecting and meeting new people in the tent easily before the start of the process. In no time good conversations were going on already before the Collaboratory itself. This led to the official opening starting a little bit late as compared to the published starting time in the schedule.

As the overall intention was to create a light, conversational tone, the facilitation team let these unofficial conversations go on for a while, not wanting to start out with an assertive energy of getting everyone in and started (as opposed to many of the other events in Almedalen, given they have only 1,5h). The positive side of this actual, more gradual start was not only to already have a good conversational tone in place, but also to allow the time to understand how many participants the Collaboratory would actually have. This was important on the organisational level, namely to understand if everyone would fit in the configuration and space available and no extra chairs were needed.

Learnings

The quality of the welcoming and hosting atmosphere supported a blending of participants and set a conversational tone before the official start, which was conducive to the overall process. It is always very important to set the tone of the event and even more so, in a setting, when it is not clear who the participants will be and where most participants likely do not know each other.

Another learning from this is that some of this setting the tone activity can already happen before the official start of the event – and yet be integrated as such.

b) Official Welcoming, introduction, framing and orientation

"The introduction by Helena arrives well, but when she mentions the name of the logo designer who cannot be with us, because he is in California, the observer notices that attention moves out of the room and participants are looking away, around, to the ceiling, to the floor" (observer notes).

The official welcoming included a representative from the hosting organisation iS!, the LiFT project, the local issue owner (Helena Lindemark) and an orientation about the agenda, the free lunch, some video activities and interviews afterwards. The key elements of the agenda were also put also on a flip chart paper and made visible on the wall of the tent.

The lead facilitator then gave a framing of the different phases of the collaboratory, their purpose and expected outcomes, but also some guiding principles for each of the phases, which would be repeated at the beginning of each phase.

c) Downloading / Fishbowl¹

"The lead facilitator introduces the fishbowl conversation. He pauses in between sentences and you can feel the public listening, taking in what he says. The topic is "speaking with you not to you" and he is doing it." (Observer notes)

The intention of the downloading phase is to get as much relevant information on the topic in question into the conversation, which includes diverse perspectives on the topic. The fishbowl method is a handy tool to implement this objective. It allows to have people with specific expertise who are much further down the road on the issue than most of the other participants share their major insights and experiences on the matter. Usually these people are referred to as *experts*, which also conveys a sense of credibility or respect. They are worth listening to, they have something to say that can be expected to be valuable. This empowers them to speak, but it also hopefully creates an openness in listeners.



Among the rules and guiding principles of the fishbowl format are experts in the inner circle opening the conversation. When they feel they have said enough, they are invited to leave the circle to make room for other participants to come forth. Nobody should talk for more than 2 min at any given time



and only speak when one is really moved to do so. An element of inquiry should be in each statement, as well as an emphasis on reflection if possible. The microphone is used as a talking stick, preventing the group from discussing wildly without listening. The fishbowl session generally lasts minimum 1h, and the facilitators only intervene in case some of the most important guiding principles get lost.

¹ image from <https://www.visualfriends.com>
<http://leadership-for-transition.eu/>

Specific challenges and difficulties

1. In the Almedalen Collaboratory, we had 1 or 2 persons in the inner expert circle who met our (ideal) criteria of an “expert” (see above and Methodology book for more detail). When the fishbowl started, it became obvious that those in the expert circle were not chosen appropriately enough and had not been prepared sufficiently.
2. As mentioned earlier, the facilitation team was not able to meet the experts personally beforehand for preparation and briefing and therefore could not even recognize them. One result of this was another person who was not meant to act as an expert taking seat in the center circle of the fishbowl who ended up talking extensively about his childhood.
3. Therefore also, instead of having two free seats for participants from the outer circles, only one stayed free during the opening round. This could also happen because we had forgotten to put a “Reserved” sign on the chairs in the inner circle of the fishbowl.
4. Shortly before the end of the expert round, another person (presenting his virtual reality company in the tent) entered the expert circle. He thereby took the last free chair and equally communicated a perspective which proved to be rather tangential to the topic. Now the first circle of experts had ended, but since no seat was free, the facilitator could not invite other participants into the circle.
5. The experts tended to talk for too long and their inputs were not very converging. Therefore, the focus got lost quite early in the process.
6. In addition – or in result, there were many different topics in the room, which might also have been a result of the rather broad and partly fuzzy overall topic and a lack of focus.

