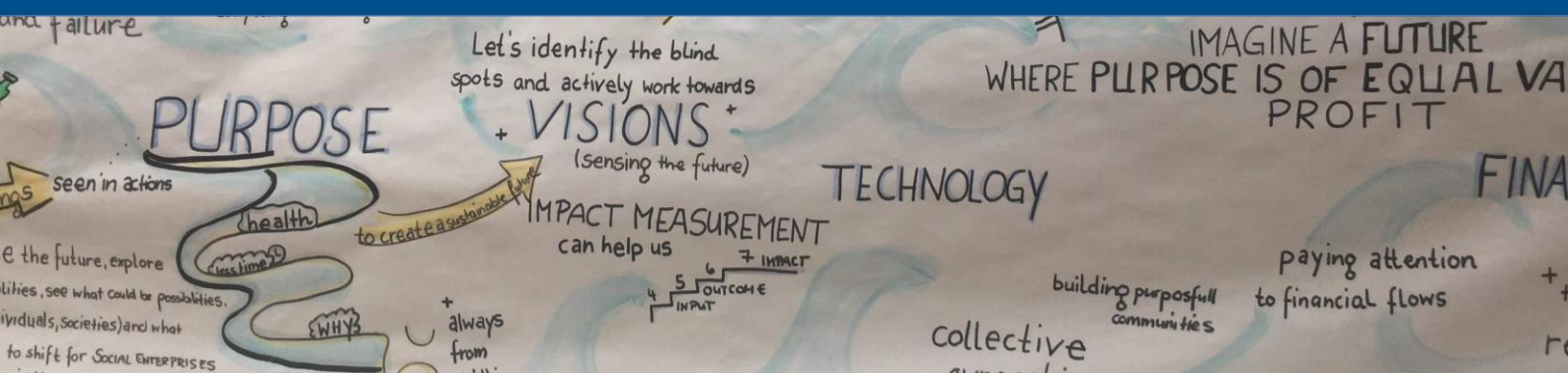# LiFT
Methodology Book

Designing and hosting Collaboratories

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LiFT Leadership for Transition

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The Methods Book discusses LiFT's experiences with and its learnings about the Collaboratory methodology. Its goal is to give orientation to interested readers by guiding them through the thinking and preparation steps we have found helpful when using the method.

This chapter focuses on the first dimension of the Collaboratory "recipe book", the context or setting in which you wish – or are obliged to host your event.

LiFT Methodology Book – Chapter 2

The context – differing settings and how to deal with them

This chapter intends to give users a sense of what **an optimal setting for a Collaboratory** would look like. Based on our practical experience, we also present a panorama of the **potential deviations** from this ideal setting that users are likely to encounter in real life. This can hopefully help you respond more adequately and enable you to work productively with the respective setting and constellation you find in your own case.

Among the most important learnings of our first project phase was the fact that each Collaboratory setting is different and specific, and that there can thus be **no simple how-to-do-in-five-easy-steps** cook-book like instructions. Rather, the first instruction must be to do a careful analysis of the given context and check whether a) the Collaboratory is the right fit for it and b) if yes, how it should be designed in order to respond to the specific setting in question.

For even though there is a "template design and structure" (as presented in chapter 1) that can serve as overall orientation guideline, this ideal typical template is likely not to be the best fit for your individual case, due to specific constraints or challenges you might be dealing with. Therefore, the design challenge is a new one in every new case, since each new case brings a new set of conditions, constraints and variables to consider in relation to the core template. This chapter aims to translate our insights and experiences about how to navigate through the potential diversity of settings into

- a number of factors to reflect about when analyzing or generating your context and setting,
- examples illustrating both the potential bandwidth of options and pitfalls in a specific setting, as well as
- tangible recommendations and guidelines for making best choices in each area of designing the event and the process as a whole.

> **Guiding question for designing good Collaboratories:**
>
> How can the specificity of each context be taken into account adequately? And how can specific challenges best be addressed by choosing and designing optimal context conditions in view of optimal outcomes?

More specifically, this entails the following questions:

What are the most important factors and **preconditions, which need to be in place** in order for a Collaboratory to be a good choice as a method? And once you have made that choice, what are the context factors you should be aware of as having an influence on shaping the character and outcome of your overall event? Moreover, to what degree can you and your preparation team **shape a suitable context** yourself? And what are the factors you should consider and be mindful of in this regard?

This chapter is structured along the lines of the most important considerations that Collaboratory hosts should take into account when planning and preparing their event. We will start by a **list of criteria** that you can use like a "decision tree" for figuring out whether the Collaboratory is a good fit in your context. As indicated, each context is made of a number of variables, which together shape the setting you (as hosting and facilitating team) are dealing with before, during and after the event.

Among the many aspects that can be part of the context, we will discuss those variables below which appear particularly important to consider before getting started. Besides the general remarks and recommendations, we will also give examples from the LiFT experience illustrating where the former come from and which were the learnings from less-than-optimal contextual settings we struggled with ourselves.

Important elements of the context/setting of the Collaboratory
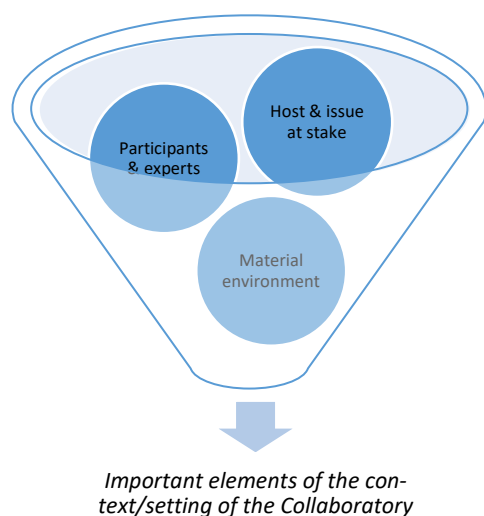
Again, more detailed information can be found in the **LiFT Case Boo**k, which provides "thick descriptions" of how the respective Collaboratories have been planned, designed and conducted, and what were our reflections on and learnings from them in hindsight.

Chapter 2.1 below summarizes the essentials that need to be in place in order for a Collaboratory to be able to unfold its power and potential – by which we mean to be able to carry a suitable process for participants and their issue, generating satisfactory results – and thus to be a suitable method. The chapters following afterwards spell out these most important must-haves in more detail based on the LiFT experience.

2.1 Essential must-haves for a Collaboratory to be a suitable method

While the Collaboratory is powerful and stimulating method that can be very effective in many diverse stakeholder settings, it is not always the best choice and/or can likely not fulfill its core goal of generating innovative hands-on solutions to complex challenges if there are shortcomings in one of the areas discussed below. We have found that for running successful Collaboratories, a number of **preconditions** need to be in place. The most important ones are:

- a **joint challenge or problem** and a central **guiding question** around this, focusing on how the challenge can be addressed or how the problem can be solved
- a **local stakeholder (usually the local host) who 'owns' the problem or issue**
- a **diverse network of stakeholders** (social actors who play a role in relation to the challenge/problem and) who are willing to be part of the collaborative process

Aspects which are equally important once the above preconditions are met, include, among other things:

- a setting that provides **the necessary time & space** for a Collaboratory to unfold (ideally not as part of a larger event which has a different agenda, see below)
- a **good**, i.e. **experienced enough design and facilitation (team)**, able to navigate uncertainty and deal with unexpected situations in an adequate way
- a **minimum shared understanding and openness of the participants** for a deeper level of collaborative inquiry than what they might be used to in their everyday life

Executive summary for impatient readers:

The Collaboratory is a method that is designed to support diverse stakeholder groups to address **complex issues of joint concern** in a deep, visionary and outcome-oriented way. Therefore, if the issue at hand is not framed adequately (see below for more detail) and does not have enough traction for a broad enough network of stakeholders to feel a **sense of concern or even urgency** in view of co-developing actual solutions, it might not be the right method. If your interest is mainly to inquire more deeply into a topic or share perspectives between a range of participants in order to better understand each other – and thus the complexity of the problem – without the need and urge to actually do something about it, other approaches might be a better choice (namely some those used in the first part of the Collaboratory, see our chapter on facilitation). Having a sufficient level of **specificity or concreteness** to the issue is important, because if attendees/participants have too much distance from the topic or if the conversation remains too abstract, then the flow tends to drift towards 'feeling good' rather than making progress on an issue.

Similarly, it is critically important that the local host or **topic owner** has a sufficiently **strong, vested interest** in it being addressed in a more efficient way, or even have it solved, otherwise there is likely not enough focus and commitment to engage in a substantial collaborative process over a certain period of time. A host committed to productively solving or at least constructively addressing the issue at hand is also an important precondition for bringing together a sufficiently large and diverse network of motivated stakeholders who are usually invited by the local host.

Regarding the **range of stakeholders** to be invited, diversity in terms of viewpoints, perspectives, experiences, assumptions etc. is crucial. Make sure from the very beginning that you include all actors that have a stake and/or a say in the respective problem or topic (be it as producers, originators, affected, concerned or profiteers), regardless of their political affiliations or orientations. Do also include people who have special independent expertise about it. Another criteria for choosing stakeholders is their ability to mobilize resources that are relevant for making progress on the issue. Otherwise you might get a typical idealist orientation of how 'they' i.e. those in power, should take action.

These stakeholders can either be invited as participants or, in addition, in the role of "experts" opening the explorative inquiry of the topic in an opening key-note or in the fishbowl session (see chapter 3 on facilitation design below). The more tension there is between stakeholders around the topic, the more productive a Collaboratory *can* be – but more important it is to give controversial perspectives a voice very early in the process.

Besides these most important *must-haves*, we suggest three more. For a Collaboratory to unfold and realize its potential, it needs a setting that provides the **necessary time & space**. We have found that the **minimum amount of time** should be one day (depending on the issue and concrete circumstances). Two days are better, unless the event is taking place locally, i.e. with participants having possibilities to come together and follow up with each other easily after the first or the main event. We have also found that if Collaboratories are part of other, larger events, the latter tends to dictate various context factors (such as available time slots or rooms), and to create distraction by the other surrounding issues and activities, and thus, to make it more difficult to really focus on the core issue.

Besides these logistic aspects, the two factors which matter most for the success of a Collaboratory are the quality of the design and facilitation and, related to it, the degree of openness of the participants for open-ended collaborative processes as such (see explanation below).

"Good" Collaboratory **facilitation**, besides knowledge about and experience with the method, largely depends on certain personal skills of the facilitator, namely the ability to act (and facilitate) from a

silent inner place, an embodied capacity to listen, observe and sense without judgement. While facilitation needs to adequately respond to whatever happens in the course of the process, it should not get triggered emotionally by it. Its responses should be driven by the overall intention of the event, rather than by that of the facilitator(s). In other words, the latter should have developed the personal capacity of detachment and of letting go any substantial personal goals with regard to the outcome of the process. As Otto Scharmer puts it: "Leadership in its essence is the capacity to shift the inner place from which we operate." Moreover, the "success of the intervention depends on the *interior condition* of the intervener" (italics in the original. Scharmer, 2007, p. 7).While what this means in more detail is discussed in the facilitation chapter and in the Foundations and Resources Book, we do suggest that you make sure that your facilitator(s)' experience matches that of the challenge.

Finally, it is extremely helpful and facilitation has an easier time if participants **share a minimum understanding** that the nature, quality or complexity of the issue at stake requires a deeper level of collaborative multi-stakeholder engagement to be addressed properly than what they might be used to in their daily experience. This helps to build a sufficient degree of **trust** in the process – and in the authority of the facilitators generating it – in other words, a willingness to go along with a potentially unknown or unfamiliar set of activities and conversations.

The Collaboratory process offers the chance – and invites participants onto a journey to let go of preconceived ideas and approaches and an to open up to newly emerging ideas in result of the collaborative inquiry (and what Scharmer calls the realm of collective intelligence. It helps to allow oneself to be present as a unique human being with its full spectrum of aspirations, senses and capabilities, and not primarily as representative of a limited function, role or task in a stakeholder organization. Participants should be open to this kind of transformative experience. (So you might want to make this clear even in the announcement of your event.)

Some experiences from LiFT in this regard:

LiFT has hosted several Collaboratory events where the above criteria were not fully or not optimally met. While some of these events were perceived and experienced by participants as quite successful, they fell short of our own expectations as compared to what *could* have been possible with the method. In other words: While you *can* conduct a Collaboratory even if not all of these criteria are met, we would rather not repeat the experience. Here are some examples:

- **Guiding topic and question:** LiFT has hosted at least two events where the topic and/or guiding question was formulated in a too general (Almedalen) or otherwise inadequate way (not inviting joint action, Trondheim 2014). In both cases, we had a group of rather motivated participants, willing to engage in and curious to learn more about the collaborative process. This is probably why the experience itself was valuable to them. Yet, our learning was that power of the Collaboratory could not unfold optimally in these contexts and that therefore, other, less complex approaches might have done the job (even better). The Collaboratory as a whole is designed not just to explore a problem or make participants "feel good", but rather to make tangible progress on concrete issues, based on deep exploration and mutual trust.
- **Local problem owner:** LiFT has hosted at least one Collaboratory where the local host was not the topic owner, and the topic owner was less committed than desirable as a host bringing together diverse stakeholders (Almedalen). This resulted in a lot of unclarity and extensive communication challenges during the preparation phase. Rather than host, topic owner and facilitation team working closely together in designing the event, every party was preoc-

cupied primarily with their own agenda, and the facilitation team had to somehow "muddle its way through" the process.

- **Diversity of stakeholders:** To bring in a sufficiently broad range of stakeholders has been an ongoing challenge in most of LiFT's events. It is not least a matter of the host being a good and widely respected networker to succeed in involving the whole bandwidth of perspectives. Yet, since most hosts have some kind of stake in the issues in question themselves, there can be limitations with regard to whom they are open, willing and able to invite to their event. Sometimes, the design & facilitation team can point to stakeholder groups that have been neglected and make suggestions in this regard during the preparation phase. In the case of one event conducted by a LiFT partner, the host was a newly emerging political party competing for votes (Rastatt), which resulted in some stakeholders not being willing or even legally allowed to participate in the event.

- **Necessary time & space**: LiFT has hosted two Collaboratories that were part of larger events (Caux and Almedalen) which largely dictated the available time slots and meeting spaces. In result, we had to construct our collaborative process around the schedule of the embracing events, rather than being able to schedule our event based on the needs of the overall intention, guiding question, stakeholder group and substantive process, which was less than optimal.

- **Shared understanding:** Members of the LiFT partnership have gained some experience with hosting Collaboratories in settings where most participants were not familiar with collaborative methods as used in LiFT (Rastatt). Knowing this in advance, this aspect has been taken into account when designing the facilitation. Ultimately, the design worked very well for the client group in the first part of the event (downloading and fishbowl). It worked less and less well, the further we proceeded in the process of deepening the mode and quality of communication and sharing. While the fishbowl experience took the group into considerably deeper levels of talking to each other than what they had been used to, and thus, brought about major breakthroughs in the group's way of addressing the challenge, it would probably have needed a lot more time and effort than we were able to invest, to conceptualize a design for going further into the co-creative part of the process with such a group.

We will now explore each of the above core aspects – and some more – in more detail, to help you get a clearer idea of what exactly is necessary to consider and where potential pitfalls are likely to lie with regard to each of these aspects.

2.2 Good issues and guiding questions for a Collaboratory to focus and work on

If you have considered the above outlined crucial "must-haves" to a degree that you have been able to make the choice to use the Collaboratory method for an event, the next challenge is to reflect and address each of them in more depth and to "massage" your setting to provide an optimal context for a successful Collaboratory. Ideally, this preparation work should include a set of core stakeholders from the beginning, in particular the local host and topic owner (who ideally are the same group of people), as well as representatives of the most important perspectives related to the topic.

The first step in this will be to further define and fine-tune the issue of what is at stake around a suitable topic and question, as an **iterative process together with the core group of stakeholder representatives**. The topic should be able to frame the general concern around one main focus, which is at the same time open and specific enough to bring enough of the right stakeholder networks together. So what are the **properties of a suitable issue or guiding question** and why?

In our experience, two factors are important in this regard:

1. **Relevance**: A topic that generates a high degree of motivational traction among stakeholders
2. **Wording and framing**: finding the right balance of abstractness versus concreteness for stakeholders to connect

Ad 1: In view of engaging a sufficient number and bandwidth of stakeholders, the topic you chose is of course the single most important factor that is likely to attract suitable participants. Therefore, the topic should be chosen and framed in a way that motivates the network of stakeholders and interested others you wish to involve. Ideally, they feel a sense of urgency around it and are drawn by the call for addressing the underlying challenge in innovative ways. In other words, a good issue is one that a relevant group of stakeholders is jointly facing, and which all of them see in need of joint action in view of finding sustainable solutions. One criteria for this can be how much tangible existing activity the stakeholders themselves have in relation to the topic. How much it is a pain point for them, the larger community, country, organization, town or commune? How pressing is it to make progress on it? This factor can and needs to be explored in advance. The second LiFT Collaboratory in Trondheim (2016) was a good example of this and can give some more detailed ideas about how to address this challenge.

To give some **examples**, on a local level, a relevant topic might be how a community/city/municipality can integrate refugees or how it wants to design its new city center. In a company, it could be about challenges connected to goals, visions, customers or defined parts of a change program.

Ad 2: Once you have identified a topic, problem or challenge that is relevant to your country, city or commune, it is worth spending some time and thinking effort on its framing and wording, more precisely, on "word-smithing" (Muff, 2014, p. 232). So what are the criteria for a well defined Collaboratory topic and guiding question? First of all, it is helpful to actually **formulate your topic (also) as a question**, because this invites people's minds to start thinking about possible answers and solutions. Moreover, the guiding question should directly invite participants into a joint outcome-oriented brainstorming. This is the case especially if it starts with the words "How can we…" For example:

- How can we integrate a certain number of refugees in A-town successfully while considering the concerns of the neighborhood?

- How can we co-create good neighborhood relations between inhabitants and migrants in quarter X?
- How can we accommodate all important needs and concerns about X and develop a win-win-win solution?

The LiFT Case Book provides **examples of guiding Collaboratory questions**. For a commented list of most of the questions used in the context of LiFT and which of them have proven more or less help-ful, see below.

While the Collaboratory process itself is designed to give room to all important concerns, needs, fears etc., a question that **focuses participants' attention on potential *solutions*** time and again can be a very helpful tool to create (or maintain) a constructive, outcome-oriented working atmosphere. Thereby, it can remind participants to go beyond their immediate concerns, needs, fears etc. as a prerequisite for tapping into a different, and potentially more productive kind of awareness.