How the facilitation team dealt with it

“When participants interact, some of the conversations are getting intellectual. Participants express themselves, their views, use the ‘I’ perspective. They speak from their experience in life. Possibly attention is on showing off with impressive statements. Long statements” (observer notes).

“Nearly all experts were speaking from the heart which had a positive effect and it seemed that many participants felt connected. Former MP speaks. Facilitators respond non-verbally. Observing, acknowledging by slightly nodding, which increased the listening atmosphere. Participants in the inner circle also showed their listening attitude non-verbally, by nodding, humming” (observer notes).

“Humorous approach of facilitator makes it light for people to move out of the circle. The lead facilitator manages to signal talker that it is time for her to stop. That worked and allowed a new perspective to be given by another participant” (observer notes).

Regarding the extended speaking time of some of the experts, the lead facilitator tried to give them signs to end their input when time had elapsed, but these were not always seen or not followed.

When the first round of expert statements was over and no more free seats in the fishbowl, the lead facilitator invited that experts who had made their point to leave the inner circle, but unfortunately, only the highest level expert (Anders Wijkman) followed this invitation. When Anders came back into the



fishbowl later on to comment, the lead facilitator let his contribution run a little longer and directed the attention of the camera to it in order to catch his statement, already anticipating that he might have something good to say.

However, according to a number of observations from participants, the experts in the Fishbowl were perceived as having a lot of respect and honest listening. This quality was apparently transferred to the smaller groups and made the transition from the Fishbowl phase to the dialogue groups easier.

No specific efforts were undertaken to refocus the discussion. In an interview with the lead facilitator, he pointed out that in that very moment it seemed not appropriate, as the existing fuzziness and unclarity was probably an important part of the process of this group and that the course of the Collaboratory would be easier to redirect through priming the next phase appropriately.

Learnings

The main learnings of this phase were linked to the overall setting and stakeholder constellation, in particular the somewhat unclear and dysfunctional role and intention of the case owner. As indicated before, a very personal vision, combined with the desire to do “lobbying” for more political influence for it is likely to create tension with the co-creative approach of a Collaboratory, both during the preparation phase and during the event. Consider saying No to such a situation when it is being proposed, in order to avoid a less than optimal continuation and related problems in result. If the case giver is unfamiliar with collaborative processes, try to invite her/him to attend another collaboratory for first hand experience before the actual cooperation. More specific learnings are the following:

- If the topic is very broad and complex, the panel of experts needs to be especially high level and well chosen. Experts not only need a certain expertise and ability of complex thinking, but also a number of inner qualities, such as the ability to stay focused, leave room to other perspectives and participants, recognize what is really relevant when etc.
- If the topic is broad and somewhat fuzzy or has a lack of focus, many different topics might appear in the room which then can increase the fuzziness. However, if it is a good idea for the facilitator to intervene and refocus the conversation is a question of perception. Sometimes, a certain extent of fuzziness is a healthy part of the process that the group needs to move through.

In practical terms,

- make sure that the facilitation team can recognize the experts ahead of time, even if it's only 10 minutes before the Collaboratory starts;
- put “Reserved” signs on the chairs in the inner circle and have one member of the facilitation team who recognizes the experts make sure that the right people sit there.
- In case most experts are unfamiliar with the process, emphasize strongly in your introduction that if everyone speaks for 20 minutes, the purpose of this session gets lost. It might also be a good idea to chose (and brief) someone to go first who can prototype the kind of statement (tone, length etc.) that is aimed for. Establish some timing mechanism that deals friendly but firmly with unstoppable minds (such as ringing a bell or switching off the microphone).
- If nothing of all this works, accept the reality and trust that the process will still work in a different way, which is what the facilitation team did in Almedalen.

Session 2 – Dialogue Groups

“In preparation of the next phase the lead facilitator talks about inner transformation, inner transition, the group seems to become a little bit less relaxed. He introduces moments of silence by breathing calmly and friendly points out that the group will be moving to the next Dialog phase. (...) It can be noticed that a calm way of talking makes a big positive difference compared to quick talk. It becomes much easier to take in what is being said.” (Observer notes)

The intention of this phase is to offer an opportunity to take the fishbowl conversation deeper and to invite even more interaction between divergent perspectives and experiences, highlighting and revealing assumptions and differences, and to look beyond them. Going beyond existing perspectives also means to go beyond just perceiving these different perspectives, towards a more personal conversation that not just pleases the mind, but touches the heart and brings group members closer to each other. After the small dialogue groups, each group is invited to share something from their experience in the small group with the whole group.