To find the adequate level of abstraction of the framing and wording of the issue and guiding ques-tion is probably the single most critical adjustment to be made during the preparation phase. A guid-ing question needs to be grounded in issues people can actually relate to and that they find motivat-ing to engage, while at the same time being abstract enough for participants to be able to recognize diverse experiences in relation to it. On the one hand, the more abstractly the issue is worded, the more difficult it can become at least for some participants to connect it to specific everyday chal-lenges which actually capture their attention. The more concrete it is, on the other hand, the more focused, selective, context-bound and complexity-reducing it is likely to become. This increases the risk that at least some relevant stakeholders (especially if you have a diverse range of stakeholder groups present) cannot relate to it or find it difficult to prioritize dealing with it. This is why, in order to be suitable for a Collaboratory, issues framed at an **intermediate level of abstraction** are most likely to be successful. Besides this, having a question that can span a range of specific and abstrac-tion is also a good choice.

Another aspect to be mindful of when trying to make the topic attractive to a wide range of stake-holders is to conceive it as a "boundary object" between the networks and activity systems of the different relevant stakeholder groups. This means that it needs to include or compile various aspects of a complex challenge that allow different stakeholders to generate their own interpretations, em-phasis or translation of it into their contextual understanding, experience and system of relevance.

Below are some **examples of guiding questions** used during previous LiFT workshops, together with comments about what their relative value was.

Topic/*Guiding question*	Where/ when	Merits	Challenges/ downsides
Co-creating Collective Intelligence for Complex Challenges *"In these coming times, what kind of a leader am I called to be?"*	Trondheim 2014	Attracts interest in specific group Invites to go beyond current practices	Focus on individual, not on joint action, rather general/no specific need or prob-lem addressed
Why School? A visioning workshop about the future of the school „*What kind of learning and knowledge is needed to best equip children to live in and lead our future society?*	Stockholm 2014	Proved to be well suited to invite the kind of visionary co-creative conversation and dialog we aimed	Attracted mainly peo-ple who are already critical of the existing school system

What kind of society is it that we should be preparing for?"		for	
The Future of Organizations *What does it take for organizations to become landing strips for a future we really want to live in?* *What does it take for us as individuals and for the organizations we work in, to actively create a future we really want to live in?*	Vienna 2014	Very inspiring Breaking inspirational focus down to action-able steps	Systemic, transforma-tive focus
Impact Leadership Track *How we can ensure that everybody lives well and within the limits of the planet?* *How to translate the global vision of "living well and within the limits of the planet) into a concrete action plan for individuals, organizations and com-munities in different countries?*	Caux 2015	Calling for all-human dreams inspiring	unsuitable for the group of participants that actually showed up, global systemic focus (big picture), too broad and not acces-sible to anyone Can be interpreted rather mentally (as a calculation exercise)
Learning Transition *How can education support societal transition?*	Luxem-bourg 2015	Good working basis for existing networks	Focus attracted mainly people who are al-ready active in the field, not so much power holders and decision-makers
The refugee crisis as a touchstone of the European Union *What are the chances, conditions and possible limits of successfully integrat-ing refugees in Germany?*	Rastatt 2016 (beyond LiFT)	Comprehensive enough to capture the main concerns, con-structive enough to go beyond them	Maybe even a bit too challenging for some stakeholders (i.e. those who were criti-cal of integration alltogether)
How can we achieve the UN sustaina-bility goals for Sweden already in 2022?	Almedalen 2016	Could be adequate with a carefully cho-sen stakeholder group	Too big for the availa-ble stakeholder group to solve in the availa-ble time
Adaptive Learning in the Digital Age *How can we create possibilities for learning that are inspiring and rele-vant for everyone?*	Trondheim 2016	Inspiring, adequate to stakeholder group	Question has been generated at the very last minute, out of what emerged as most relevant
Growing up in Community *What does it mean to "grow up"? How can we create holding environments that invite personal growth and trans-formation?*	Sieben Linden 2017	Burning question to stakeholder group	Still almost too broad, too complex, too many facets to keep focused, it turned out
Education for Sustainable Communi-ties	Šibenik 2017	Inspiring	Conditions were not optimal (independent

How can we join forces to design and deliver transformative learning opportunities that help catalyse the Great Transition in local contexts? *How can we create containers for ongoing cooperation around transformative learning?*			of guiding questions)
How can we make tap water the n° 1 drink in Switzerland?	St. Gallen 2013 (beyond LiFT)	Precise enough to attract the right set of stakeholders	
How can transnational cooperation support the integration of NEETs in the Baltic Sea Region?	Tartu 2017 (beyond LiFT)	Inspiring, sufficiently engaging and precise for stakeholder group	-
… (to be continued)			

Finally, two more things are important to mention in relation to the topic and guiding question of a Collaboratory, first, the **process** of developing and drafting the working topic itself and second, challenges related to more **specific audiences**, especially to their degree of familiarity with each other and with collaborative methods.

First, while it is recommendable to aim for a well-defined topic and guiding question long before the event, not least because this is likely to help to invite the right stakeholders and participants, there might also be gradual exceptions to this rule. Note that the contours and the wording of the issue might only evolve in the course of the overall process. The initial formulation of the issue used for the invitation can change after having processed input from stakeholders prior to the actual event. It can also further evolve through the conversations emerging in the initial phases of the Collaboratory. This is what occurred at the Caux Collaboratory in 2015, for instance (see below). Thus, it is important for facilitators to listen carefully to where the energy and focus of the group actually goes and to adapt and frame the wording of the issue and question accordingly.

Issues can also merge or differentiate. If similar things happen, potential modifications should be made, together with the local hosts, if possible, and should be made transparent to the participants of the event. At the same time, this should not result in running a Collaboratory on more than one issue at a time.[1]

Second, if you have a more experienced group of participants, the Collaboratory can benefit them by providing a "**liberating structure**" for exploring almost any given topic in much more depth. In this case, the focus is more on the explorative first part of the process, where new deepening questions are actively sought, while questions for joint action can emerge as a byproduct and be taken on in the later parts of the process, if this appears adequate to the shared intention of the event. If having this kind of participant group and objective is known beforehand as an element of the context, it might be useful to reflect about using the Collaboratory as a whole is a good idea in this context. So this situation can also be an example of less being more, in other words conceding that the Collabor-

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[1] While we can imagine that this could work with very experienced groups (even though we have never done it ourselves), it would be substantially more challenging because attention gets split. We therefore recommend not to do this unless you are very familiar with the format and have a clear enough idea about the pitfalls and challenges connected to a similar endeavor.

atory might not be the right method, and that to only use parts of might be a better and wiser choice in order not to stretch the boundaries of the usefulness of the method.

Experiences of LiFT with regard to guiding questions:

LiFT has hosted at least four events (Caux, Almedalen and 7Linden) where the initial working questions either proved unsuitable in the course of the event, and had to be modified, or where it was difficult to agree on a suitable question together with the host in advance.

- In the first case (Caux) the initial topic and guiding question (impact leadership track on co-creating concrete action plans to implement the global vision of "living well and within the limits of the planet) proved to be **unsuitable for the group of participants** that actually showed up to the event (see sections below on marketing). So after some initial efforts to implement the focus and design that had been planned, facilitation gradually let go of it and rather allowed the group to define and follow what was most interesting to them – with surprising results.
- In the second case (Almedalen), the topic (How to achieve the UN sustainability goals for Sweden already in 2022 instead of 2030?) proved to be **too broad, too abstract** and/or not tangible enough for most participants. This was partly due to a lack of communication during the preparation phase. So facilitation let the focus gradually shift towards what was of most value to the participants. Ultimately, most of them seemed to get all they needed out of the process nevertheless, even though it fell short of what the LiFT team might have expected.
- In the third case (ecovillage 7Linden), it was **difficult to define** a very concise working question **in advance**, although the topic (growing up in community) was clear. This was mainly due to the broad range of perspectives, needs and interests among participants in relation to this general topic – and to the habit of the hosting network to rather go with the flow than doing too strict planning, let alone to have planning done by some small group (of designers/facilitators) alone. Whereas putting too much emphasis on the overall focus was partly difficult and was experienced by many participants as imposing "too much structure", the group ultimately did make considerable progress working on the topic, and a number of tangible projects and solutions came out of the process.
- Finally, even though the overall event was very well prepared together with the local host, at our second Collaboratory in Trondheim (autumn 2016), we only came up with the **working question right before the start of the event**, in result of numerous, ongoing conversations. The same pattern happened at an event in Tartu (Estonia, 2017) despite intensive conversations with the local host.

A **general learning** from this is, again, that each case and each context is different. This has two implications. First, just because a given context does not (completely) match the ideal blueprint doesn't mean that it is impossible to host a Collaboratory there. Second, therefore, to study the given context as comprehensively as possible in advance is one of the most important preconditions of a successful Collaboratory event and always a good investment of time. Ideally, this should be done in close communication with the local host. By exploring the design options that best match the given context together with the host, you can also build trust and establish a good working relationship with them. This applies first and foremost to the definition of the overall topic and guiding question.

2.3 Who or what is a good host, hosting organization or network of supporting actors? And what should be their role?

Next, we would like to share our thoughts, experiences and recommendations with regard to the person or organization hosting the Collaboratory event on the local level. We suggest, in particular, to consider the local host's role and responsibilities in the overall process of preparing and conducting a Collaboratory event, their relation to other role holders and to the topic and guiding question. While the host, especially if engaged around the issue at stake, can have several, overlapping roles, this might not be the optimal scenario.