Specific challenges

As pointed out above, time constraints were an important “red thread” of the whole day in Almedalen and especially influenced the transitions between the different phases of the Collaboratory.

A second challenge was the degree to which some participants had similar perspectives and/or (lacked) a vested interest in the topic which could counteract their ability to focus and explore the topic and the diversity of perspectives in depth.

Another challenge was to keep the harvesting part (for sharing the essentials of the dialog groups) focused in order stay within the time limits.

How facilitation dealt with them

“Groups of 3-4 people were asked to find each other in silence which worked well. 7 groups were formed. Talking stick was not used by all groups. Language Swedish/English issue was solved by groups without intervention.” (Observer notes)

As mentioned above, we included a mindfulness element to create the dialogue groups, namely inviting people to move their chairs in a silent, mindful way and, while moving around in silence, to find two or three people they did not know yet, and form groups and random new connections on that basis. To address the time constraint, the facilitation team decided to let people self-organize. The assumption was that the homogeneity of the participants (see section above) would enable them to self-organise smoothly, which in fact was the case.



In view of the dialog groups’ activities, the facilitation team gave some framing instructions, for instance recommending to use a talking object, taking deep breaths in between sharings and being mindful of what is arising in them as they prepare to speak. After a about 30 minutes, the facilitators would come and start asking the groups for key points to be “harvested” and shared with the whole group. This was to help focus and to translate the conversation outcomes into a succinct language.

For harvesting the results, the facilitation team had planned to move from group to group and have one person of the group present their key findings. However, the first participant just jumped up and

came to the kind of natural stage on one side of the tent, and all other groups just did it the same way. The facilitation team adapted to this style that emerged spontaneously which worked just fine within the given time frame, since there were not too many groups.

Regarding the challenge of not having enough diversity of perspectives, the facilitation team did get confirmation of this through the feedback and observation sheets in which some participants said that there had been almost too much respect, preventing a certain honesty or engagement. One participant recalled: *„What happened in my group was firstly a silence. Maybe 2.5 minutes before anybody decided to say anything. After that, the first topics structured the rest of the conversation. We ended up following a train of thought that focused on the virtual reality or technology perspective. We struggled to get the other perspectives related to that topic. That process in itself was also very much trying to please and not criticize.“*

Learnings

The experience of this dialogue group showed that a certain degree of vested interest in a topic and a minimum diversity of participants are an important factor to get a true dialogue going, where intensive interaction between divergent perspectives and experiences can reveal differences and assumptions, and help to look beyond them, rather than everyone coming to some nice, polite agreement very easily. As not all participants in Almedalen had as much of a vested interest in the topic and most held a rather post-modern worldview, the tendency in the groups was to easily drift to things people had in common and agreed on at the expense of more authentic inquiry into personal pain points connected to the topic.

Ultimately, for dialogue to really work and to unfold its full potential, one needs more time and more stakes, i.e. vested interests of participants in the issue at hand. In fact, in most Collaboratories there is a tension between the qualities like the depth of the dialogue and its potential to really surface many diverse perspectives on the one hand, and the practicalities such as time constraints, the type of participants present and their relation to the topic on the other.

Lunch

Specific challenges

While the Lunch break had been carefully prepared by our local host who had ordered wraps to be delivered to the schoolyard, it turned out that the ordered Lunch came much later than expected.

Also, a spontaneous presentation by a company that appeared to be sponsoring the lunch was done outside in the schoolyard once the food had arrived. It was not clear how this linked to the theme of the day.

How facilitation dealt with it

“Delivery of lunch was being delayed and the facilitator managed to bridge this unforeseen gap very well, just by staying present and focused” (from an interview with a participant).

The lead facilitator tried to make up some time by talking and explaining the process a little more. Furthermore, another unexpected person from WWF Sweden dropped into the program presenting a photo project that was displayed in the tent. She was able to fill some more time while the group was waiting for the lunch to arrive. However, even after around 15



minutes, lunch was not there and people had to wait a bit longer. Later, in order to make up for some of the time the facilitation team invited the participants back into the tent as soon as they had finished their lunch.