In an ideal world, it would be the host who brings in the issue at stake and would then suggest a number of important stakeholders to be invited to the event. Also, the host would take care of actually inviting both regular participants and important stakeholders who are asked to bring in specific perspectives. Finally, they would be in charge of the actual logistics of hosting in the broad (technical, organizational and energetic) sense of the term. In other words, a good host is one who is engaged with the local issue and has a strong network helping them to draw in a sufficiently broad number and diverse range of participants. It is generally also a good starting position if the host is in positions of accountability where they have both a need to make progress on an issue and authority to convene relevant stakeholders.

– At the same time, we have encountered **rather few such ideal scenarios**. This is partly connected to a number of structural constraints. So while the LiFT project has rarely had an ideal host like this in the course of our funded workshops, LiFT members have hosted Collaboratories "on demand" of such hosts, for instance in Rastatt (for a political organization) and in Tartu (for an EU working group in the Baltic Sea region).

Based on this joint experience from in- and outside LiFT, the following subchapter looks at three main aspects related to the hosting role, how it can differ in different contexts and how this might impact the overall process and event. In our experience, the main aspects to mindful of are:

- the host's relation to the issue at stake
- the host's role in relation to the Collaboratory facilitator team and how the latter two might cooperate on pre-event activities
- the host's familiarity with collaborative methods and previous cooperation experience.

All of these aspects have several dimensions that can be looked at.

Ad 1: Should the host(s) own or at least propose the issue at stake and the guiding question? And what is their connection to both?

There is a simple and a more complex answer to this question. The simple answer is: yes. **The issue should be brought in by the host**. In other words, the roles of owning the issue, convening the event, and inviting the participants from the host's existing network should be held by the same person, entity or organization.

Why is it important that the host owns the issue? Imagine a private graduation – or wedding party where the graduate or the newly married couple were not present but had simply disappeared, leaving the event to a professional caterer. You might meet interesting people at this kind of gathering, you might enjoy nice food, have a good time and even learn a lot. But you will rather not have the experience of being part of a joint once-in-a-lifetime event that deepens the sense of connection between you and the host around an important cause that you both feel committed to. While this

comparison has its limitations, it hopefully illustrates the importance of the hosting role going beyond mere logistics: The Collaboratory becomes more powerful if there is a strong commitment to the issue by the host, more precisely a commitment to making real progress on solving the underlying problem or challenge. For this likely not only ensures the necessary dynamic, alignment and effectiveness of the preparation work and local framing. It also has a positive effect on the depth, focus and dynamic of the event itself, as well as on the willingness to carry on the momentum after the event. All of these aspects are important for the overall success of a Collaboratory. Therefore, the local host should be committed to the issue in the sense that they see the need to invite constructive support to work towards meaningful solutions to it by going beyond their own immediate perspective.

The more complex answer to the question about the local host's role(s) is that being the 'owner' of the issue or someone who is trying to initiate or further some meaningful action in relation to it, **the host often needs help in framing** their articulation of what this means. As explained earlier on, it is important to frame and formulate the working question in a specific way in order to invite a wide range of stakeholders and to ensure constructive and outcome-oriented conversations. Yet, topic owners are often too caught up in their specific perspectives and experiences to be able to frame the core issue in an open enough way. In that case, they might need scaffolding to propose and formulate the issue in a manner that can also motivate others to see themselves in the question and be attracted to making a contribution to solving it.

This is connected to the question to what degree the topic owner (whether or not this is the local host) can or should also have their **own stake in the issue**. While someone who proposes an issue is likely to have some kind of perspective on and stake in it – which is good –, it is also important that the thematic host is not too dogmatic about their specific own agenda. Rather, they should be open to other views and to transformative learning with regard to the issue, which might also imply to let go of some of the initial perspectives and experiences. Yet, taking care of this happening is ultimately above all the facilitators' job, not that of the host.

So while proposing and to some degree "owning" the issue is a good prerequisite on the side of the local host, their actual positioning towards it is an equally important aspect to look at in advance. What we ultimately suggest considering is not so much their degree of familiarity with the issue, even though that helps a lot in terms of being familiar enough with the relevant networks for suggesting suitable "experts". We also suggest to **consider their ability to step beyond their own perspectives** and experience to generalize how they connect to the issue in a way others can find themselves. However, since this is a much higher cognitive task demand, it is more of an ideal and something that requires scaffolding on behalf of the facilitators.

The opposite challenge is also possible. Several examples have made clear to us is that if the issue as proposed by the local topic owner is too broad, too abstract, or too distant from the experiences of potential participants, there will be little substantive engagement and little in the way of tangible outcomes. The pre-design scaffolding work therefore likely has to consider how the issue might have to be (re)framed to make it suited for the method of the Collaboratory in the first place, as well as for it to be of service to all involved parties – and the larger purpose behind (see section above). In fact, this is more often the norm. Moreover, the ways in which local topic owners perceive and conceive the issues they are facing can be regarded as a sequence or continuum. It is partly related to the involved parties' leadership development (see chapter 5 of our Foundations & Resources book), partly also to that of the facilitators – and to the relationship between facilitation and hosting.
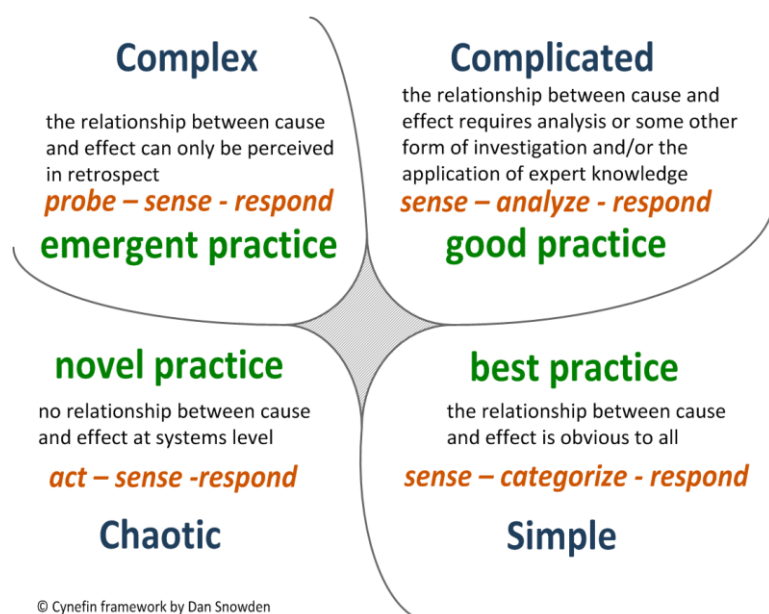
LiFT Leadership
for Transition

A slightly different situation – demanding a similar **need for scaffolding** – occurs in contexts where the Collaboratory is used for teaching purposes. When it is part of a university seminar, for example inviting students to develop practical collaborative skills, the issue is likely to be chosen and set up front by the professor for its pedagogical value, so that the setting is largely pre-defined and students can learn to co-organise and co-facilitate Collaboratories.

Experiences from LiFT in this regard:

The LiFT team has gathered a number of experiences, first, with regard to the roles and degree of involvement of local hosts with the topics and thematic issues of their respective Collaboratory events. As indicated earlier, the best case scenarios were those where local hosts proposed controversial issues to us that were part of their own thematic area of work and/or expertise without them having a very clear (orthodox) and pre-defined stance or position in them. Rather **successful hosts were open and eager to engage in an open-ended collaborative process of inquiry**, relaxing into some kind of participant role themselves, curious to see new ideas emerge, while letting LiFT take care of the design and facilitation of the Collaboratory itself (Stockholm, Vienna 2014, Trondheim 2016).

In one such case (Vienna), the local host had arranged, organized and facilitated a pre-Collaboratory un-conference opening up the conversation. By this, they had made a big contribution to creating a co-creative, joyful and explorative space, climate and atmosphere, which allowed a number of inspiring ideas to emerge which, the next day, proved to be an excellent basis for the actual Collaboratory to work with/from.

In another such case (Trondheim 2016), the local host and topic owner actively used the Collaboratory process as a tool for building up a broader and stronger network of stakeholders and activists around the issue at stake. Similarly, in the German Collaboratory (Sieben Linden), our event was the catalyst for an existing network to discover a new joint challenge – and to (re)build capacity around this. In all of these cases, the local hosts (mostly our local LiFT partners) had done a great job inviting enough of the right participants to ensure deep, insightful and productive exchange between all participants. And in all of these cases, the local host was both thematically engaged and open to participate themselves in a process that was designed, held and facilitated by others from the LiFT team. In other words, that was **beyond their own control**.

Complex
the relationship between cause and effect can only be perceived in retrospect
probe – sense - respond
emergent practice

Complicated
the relationship between cause and effect requires analysis or some other form of investigation and/or the application of expert knowledge
sense – analyze - respond
good practice

novel practice
no relationship between cause and effect at systems level
act – sense -respond
Chaotic

best practice
the relationship between cause and effect is obvious to all
sense – categorize - respond
Simple

© Cynefin framework by Dan Snowden

So if we consider these cases "complicated but ordered" settings, the challenge becomes greater when it goes from "complicated but ordered" realms to complex ones, as illustrated in the **Cynefin model**.

The LiFT experience has also known **less successful examples** in terms of the local host owning the issue at stake. In one such case, the local host (our local LiFT partner) did not propose the topic themselves, but rather invited a local colleague whom they were in working contact with, to provide and bring in her

topic, and thus, to take the role of a co-host or thematic host. So there turned out to be two separate roles, that of the host who provided the venue, catering and logistics and did a considerable amount of marketing – and that of the topic giver/topic owner. While we can imagine that this *can* work in principle, in the actual case (Almedalen), it did not work out optimally, for several reasons.

First, the separation of roles seemed to reduce the overall commitment – that to the outcome of the process on the side of the host, and the commitment to the process itself on the side of the topic giver. The former, on the one hand, was if not completely dissociated from the topic but limited to pure hosting logistics. So while they fully dedicated themselves to the more logistic aspects of the art of hosting (which they did very well), they left the more substantial dimensions of the framing, prepoaration and focus to the facilitation team and the topic-giver. The latter, on the other hand, came in with a rather strong agenda of her own and turned out to be less supportive of the overall collaborative approach than it would have been desirable. This was partly due to a comparatively little familiarity with and understanding of the method. In fact, the topic holder seemed to be hoping to use the Collaboratory as some kind of promotion event for her initiative, rather than as a space for co-creating meaningful solutions beyond initial agendas. So in that sense, she had a stake in the event, if not in the specific quality of the process in the broad sense.

Second, this double lack of commitment in the given constellation demanded a lot more communication and alignment work than usual. On the one hand, because the "logistics host" who was dedicated and good to communicate with, had no specific interest and stake in the issue and thus, declared themselves not competent, leaving the facilitation team "alone", so to speak, with the less dedicated issue owner. On the other hand, the latter's lack of commitment to the process as such lead to a considerable number of misunderstandings and/or miscommunications both during the preparation and during the event itself. Moreover, we faced several incidents where facilitation had to deal with unexpected needs, demands and disturbances, which could and would normally have been addressed during the preparation phase by seeking the **necessary alignment with all involved parties** (for more detail see the case study on Almedalen in the LiFT Case Book).

Finally, at the end of the day, there was also less commitment than desirable on both parts of the hosting side to carry on the follow-up work after the Collaboratory event. Because the hosting role had been split up, no-one seemed to really be in charge and take the lead on follow-up activities.

This leads to another, related challenge, namely to determine the **"right" degree of stake** that local hosts can or should have in the issue involved. The opportunity of dealing with various degrees of such stakes also provided us with a couple of important learnings. As the above example has shown, it is important to make sure that the local host is not only the host in a logistic sense, but also in the broad sense of inviting input to a process of working towards solutions to a challenge that is shared between the host and the participants. But what if, on the contrary, the host has – or is perceived as having – **too much of a stake**?

One Collaboratory that was hosted by a LiFT member outside of the project had a host who not only proposed the topic of the event, but in some sense also had an agenda. For not only they were connected to or sympathizing with certain perspectives on the topic more than with others. They also hosted the event as part of a larger conference one aim of which was to give the host some public visibility. In the example at hand, the Collaboratory was hosted by a newly formed political party in Germany (see case study on Rastatt). The latter was open to experiment with a new method of inviting trans-partisan dialog across domains, sectors and political camps (our condition for offering them such a process). Yet in some sense, they hoped to thereby also be able to present themselves as an open-minded and outcome-oriented force to a wider audience for the first time. The fact that the

conference was scheduled not long before an upcoming election was therefore also part of the host's "stake" in the issue and event. Even though the host did not give any guidelines or make constraints on the preparation team in substantial regard, the pre-election constellation still turned out to be an obstacle, because this prevented certain stakeholder groups from participating in what was perceived as a "political event".

Without going into too much detail here, the topic of the conference was how Germany could best deal with the refugee crisis in view of working towards successfully integrating migrants and refugees into the existing society. Therefore, it had of course been a concern to involve a broad range of stakeholders and to include not only NGOs, ordinary citizens and (former) refugees, but also representatives of the local city administration, the operators of refugee asylums, as well as the police and security forces, for example. Yet these groups were either not allowed to participate in a "political" event, or feared problems if they spoke out too explicitly about certain problems they were actually confronted with in their daily work with refugees. In this sense, the host's role (more than their stake) in the whole setting proved to cause some limitations on the event with regard to the degree to which the method could unfold its power.

Besides the possibility of inviting a wide range of stakeholders, this also impacted the scope of diversity that was present among the regular participants of the workshop. Despite broad marketing activities, which included online and printed ads in the local papers, we ended up with rather few local participants, whereas the majority were sympathizers of the hosting party and their acquaintances.

Even though most of them displayed a certain openness and readiness to go beyond pre-established viewpoints, we sensed that parts of our process and tools were **too much of a stretch** for some participants and their familiar habits of addressing complex challenges. More details of this event are discussed in the LiFT Case Book and, to some degree, in the chapter on facilitation below.

*Ad 2: What is the **distribution of roles** between the Collaboratory facilitator team (LiFT) and the host? How is it translated into a cooperation agreement? Which arrangements should be made clearly in advance?*

There are several levels to be looked at here: One is that of the actual distribution of roles and the cooperation practices – and the experiences we gained from them; the other one is the question to what degree roles and other parameters of the cooperation around preparing and hosting a Collaboratory should be **formalized** between the host and the design and facilitation team (as a service provider).

As indicated above, the most straightforward constellation and the clearest and most effective division of labour is to have a local host owning the issue, convening the event, and inviting the participants from their existing network, while Collaboratory facilitators come into this context from the outside to support the work on this issue without themselves having a stake in it. Of course, they do need to acquaint themselves very well with the context and topic, including the relevant network of stakeholders and potential conflicts or existing tensions between them around the issue way ahead of the event.

Moreover, the success of the event is likely to depend on the quality of the working relationship between designers/facilitators and hosts. For the design/facilitation to unfold well, it is critically important to establish a **good local connection and relationship with the host** from the very start throughout the preparation phase. Since much of the design work depends on knowing the local specifics, the design and facilitation team needs a good flow of information and to be able to ask questions that help reveal often implicit needs or expectations of the local host.

This is in fact a key concern one should be aware of throughout the preparation phase. Local hosts most often don't know what they know (and are not necessarily aware of their ways and modes of knowing), and a big part of the relationship building and design work is to tease this out in conversations with them.

At the same time, it runs the other way as well. The local host often needs help to understand how best to approach different kinds of tasks that they may face, (e.g. marketing, getting appropriate 'experts' for the fishbowl, getting relevant, diverse stakeholders to attend and so on). This can then affect the design inputs as well. Another important element – and effect of a good working relationship is that the **host trusts the facilitation and design team enough**, and that ongoing consultation between them can help this, as they see how their needs are being creatively met through the design specifications.

This being the optimal scenario, reality tends to be more diverse. In fact, we can imagine – and have partly gone through – a whole **spectrum of constellations** of roles. On one end of the spectrum is a rather simple, linear setting as it would be used, for instance in the context of semester-long seminars in higher education – or in the LiFT Facilitator Training prototype – where students are invited to co-organize and co-facilitate Collaboratories as a tool for teaching complex systemic thinking, leadership skills and other practical competencies. Here the issue is likely to be set by the professor for its pedagogical value, so that students can focus on preparing and implementing a collaborative event around it (i.e. on searching for and bringing in relevant external stakeholders etc.). In such a "laboratory" case, the setting can be simplified (artificially made less complex) in that the issue does not originate from the stakeholders' concerns in the first place, nor is there a local host distinct from the facilitators, so that specific pedagogical tasks can be isolated and worked on better. Collaboratories set up that way have nevertheless proven to be able to trigger shifts on substantial societal issues (Dyllick & Muff, 2014).

On the other end of the spectrum there are **highly complex scenarios**, for example with a local host (or even several in the case of a series of connected events), cooperating with one or several international hosts who might all be part of a larger network, various funding agencies and various networks of stakeholders being involved. In such complex constellations, it is all the more important to find and frame an appropriate issue and to define the roles and responsibilities very clearly between all involved actors. An additional source of complexity and challenge is generated in a setting where the organizers and/or facilitators themselves belong to one or more of the involved stakeholder organisations and networks. In this case, roles have to be made ever more clear (which can include dynamic changes, i.e. people wearing different hats in different phases of the Collaboratory). In the best of cases, i.e. especially when roles and mandate are crystal clear, complex constellations (including local and international hosts, networks of stakeholders, funders and facilitators) do not necessarily stand in the way of producing relevant results through Collaboratories. In contrast, we can imagine that they can even be helpful to work on certain complex issues. One of our key learnings in this regard is that evidently, the framing and transparency of roles and the process itself have to be increased in line with the complexity of the given constellation.

In this sense, the situation where the same persons are connected to or representing a host, one or several stakeholders in the issue, and perhaps also play a role in facilitation, as we had it in one LiFT Collaboratory, can likewise be seen as an asset (in terms of increased bridge-building capacity) or a problem, depending on the overall setting and conditions. It requires ideal conditions to realize these kinds of assets, otherwise the potential problems can take over and limit the realization of potential.