As to the hosting organization who ordered the lunch, they brought in and distributed a strawberry and chocolate desert in the afternoon break to make up for the delayed lunch. This was perceived very well by the participants.

Learnings

Even though the lunch delay had been dealt with very smoothly due to the ability of the lead facilitator to adapt and improvise in a meaningful way, it might be a good idea for the facilitation team to consider possible options that might be available in case of such a logistical problems (lunch, coffee breaks) beforehand in order remain flexible and to prevent any tension to spill over to the participants.

More generally speaking, in constellations such as in Almedalen where three parties were involved in the organisation – a local host, a case owner and the facilitation team –, it is always a good investment to take the time to exchange and align in more detail also on these kind of logistic questions.

Session 3 – Visioning and Harvesting

“After the break people intensely talk and difficult to get them back to the tent, inertia. Funny moderation to get people in. Jonathan reassures during the session that all this is ok, keeps it light, while respecting the process. Participants are still a bit unfocused. While he is introducing the visualisation people become more mindful and the atmosphere gets calm...” (Observer notes)

The purpose of the visioning phase, taking people into a state of mental calmness, emptiness, and thus, openness for novel insights and ideas to emerge, is to envision potential futures where the current problems are resolved. The ideas around this future are then brought back into the group and anchored there. This is usually done through a guided meditation or visioning exercise which obviously needs a high-quality attitude of presence on the side of the facilitator in order for participants to have sufficient trust to follow and engage in that process.



Ideally, the facilitator is able to coordinate their voice and words so that people are facilitated to enter a transcendent state, where the usual thinking mind is calmed down to let go of its usual limitations, while intuitive sensing is enhanced, so that more possibilities can emerge. The most important ingredient of a good visioning process is therefore the ability of the facilitator to connect to and stay in this calm and meditative state while guiding the group, in order for him to offer the right speed and vibration to the group and for the latter to be able to tap into the field of collective intelligence.

With regard to harvesting, this was planned to be done in three steps. First, for participants to graphically or otherwise represent their thoughts and experiences for themselves, materials were provided before the visioning started (paper and pens). Second, we invited people to share their visioning experience in smaller groups, in order to ground in the experience. For this, we provided three guiding questions:

- How do you see the future situation?
- How might this be possible?
- How might you overcome potential barriers?

Finally, the intention was to encourage people to present their visions to the large group after they had done the former.

Specific challenges

“Someone else is coming in to join, gets briefed by Jonathan. Unclear why the person with apples came in, slightly disturbing because of not knowing. Also, while listening his attention was focuses inward” (observer note).

The visioning Session started late because of the delayed lunch. Also, the provided materials (paper and pens) turned out to be quite unsuitable for painting and drawing (as part of the harvesting after the visioning). But the biggest challenge was that during the harvesting and sharing part of this session, another “expert” showed up – Matthias Goldman, a Swedish think tank owner –, who now also required some space and time for his intervention. The tension between the interest and focus of the case giver and those of the method and facilitation team showed up once more.

How facilitation dealt with it

“A lot of ease in entering the meditative space, almost happy and eager, more mental activity while visualizing, more effort. People seem to thoroughly enjoy this state of visioning, maybe because of practice with mindfulness which many of the participants had” (bserver notes).

“For the harvesting of the visualisation, most are very mindfully following the instructions to draw” (observer note).

The facilitation team knew that Matthias Goldman would come sometime during the day, but had planned to let him be part of the open space later in the process in order to fit his concerns in more smoothly. However, since he could only stay for a short time and since he seemed to be very important to the local topic owner Helena, the lead facilitator, after some discussion with both of them, managed to sneak him into the harvesting session.

Before starting his own short talk, M. Goldman was given the role to move from group to group, asking each of them to very briefly state their status of visioning and discussion. He did so, distributing apples and listening in a little into each group. This gave him a chance to pick up what’s going on in the room, to gather some impressions and get a feel for the conversations. It also allowed him to respond to what he had heard, rather than just throwing in his own perspective. In fact, when M. Goldman ultimately gave a little talk in response to what he had heard, thus giving him some moment in the spotlight, he was actually quite enthusiastic about what he experienced was going on in our session and presented his thoughts with a lot of energy. He also managed to playfully engage the audience, as well as to engage with a number participants who questioned and challenged him. Ultimately, this made the sudden appearance of this much desired stakeholder to look like a rather natural thing.

Even though some participants still perceived his presence with a question mark, it was overall possible to frame this intervention in a way that prevented it from disrupting the process, but mostly appearing as a natural, organic part of the overall experience. In fact, knowing that someone else might show up unexpectedly in the afternoon, the program on the flipchart mentioned “Surprise”. Therefore, this incident of improvising could be framed by saying “we’ve had a special guest appear, we have an opportunity”.

Learnings

“Facilitation very nicely integrated this slightly ‘weird’ presenter, so he got the attention and was challenged a bit by one person. All stayed light enough to carry through a short break, where people stayed in the tent or went out enjoying chocolate, strawberries. A sense of empowerment is noticeable and relaxedness” (observer note).

One of the most important learnings of this exercise in improvisation was that whatever happens, even if unexpected events seem to disrupt and counteract one’s own plans at first sight, the most important challenge and skill is to stay present, to sense into the group and the existing field, and to trust that one’s intuition will ultimately find creative ways to deal with any incident without resisting it. It is an important skill to perceive – and then frame – unexpected events as potential opportunities and added value to the overall process, rather than as disturbances.

At the same time, the same skill is necessary for knowing how to discern if and when including such an unforeseen intervention is really appropriate and when it would be more beneficial to say NO for the sake of keeping the flow and focus of the overall process up.

If the setting is such that surprises of whatever kind are to be expected, it is wise to provide some space for them or even mention this somewhere in the official program.

Another, more profane learning is to have a clear idea about the type of material that is needed for the session and to make sure that someone from the team takes care of it at least 1 day ahead of the event.

Session 4 – Prototyping

Intention and specific challenges

As with all other phases of this Collaboratory the main challenge here was again the relative lack of time. Note that in other settings, this phase can easily last for more than one full day in itself, so again, time restrictions put substantial limitations onto this phase, and expectations needed to be restricted to giving participants a sense of how their visions could be moved forward in practical ways.

Another risk that was discussed by the team was that there could be too many groups, thereby dissipating the creative energy.

Before the start of this session, chairs needed to get out of the way, paper & pens put into the center, and designated meeting areas prepared for breakout groups.

How facilitation dealt with it

At the outset, the lead facilitator briefly introduced the rationale of the *open space* process and how we intended to use it here. Since the event was squeezing a complex method and process – and a complex topic – into just one short day, the emphasis was on creating networks, initiatives, and some logistics around next steps, rather than expecting concrete projects or initiatives in result of the open space. Therefore, the guiding questions we proposed were:

- *What wants to happen next?*
- *What are you drawn to move forward?*
- *What do you need to do in order to get things moving?*

To avoid the creative energy from dissipating and to keep the tight time frame, specific framing and condensing questions were used by the facilitation team. One major question that opened the open space was: Who can come up with something that can be realized in the next three months?

After this opening, 10 min were foreseen for the first part of the open space, i.e. for presenting ideas about what wants to happen next in the center of the circle, then 10 min for a marketplace to self-organize around the ideas presented before. After that, participants were given 40 min to work on their ideas in breakout groups, making essential connections, coming up with concrete actions etc.

It turned out that participants were very eager to elaborate their ideas, and despite there initially being a long list of suggested topics to work on, the participants managed to self-organize to condense the variety of topics into three major themes that they wanted to work on for the remaining thirty minutes in three groups.

After these break-outs groups the participants came together in the tent for another 20 min and formed a big circle for briefly sharing & harvesting the main outcomes from the discussion of each group.

The last 10 min were dedicated to a closing, consisting of two elements, first, of acknowledging the presence and efforts of the participants and summarizing the results. Second, the latter were handed back over to Helena as the local topic owner and contact for future activities, so that she could take back responsibility for following up with the participants.

Learnings

Despite the unexpected twists & turns and the less than optimal prep link with the hosting team, there was an immense positive energy in the room from the people participating at the end. Why and how was this?

In an interview after the Collaboratory, the lead facilitator explained: *“What I noticed as the day progressed was that even though it was not what we imagined or wanted, for the people involved it seemed to be very energizing and motivating and they seemed to feel good about it. They personally or as a group got something out of it. Whether the stakeholders or Helena as the owner of the topic got as much tangible outcome as was ideally possible is hard to say. I did see that for myself, there was a correlation between my own anxiety and frustration, and when setting that aside, we could see things flow in a way where people were more satisfied, more engaged and so on.”*

So somehow, the format of the day had obviously helped to create this positive energy.