So as with leadership challenges in general, success pretty much depends on the **degree of leadership development** and the leaders' capability to adequately meet the complexity of the challenges at hand. This relationship is explained in more detail in the LiFT Foundations and Resources Book (chapter 5), along with how integral theory relates to leadership). To come back to the example above, the conclusion is that the complexity existing in real life doesn't have to be made a problem and can be dealt with in a Collaboratory if designers and facilitators are able to deal with the given degree of complexity. However, we recommend to **avoid over-complex constellations** for the sake of having "clean" and powerful processes. Especially if you are less experienced with the method, it is preferable to look for – or to **create settings with a clear enough role constellation**.

> While we do see the Collaboratory method as a rather flexible, agile tool that can be adopted to very different contexts, and thus, think that an ideal, default or normative constellation is not a precondition for working with it, using the Collaboratory methodology in complex contexts clearly demands high levels of experience and expertise.

As indicated earlier, the main objective of this book is to give users a) a better sense of what an **optimal setting** would look like. Based on our practical experience, b), we give you a **panorama of the potential deviations** from this ideal setting that you are likely to meet in real life. This will hopefully help you to respond more adequately and enable you to work productively with the constellations you actually encounter in the setting you are working in.

Before looking at more examples, here are some thoughts about **formalizing the facilitators' mandate**. While we do encourage you to actively reflect roles and to achieve more clarity and alignment about them while preparing events, we doubt that formalizing roles is an aim in itself. Rather, a certain openness and agility in working with diverse contexts and challenges generally appears crucial. At the same time, some degree of formalization and mandating of roles appears helpful if the Collaboratory is offered to external clients on a professional basis.

The following paragraphs will now give some more background and illustration of specific challenges that were connected to cooperation and role constellations we encountered in LiFT.

Experiences:

LiFT itself has so far not made formal agreements with hosts about its mandate and the distribution of roles.[2] However, a differentiation and mostly **separation of facilitation and hosting roles** emerged as a useful practice from the first public LiFT event onwards. At that time, it was a practicality driven by necessity: While our Norwegian partner (NTNU) volunteered to host the first event, it was our Swiss partner (Business School Lausanne) who brought in the method of the Collaboratory. The latter thus offered to take care of designing and facilitating the event, so that the local host could focus on

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[2] This has two main reasons. First, at the outset, it was the local LiFT partners who took the initiative to host an event in their region and/or working environment, and formalizing appeared unnecessary. Constellations only became more complex, more differentiated and manifold with time. Second, the character of the working relationship between facilitator teams and the local host(s) has been an ongoing area of experimentation and learning during the course of the LiFT project. So while we do have a rich experience – and a set of recommendations concerning role constellations derived from it now, there is no experience as yet with formalized agreements.

hosting logistics and, together with rest of the team, take support and participant observer roles. This allowed the team to just participate in order to get a better taste of how the Collaboratory combines otherwise familiar methods and tools in a dynamic and integrative way.

While this general approach proved to be extremely valuable and the most effective scenario that has been enacted successfully in LiFT workshops n° 1 (Trondheim, March 2014), 2 (Stockholm, August 2014), 3 (Vienna, November 2014), 4 (Caux, July 2015), and 7 (Trondheim, October 2016), other LiFT events deviated from the above principle in various ways and for various reasons:

- The first part of the LiFT Collaboratory on "The future of organizations" in Vienna in November 2014 was a **positive exception**. The event consisted of two days (a half-day conference with three key-note speakers and a one-day Collaboratory), the first of which was not only hosted but also facilitated by our local LiFT partner, the Center for Integral Leadership. Only the Collaboratory itself on the next day was facilitated by other members of the LiFT team. This proved to be a functional distribution of roles, for several reasons.
  The local host (Christiane Seuhs-Schoeller) had put a lot of personal energy and commitment into inviting well-known key-note speakers – who so to speak laid the groundwork to an extended downloading phase. Also, the conference – as well as the event as a whole – touched a core concern, area of work, and even the purpose of the hosting organization. Therefore, it was important that Christiane as its leader also took a very active stance owning, opening and facilitating the first part of the event. Moreover, the fact that she was just a participant of the Collaboratory on the second day, allowed her and some of her team members to co-create a new, ongoing project together with other participants that is described in more detail in our LiFT Case Book.

- LiFT workshop n° 5 in Luxembourg, hosting the Benelux Pop-Up University for Transition, was another deviation. Here, the event had been prepared exclusively by our local LiFT partner, the Alliance for the Future, in cooperation with an existing network of organizations from the Benelux countries working on the topic of education for transition. Also there had been a mandate for A4F by the local host who had been in conversation with A4F for a while about designing this event. Therefore, A4F also took care of most of the facilitation, even though two other LiFT partners stepped in, facilitating the fishbowl, visioning and harvesting phases. Another reason for A4F's strong presence in the facilitation was the fact that the event was mostly held in Dutch and French which not all LiFT partners were fluent in (for more details see the chapter on LiFT Luxembourg in our Case Book).

- The LiFT workshop in Almedalen – even though being an example of the above described separation of roles – proved to be an event where, in hindsight, even more clarity and a more succinct distribution of roles would have been helpful. This was mainly due to the fact that our local LiFT partner (as the local host) was not also the topic giver, while the latter was less familiar with the methodology, which required an extra amount of communication not all of which proved successful in (for more details see the chapter on LiFT Almedalen in our Case Book).

- Similar to LiFT Luxembourg, the LiFT workshop in Sieben Linden (Germany) also saw our local LiFT partner and main organizer of the event being a member of the facilitation team at the same time. While this did not have negative effects on the event itself – and might thus not have been noticeable to participants –, it did produce a certain tension between some team members during the preparation phase, due to unclarities, ambiguities and conflicts about roles and expectations. Part of these conflicts was the perception that the local partner

(team member) had a stake in the issue – and the lack of time for processing the arising differences in a suitable way before the event (which we did afterwards though).

- Finally, LiFT Croatia was again designed and facilitated almost exclusively by one of the LiFT partners, who in this case was the international cooperation partner of the local host. This constellation was partly due to that LiFT partner's commitment and hands-on attitude, partly due to the fact that that partner could not be present at some of the previous workshops and thus lacked the experience of the shared preparation practice between hosts and design & facilitation teams that had emerged in the project over time. The fact that, due to the first two aspects, the partner started their preparation comparatively late, also gave the rest of the project team less opportunity to make contributions and to actually co-develop the event. In hindsight, we suspect that some of the problems that occurred during the event could have been avoided, had preparation been started earlier and had it been done in a way that was more in line with the above suggested distribution of roles.

- Furthermore, an experience from a Collaboratory that one of the LiFT partners has held in India showed that it was insufficient to have a clear mandate *only* from the international host, since it turned out that the funder and the local host actually held diverging expectations. (This only became apparent *in situ*, to the surprise also of the international host.) The learning from this was that if there are several partners or organizations involved in hosting an event, we might need to insist on liaising and aligning directly with all of them, i.e. with the local host, the funder(s) and the international host, even if we have been brought in as facilitators by the latter. Ideally, the results of such an alignment should be fixed as part of the facilitators' mandate and task.

Based on these experiences, one **important learning** is that it actually needs an agreement (either informal or as a more formal mandate) about roles and responsibilities between the host(s) and the design & facilitation team in order to allow for an optimal workflow and effective communication between all involved parties. This had often been missing or remained quite implicit during a number of our LiFT cases, partly because most of us either supposed that things were clear, did not know yet what were the essential "must-haves" to focus on, or just took it as another experiment without making too high demands at the outset. While we have found that Collaboratories *can* be conducted in contexts with less clear agreements, mandates and roles, their outcomes clearly remained below what would have been possible in a more suitable, better prepared setting.

Ad 3: Are pre-event activities possible and what kind (marketing, meetings, etc.)?

As mentioned already, the **preparation phase** is at least as important for making the actual event a success as is the latter itself. Ideally, the preparation phase stretches over several months, with intensive communication between the local host and the design & facilitation team. This might also include physical meetings with local partners involved. The intention of this phase being trust building and alignment about the overall purpose, approach and design of the event, more tends to be better here. In fact, the events where we had extensive preparation activities, including pre-meetings with the local hosts and some of the stakeholders, were our most successful ones (Vienna 2014, Trondheim 2016, Sieben Linden 2017). This is because aligning the involved groups ahead of time generally creates more clarity, trust, momentum and focus. An important part of this is also to make implicit assumptions, interests and concerns explicit.

To set up pre-meetings with local stakeholder representatives who can then invite more participants is also a very good idea. They can **give them a more tangible sense of the Collaboratory** and how to talk about it with others for marketing purposes. Another advantage of such meetings for the design & facilitation team is that they likely help to get a better picture of the degree of familiarity of the host and the expected participants invited by them with this kind of methods. If the host is very familiar with collaborative methods, it might be possible to design the process differently, i.e. reduce certain phases and go deeper in others.

As an example, this kind of dialog process between the issue holder and a relevant group of stakeholders was missing in the case of LiFT Caux (2015) where the former (partly because of being rather tied up herself) did not do enough "marketing work" among interested audiences to connect with them ahead of time, instead of just assuming they will show up because of the larger even context.

2.4 Where does it take place? What is a good location & venue?

The choice of the venue is one of the first things to be discussed and agreed upon with the local host. Given that not every venue is suited for a Collaboratory, communication about certain **selection criteria** is crucial before making that choice on the part of the host. A thoughtfully selected venue can have a very positive impact on the process, for instance when the overall energetics of the room and setup strongly support the process. Inversely, less suitable venues or rooms can distract participants' focus, make them feel less comfortable and thus, less motivated and creative. This, in turn, puts significantly higher demands on design and facilitators. Therefore, a good venue can make the facilitators' lives a lot easier.