The process as a whole

Considering the Almedalen workshop as a whole, we can formulate few general reflections, as well as a number of more specific learnings in hindsight.

Due to the general combination of the setting, the group of involved stakeholders and in particular the constellation between the local host and the topic giver, the overall Collaboratory process was characterized by a certain unclarity and lack of directionality resulting in the Collaboratory taking its own dynamic. Given that some elements of this hosting constellation, as well as of the local case giver's agenda were not clear, and sometimes also not explicit and transparent at the outset, but became visible only during the actual Collaboratory process, one of the meta-reflections of the LiFT facilitation team was that the process in some way mirrored the missing clarity and direction of the local hosting situation and case giver. This is by the way a phenomenon that we observed re-occurringly in other contexts.

This lack of clarity ultimately also applied to the chosen topic. The Almedalen workshop was a good example of the fact that when the topic of a Collaboratory is too broad and too abstract, the contents that are discussed during the process are often not easily accessible for participants, let alone impactful. One result of this was the difficulty of engaging a suitably diverse set of stakeholders who

actually had a “burning stake” or vested interest in the topic of accelerating the achievements of the UN sustainability goals by 2022. Another result of this was the fact that the focus gradually shifted away from the (maybe rather idealist) initial guiding question we started with to something like: “Can mindfulness, personal development + virtual reality save the world?” – if we were to put words on what really happened.

This obviously also had an influence on the depth of meaningful dialogue and prototyping of concrete actions, which the Collaboratory methodology is specifically designed for. The facilitation team realized this tension quite early on and decided to not “impose” too much directionality and structure. As the lead facilitator worded it... *„Rather than fighting the tide to make something happen, when the recipe ingredients weren’t there, let it flow in an easy way“.*

And yet, even though the Collaboratory could not produce the depth of results that are possible in a more suitable setting, the process has somehow still been functional even in this context. What a collaboratory *can* still deliver in a similar situation and setting are „feeling-good“ conversations. A lot of good conversations actually happened, which is also what people expressed at the end. And despite the unexpected twists & turns and the less than optimal prep link with the hosting/case giver team, ultimately, there was “good energy” and effective self-organisation. This might partly have been due to the relative homogeneity of the group of participants most of whom likely shared post-modern value systems present and a strong awareness of relationship qualities and certain skills and good-will of working together.² Moreover, many participants actually expressed their gratitude for the Collaboratory being held.

D. Feedback, reflections and ideas for improvement

Besides the more systematic feedbacks by the LiFT observers some of which have already been mentioned, we also actively collected feedbacks and opinions from some of the participants. The following excerpts illustrate both their positive responses and a certain sense of the missing clarity:

Person 1:

The first part was an interesting way to share thoughts. I will try out the sharing with an inner circle where participants go in and out. But I will put a clock on the talking. I believe in that way of sharing ideas. After lunch – more difficult to see the productivity, hard to get the point. Maybe I just got restless....

Person 2:

The event catches those who are seeking. It’s necessary to take one step back and wait for the ones who are on their way. We are used to struggle, now when we have tailwind, we have to listen in and make other people be heard. I am strengthened, so used to be alone and now I feel I’m not anymore

Person 3:

Good atmosphere, permissive, cohesive. Open space is a good way, but it would be better with the same people the whole day. Dare to believe that the event can keep participants for the whole time.



² In fact, a similar homogeneity was present in the ecovillage, 7 Linden during the Collaboratory in June 2017.
<http://leadership-for-transition.eu/>

Person 4:

There is a challenge in the differences in background. Facilitation of group discussions would have been helpful. More clear goals/objectives would have been good.

When looking back, it needs to be acknowledged that for the context of the Almedalen week and compared to its usual formats, the LiFT event obviously made a big difference already, even if it fell short of our own high expectations. The one outcome dimension that was most clear was the positive impact of the Collaboratory for the local topic owner for whom it has created a launching platform bringing her closer to her vision of achieving the UN Sustainability Goals by 2022.

E. Outcomes, follow-up and post-event activities

“What I noticed as the day progressed was that even though it was not what we imagined or wanted, for the people involved it seemed to be very energizing and motivating and they seemed to feel good about it. That they personally or as a group got something out of it. Whether the stakeholders or Helena as the owner of the topic got as much tangible outcome as was ideally possible is hard to say. I did see that for myself there was a correlation between my own anxiety/frustration, and setting that aside, to seeing things flow in a way where people were more satisfied, more engaged and so on” (in-depth interview with Jonathan Reams, the lead facilitator, after the collaboratory).

As an EU-project with a limited range of activities and scope, LiFT is not able to provide or take responsibility for more long-term follow-up activities beyond its own collaboratory workshops. However, the collaboratories are supposed to create a lasting impact beyond single events, even though the LiFT team cannot be involved in this locally, in contrast to the local host and/or case giver.

Some very concrete immediate results reported from the working groups included reports on having made “good new contacts” and the idea to “take the ‘samtalssofa’³ to Stockholm, maybe do it as virtual reality dialogues.” Others also found the setting “intimate, but at the same time too open ended”, lacking responsibility to carry things forward.

To follow up with the Collaboratory held during the Almedalen Week 2016, Per Hörberg from the Swedish LiFT partner *Initiativ Samutveckling* has conducted an interview with the local topic holder, Helena Lindemark, six months after the event. Here is what Helena reported:

“I am very grateful for getting this support for Agenda 2022. The impact of the Collaboratory has given me several openings to reach the vision. It has given me trustworthiness enough to get the needed contacts in the Swedish Government – Minister of Development Assistance, and Minister of Public Administration.”

In fact, she reports a number of new high-level contacts and supporters to her project in result of the Almedalen collaboratory. One very concrete result is Helena’s new collaboration with an entrepreneur to produce a “digital cloth”. An online artefact describing the global achievements of the UN’s Goal Agenda 2030. Monitoring all 17 goals per country. How far has each country reached now? Helena and her partner participated in the Almedalen Week 2017 with this innovation and were present both in a large hotel in Visby and at iS!’ meeting place 2017.

Helena also got an offer from Sweden’s greatest media company to drive the project as a part of the company’s values and goodwill creation. The company is willing to build the case the years forward to

³ Samtal = Swedish for conversation. As one of the gags of the overall Almedalen event, a colorful sofa on wheels was moved around, and people representing specific initiatives were invited to have a seat and enter an interview-like conversation with a host that was filmed and recorded.

inspire the decision makers to decide about the Stockholm Conference 2022. Stockholm Resilience Center, with well know CEO, Professor Johan Rockström is another new opening for Helena's Agenda 2022 in Stockholm.

The reference to Almedalen has also helped Helena to get in contact with the Swedish Delegation for UN's Agenda 2030 who has the responsibility for the overall plan for the Swedish implementation of Agenda 2030. On the way to a decision on this level, Helena already has appointments with Vinnova, Sweden's innovation agency, and the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce. Vinnova develops Sweden's innovation capacity for sustainable growth and for benefiting society, and would be an appropriate partner in her project. Next, Helena is aiming for a meeting with the Swedish Prime Minister. One of his secretaries was due to meet her in March 2017.

Summing up, the Collaboratory at the Almedalen event gave her an opportunity to greatly leverage her project, even if this happened less by immediate follow-ups from the event (i.e. working groups), but rather through her getting more high level contacts and providing her with a high level reference (our event) to point to in her record.

F. Summary of main learnings

In hindsight, the Almedalen Collaboratory was a case where several of the important criteria that should be met in order for a Collaboratory to be a suitable method were not in place. Therefore, our post-event reflection was that we would rather not repeat the experience. However, even though – or precisely because the overall setting was not optimal, there have been a lot of substantial learnings from this case.

Case owner and hosting constellation

As explained in more detail in our Methods Book, we suggest to consider criteria such as to have a host who is bringing in a topic they are committed to making progress on while at the same time being open enough to welcome other stakeholder perspectives. In this sense, it is helpful, if the case giver has some degree of experience with experiential processes.

Also, if the setting and constellation of initiators is more complex, such as in Almedalen where three parties were involved in the organisation – a local host, a case owner and the facilitation team – it might be necessary to take more time to exchange and align in more detail also on logistical questions at local level.

If the case giver is unfamiliar with this type of processes, there might be a possibility to either invite them to attend another collaboratory for first hand experience or invest some more time into creating alignment with them about the underlying intention, focus and the choice of design.

A personal vision combined with the desire to do “lobbying” for more political influence might create tension with the co-creative approach of a Collaboratory, both during the preparation phase and during the event. Consider saying No to such a situation when it is being proposed.