Ideally, the place or venue has some connection to the event itself ("Why School" took place in an international school in Stockholm; "The future of organizations" took place in the Impact Hub Vienna, and "Gemeinschaftskinder" in the large seminar room of the ecovillage Sieben Linden).

Besides this, here are a number of **aspects to be mindful of** when choosing a venue:

- **The location**:
The meeting place shall ideally be apart from other activities. The more participants can focus on the issue and the process, the better. Therefore, be mindful of noise, both in the immediate physical and in a more subtle sense. Other people or events going on in or around the location can easily distract participants. Generally, being embedded in another event (like we were in Caux, Almedalen, Sieben Linden) adds complexity to how participants try to integrate two (or more) different agendas, which tends to distract their focus away from the Collaboratory topic. Locations where people can come in and leave freely during the event are also not recommendable.

> **Desirable physical conditions**
>
> **Room**
> - size in relation to expected number of participants
> - rather square or round than rectangle
> - daylight if possible
> - possibility to use walls for putting up posters, flipchart paper and other info materials
> - quiet, not too much noise from environment
> - pleasant overall atmosphere or possibility to create such an atmosphere, i.e. by decoration, flowers etc.
>
> *Nice to have:*
> - entrances/doors should be easily accessible when room is full.
> - door should be opened and closed without too much noise.

What is desirable though is an environment where participants have the option to go outside, either for a reflective walk in nature or for holding smaller group sessions in fresh air as part of the overall process.

● **The room(s)**

The meeting room itself should be large enough to accommodate the whole group easily in a big circle without having to squeeze or, inversely, having a lot of free space left. Note that for a Collaboratory, you want to have considerably more space than working with the same size of group in a more conventional setting, in order to generate a feeling of "space" for something new, additional to come in and fill the room. As a rule of thumb, a ratio of 2.5 to 1 might be appropriate, in that the room should be designed to fit 2.5 times as many participants as people normally consider it holding for an event.

Preferable are square rather than rectancle rooms, unless they provide enough space for both a large fishbowl circle already set up, and for participants to move around before and after, for instance during the icebreaking in the beginning. It is also desirable to have options for breakout groups either in the large room or outside (in separate rooms or outdoors), starting from the dialog phase and throughout the co-creation phase where sub-groups are working on their respective prototypes. Often, some sub-groups prefer working outside if the weather conditions allow this. It is therefore good to plan for outdoor options.

Our **best experiences** were in large, spacious rooms with high ceilings (Stockholm 2014, Vienna 2014, Trondheim 2016) where both large group and breakout group activities could be held in the same hall without disturbing each other, or where the latter had manifold outdoor options (such as in the ecovillage Sieben Linden). If the room has daylight, natural materials of walls and floors or even a pleasant view, that adds enormously to a positive aesthetic quality and atmosphere. So do well chosen elements of color, tissue, plants/flowers, or design which in some cases can be added without much effort. When sitting in a large circle, the center of the circle should be decorated with an item that is nice to look at (e.g. flowers, a candle, sculpture…).

● **Furniture and technical equipment**

More technically, it is important to have a flexible space, with easily moveable furniture, i.e. chairs and flip charts. There should be a possibility to fix e.g. flipchart paper at the walls or windows if necessary. If you are hosting a multilingual event, extra space for interpreter cabins and equipment might be necessary. Also, it is convenient if the venue and rooms provide technical equipment such as a video projector and suitable screen, internet access and an

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Desirable equipment and materials

Chairs
- comfortable, with or without armrests, but not too high chair backs (so they don't block the view of those sitting behind)
- not too heavy in order to be moved and/or stapled easily

Tables
- depending on size of the group, small tables for 4-6 persons.

Sound system
- arcoustics (echo…)
- microphones (handheld, portable)
- amplifier
- technician if necessary

Other Materials
- 2-3 Flipcharts + paper, pins/glue, markers
- A4 paper and coloured pens
- Materials for decorating the room (i.e. flowers, logos of organizers etc.)

acoustics and sound system that matches the design. Otherwise, the design has to be adapted to the existing conditions.

Finally, make sure that the right kinds and necessary amounts of paper, pens, stickers etc. are available and that you know where the most nearby stationary shop is located where missing items can be easily purchased if needed.

To sum up, **the ideal venue** is a location that is big enough, can keep everyone's attention focused and concentrated on the event and that inspires individual and collective creativity.

2.5 How much time is available and how much is suitable for the event?

The next decision that hosts and design teams have to make very early in their preparation is which time frames they can make available – and which duration would be most suited for the kind of challenges they wish to address in their event in the given setting. While the Collaboratory is a flexible tool that can be adapted to various time frames in principle, there are limits to what you can achieve in a certain amount of time.

Ad 1: How much time does it need to conduct a Collaboratory?

By "conducting", we mean the duration of the actual physical event. Note that the by far largest amount of time goes into preparation and therefore tends to remain invisible to most participants and even to some of the hosts. Nevertheless, as an organizer and designer, you want to invest most of your energy here.
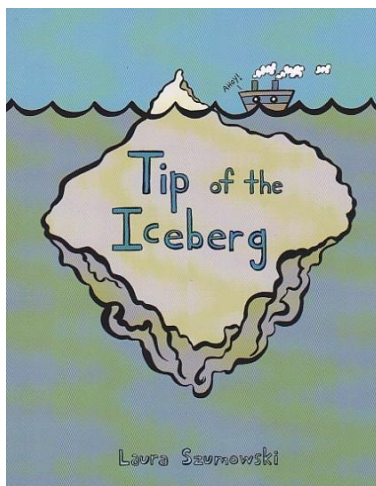
Ratio of preparation time versus the duration of the actual Collaboratory event

The simple answer to the question about an optimal duration of an event is: "**the more the better within reason**" with the details of the choice of time always depending on the local setting, the issue, the stakeholders' degree of motivation and their connection to the issue.

The time frames we have experimented with in and beyond the LiFT project range between a few hours and several days. While some of the LiFT team members have conducted events that were shorter than one day outside of the project, these were mostly "appetizer" experiments for groups who wanted to get a first idea and taste of the method but could spend only limited time on a regular process. Our own events took minimum one full day, mostly two and, in some occasions, up to four days.

As a rule, **one day** is seldom enough to do justice to each segment of the process, thus truncating the possible depth and making transitions between sessions and integration time insufficient. **Two days** is better, as people can have enough time to drop into and take the most out of each segment of the Collaboratory. **More than two days** is nice to have, yet likely requires a more substantial issue, a more diverse group of stakeholders and stronger actionable outlets for follow up activity. So in order to deepen the effect of the different phases of the Collaboratory, it is a good idea not to speed through them but to allow time for breaks, reflective sequences or even sleeping over the day's experiences. Half or even one day tends to be a rush as compared to what would be possible with more time. If there is little time, the prototyping usually suffers and the likelihood that a co-created project is actually realized after the Collaboratory diminishes. Therefore, if the event is actually addressing a burning issue in need of sustainable solutions, two days might still be experienced

as insufficient, especially if stakeholders have not met before and only start to come to know each other during the event. Thus, while there is no standard for an optimal time frame and designers need to respond to local conditions and possibilities, as well as to the goals and purpose of the event, our experience is that two days are ideal in most cases.

Below are some useful criteria to be taken into account for making a good decision about the duration of an event. While time horizons between one day and 3-4 days can all make sense, the following aspects of the context and the issue at stake should be considered:

1. The main purpose of the event: is it more about experiencing a collaborative exercise or actually about producing meaningful results to benefit the community in question?) General rule: more depth needs more space.
2. The (degree of) complexity of the issue and guiding question: More complexity requires more time.
3. The degree of familiarity of the stakeholders with each other: Greater familiarity of participants requires less time (yet, this might reduce the possibility of innovation and emergence).
4. Participants' familiarity with collaborative methods in general and with practices such as the ability for generative listening in particular: Greater familiarity of participants requires less time.
5. If known, their "center of gravity" regarding value systems and worldviews: time needs to be adapted to the specific needs.
6. The possibility of including excursions or phases of exposure into the event which might add depth and quality of experience beyond the very process on site: Special time slots need extra time.
7. The possibility of conducting follow-up events or even a series of events around the issue with about the same set of participants, which would allow to split up the process over several meetings: If follow-up events are easy to organize and part of the host's plans (i.e. likely to happen), the main event can be shorter.
8. …… (to be continued)

Ad 2: How can the overall structure be adapted to varying time frames?

As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, the (more substantial) **first five of the above criteria** are the most important ones to consider. Yet, in view of possible variations related to the available time frame, a number of **options** can be helpful in order to design a Collaboratory structure that fits the available temporal setting.

Generally, it is possible to run through all phases in a short time, as well as it is possible to extend the phases, in particular the dialogue and the prototyping ones. Note however, that it is a good idea to not let the downloading fishbowl phase go on too long – seldom do people want to sit more or less passively for a long time. The primary way in which the structure can be adapted to the setting is in how tight or loose the transition and integration times are dealt with. In a one-day event, participants are generally asked to move quickly from one segment to the next, thus requiring more concentration and less ability to reflect, integrate, process etc. One effect of this is that it lessens **participants' ability to take in** everything that is available. So when varying the time frame, it is important to try and take this need into account.