Choice of topic and management and experts

The Collaboratory is particularly powerful if the topic is focused and combined with a guiding question inviting joint action in a concrete area of concern. If the topic is very broad and complex, the panel of experts needs to be especially high level and well chosen, in terms of expertise and ability to be complex thinkers, but also in terms of inner qualities, such as the ability to stay focused, leave room to other perspectives and participants, recognize when what is said is really relevant etc.

Especially if experts are new to collaborative processes, it is important to contact them way before the event to give them some orientation about their role. On site, make sure that the facilitation team can

recognize the experts, even 10 minutes before the Collaboratory starts. It might be necessary to put “Reserved” signs on the chairs in the inner circle to prevent other people from taking the experts’ seats.

Stakes, participants, vested interest and diversity

The experience during this event showed once more that a minimum degree of diversity of participants and a certain extent of vested interest of all of them in the topic in question are important factors to get a true dialogue going. Diversity is a precondition for a lively interaction between divergent perspectives and experiences, revealing differences and assumptions, and for ultimately transforming and looking beyond them, rather than everyone coming to some nice, polite, superficial agreement, because nothing relevant is at stake. The latter is what happened in Almedalen. As most participants seemed to have less of a vested interest in the topic and likely held a rather post-modern worldview, the tendency in the groups was to easily drift to things people had in common and agreed on at the expense of more authentic inquiry for diversity of perspectives.

While in Collaboratories, there is always a tension between the depth of the dialogue and its potential to really surface many diverse perspectives on the one hand and factors like time constraints, the type of participants and their relation to the topic on the other hand, it needs sufficient time and vested interest for this process to really work. In this sense, the breadth of the vision and the choice of stakeholders/participants should be an important criteria for evaluating, already during the preparation phase, if a collaboratory is suited in this particular context. If all of the core criteria are fulfilled, a Collaboratory of one day *can* work very well, producing lasting results and far reaching actions. However, if (some of) these criteria are not met and you still want to do a Collaboratory, consider to provide at more time to allow participants to adapt to the transformative set-up. This can be challenging initially for very active minds, which by default find it difficult to endure moments of not-knowing. Yet, this was not the main challenge at Almedalen.



LiFT team members at their debrief, reflecting one of the sessions.

Leadership

Taking into account these meta-reflections, the core factor that “saved” the event was likely the leadership skills of the lead facilitator, the ability to stay present, to sense into the group field, to trust the process and to frame any undesired twist or unexpected event, such that it becomes an opportunity and even add value to the overall process.

Emergent, sensing, trusting and humorous leadership combined with good and meticulous planning and preparation (even though plans might have to be adapted or given up altogether) is the most promising strategy in order to have mental alternatives of possible scenarios available to choose from in the case of the unexpected, including the freedom to do something completely different.

All of this is most successful if surrounded by a strong focus on appreciative hosting through the local host. This was one of the most positive learnings LiFT got out of the Almedalen case.



Hosting and logistics

The hosting organisation in Almedalen, our Swedish LiFT partner *Initiativ Samutveckling (iS!)*, had great attention on holding a welcoming space in and around the tent, making sure that everyone would be welcomed. As part of this special practice, iS! has a number of designated “hosts”, wearing a special vest marked “Värd” (host), thus making them immediately visible and easy to recognize for everyone coming in. These värds would greet everybody at the entrance, gently guide late-comers to their chairs and generally put a lot of attention on how any event is “held”. This made a lot of difference for the overall atmosphere and atmosphere of respect and appreciation. In its own sessions, iS! also has a strong focus on each facilitator being aware of the importance of the “hosting attitude”.

The quality of the welcoming and hosting atmosphere can greatly support the blending of participants and set a conversational tone before the official start, which is conducive to the overall process. It is all the more important to set the tone of the event in a setting where it is not clear who the participants will be and where most participants do not know each other.

Other practical learnings include:

- to have a clear idea about the type of material that is needed for each session and to make sure, someone of the team takes care of it at least one day ahead, such that in case something is not available, it could still be organised in time,
- to make arrangements for changing weather if you are not in a closed room,
- to check out the real-life context conditions ahead of time, see where you can make changes to improve the setting, and think about how you can frame things you cannot change (such as noise from the environment) into the process in some creative, productive way.

Finally, be aware that each Collaboratory event is also an occasion for learning for yourself. Don't take everything too seriously – and have fun! 😊