When time is limited, there is **no simple answer** to the question what is better: to run only through parts of the phases, run quicker through all of them, or consider the Collaboratory as unsuitable and request a minimum duration. Our guess is that if less time is available, it is better to focus on certain elements of the Collaboratory (i.e. the fishbowl and dialog), rather than try to speed through the

whole standard format. In that case, you might rather treat the short version of it as an "appetizer" to get a first feel and taste of the method, rather than expecting mindblowing outcomes. This choice should be agreed upon with the hosts in advance.

Overview of Collaboratory formats and durations within LiFT

Date	Location	Topic	Duration
Feb/March 2014	Trondheim (Norway)	Co-creating Collective Intelligence for Complex Challenges	2 days
August 2014	Stockholm (Sweden)	Why School?	1 day
November 2014	Vienna (Austria)	The Future of Organizations	1,5 days
July 2015	Caux (Switzerland)	Impact Leadership Track around Global Sustainability Goals	4 days
November 2015	Luxembourg	Benelux Pop-up University for Transition	3 days
July 2016	Almedalen/Visby (Sweden)	UN's Agenda 2030 – can a positive vision help us achieve sustainability faster?	1 day
October 2016	Trondheim (Norway)	Adaptive Learning and Job Creation in the Digital Age	2 days
June 2017	Beetzendorf/ ecovillage Sieben Linden (Germany)	Aufwachsen in Gemeinschaft	3,5 days
September 2017	Šibenik (Croatia)	Education for Sustainable Communities	4 days
Other Collaboratories conducted by team members beyond the LiFT project			
January 2016	Rastatt (Germany)	Integration of refugees	0,75 days
September 2017	Rotterdam (Netherlands)	Sustainable science	
November 2017	Tartu (Estonia)	How can transnational cooperation support the integration of NEETs in the Baltic Sea Region?	1 day

On the other end of the spectrum, what **options** are there **to make good use of more time**? If circumstances allow, consider building in natural breaks to give participants opportunities to digest their experience, for instance by having overnight stays, by taking them on a day trip or shorter excursions before or early on in the process (this can be combined with visiting relevant model projects in the region, for example), or by simply moving away from the venue for a walk. All of these are generally experienced as energizing (rather than being crowded in one place for a longer time in a row). They also help to engage the participants with each other in a different, deeper, more informal and personal way. This, in turn, will build trust and strengthen the motivation to work together on a joint challenge in a committed way.

Note that even if you have only one day, it might be a good idea to split the event into two half days with a night in between. People thus have the opportunity to get closer over a beer or even a party in the evening and to process what they have heard more thoroughly. Especially with larger and more

challenging groups, make sure you have a night between the downloading and the visioning phases in order for the latter to produce deeper results.

For more experienced groups, a Collaboratory can be considerably shorter and still be effective. Experienced in this case means that groups display a high degree of qualities like the ability for generative listening, slowing down thought processes, managing attention, presencing etc.

Besides the duration of the face-to-face event, the question of what kind of follow-up activities are possible also plays a role in deciding about time frames. If a group wants to do serious, outcome-oriented work on a given topic, it would ultimately be better to think in terms of sequences of Collaboratories rather than single Collaboratories (see also the idea and practice of Social Labs).

So ultimately, there is no simple answer to the optimal duration of a Collaboratory, just as there is no one-size-fits-all design.

2.6 Who should be the participants? How to attract and select the right number and kind of participants?

While in principle, anyone can participate, the quality and outcomes of a Collaboratory strongly depend on the overall number and composition of participants and stakeholders. In a nutshell, **diversity is key** – as long as it is combined with capacity to both represent constituent groups and take action on their behalf. So diversity in and of itself might not sufficient. You rather want to have the key groups present at the event in meaningful proportions. In connection with this, the more participants actually have a personal interest or even a stake in the topic, the more demanding the process will be – but also the more meaningful outcomes are possible.

Ad 1: Number: How many participants are desirable for an optimal process?

First of all, there is a **minimum threshold** for a Collaboratory to be a useful, suitable method. A minimum number of **25-30 participants** is a good starting point to have a sufficient level of diversity and dynamics in the process. On the upper end of the scale, the limits are generally defined by the size of the room and the logistics of facilitation. The largest events hosted by LiFT had about 150 participants. With this number, you can usually work together easily in a suitable room. If the venue allows, up to about 250 participants can still allow for everyone having an overview over the process in the room. Larger events beyond this are possible, but require appropriate preparation and experience. The co-creator of the Collaboratory method, our LiFT partner Katrin Muff, has hosted a number of larger events, with up to 400 people or more. However, this puts high demands on the facilitators, and it might be necessary to work in several rooms in parallel, possibly with technical support such as screens showing what is happening in the different rooms to those who are outside.

Ad 2: What should the composition of participants ideally look like?

First of all, the relevant stakeholder groups around the issue need to be clearly identified. You want to have all the perspectives on a topic that exist in the socio-political sphere be part of the process in order to achieve sustainable, lasting results that everyone can live with. Therefore, a **careful stakeholder analysis** needs to be carried out beforehand, ideally together with the local host and with the topic owner, to make sure that no relevant perspective is left out. This is especially important if the topic produces tensions between certain stakeholder groups.

As an **example**, a Collaboratory held by LiFT partner BSL in May 2014 about "How Food Waste can be reduced in Switzerland" had participants from the following groups:

1. food processors,
2. retailers,
3. food services,
4. government ministries,
5. regulators,
6. NGOs,
7. academics,
8. community associations,
9. consumers.

Another example: a Collaboratory to be held on request of a city administration which plans to build a refugee asylum in a particular neighborhood would need to consider inviting at least one (or several) representatives of the following groups:

1. City government and/or administration,
2. residents of the neighborhood in question,
3. NGOs active in supporting refugees,
4. local self-help groups,
5. refugees themselves,
6. police and/or security forces,
7. local residents with a migrant or refugee background,
8. other locally relevant groups, such as churches, associations with experience around integration strategies such as music or sports groups.

These lists are not necessarily complete, but rather meant to illustrate the **bandwidth** that Collaboratory organizers should set out with – even if they might ultimately not succeed to get all of these groups to participate.

Experiences from LiFT Luxembourg (on Education for Transition)

We wanted this to become a dedicated cross-sector event. We easily got the educators in because they were part of an established network of the international host. We also got politicians, even a minister and a MEP, but they left (as it is practically always the case) after the intro round table. We had difficulties to attract academics, because this was not a traditional conference, in which it is possible to deliver a focused presentation of one's research results. Therefore, we ended up mostly with junior researchers. It was also difficult to get entrepreneurs, because 2 days is perceived as too long for them. We even had difficulties to include representatives of civil society initiatives as the event did not take place on the weekend, and people volunteering in these initiatives had obligations in their day job. Even though we had a lot of participants, the intended cross-sector balance could not be achieved. This shows how difficult it is to create the conditions that make a Collaboratory attractive to different stakeholder groups.

In fact, the goal should be to **get representatives of all of the relevant groups involved in an as balanced way as possible**. This can be a big challenge if stakeholders come from different cultures, value systems and/or sectors because expectations, availabilities, modes of communication and work-

ing, etc. are likely to differ considerably between them. An additional consideration to have in mind throughout the selection and invitation process is to represent people who have power to act in their domains and on behalf of a group, or at least who have a reasonable voice in a group that can support progress on the issue.

Ad 3: What should be the degree of involvement/commitment of participants around the issue?

Besides the formal or sectoral composition of participants, the process benefits enormously the more participants are actually engaged around and have a stake in the issue. Not only will a more direct engagement, commitment and, in particular, ability to influence or act in their specific context bring more relevant experience from each segment or sector to the Collaboratory. It will also raise the degree of motivation, traction and momentum the event can unfold. So the simple answer is: the higher their degree of commitment, the better.

When participants feel too distant from the issue, the focus is likely to drift more into working towards 'feeling good' and finding idealistic agreement with others, rather than actually making progress on a difficult problem. Alternatively, the conversation might turn more into a theoretical discussion *about* the topic rather than a conversation between stakeholders about solving the underlying conflicts. Quite generally, participants' engagement with the issue will determine the depth of the process (besides, of course, the factors that have been discussed above, for example distractions by other things going on, or the skill and agility of facilitation to navigate upcoming tensions as participants are very engaged etc.).

Another important factor about the composition of participants that influences the process is their **cultural, working style and cognitive-developmental basis**. While this aspect is hard to anticipate more exactly, it may become visible in a certain polarity between the more task-oriented need to work on an issue, as opposed to the more person- or relation-oriented need to getting to know the other people in a group rather than to work consistently on a single issue. Overall, the Collaboratory process is designed to cater for diverse needs, but if you have a sense of the composition of your group, you may choose to emphasis specific practices.

> ➜ Catering for the **relational component and needs** in the Collaboratory process remains an ongoing challenge. In India, for instance, several participants complained that they didn't have the chance to come to know everybody else.

Finally, we came across a practical issue that can also influence participants' engagement, namely the question how to deal with, and ideally to **integrate children** into a Collaboratory. Their presence and age can influence the attention span of the parents (even when a kids program is provided). This is because the natural responsiveness of parents to their kids tends to pull attention from the Collaboratory process, as well as create an inner tension in the parents wanting to be in the Collaboratory and with the children. – It would be interesting to run a Collaboratory specifically on this topic…

2.7 Are post-event activities possible/aimed for?

While this question will be taken up in the last chapter of this book, you might find it useful to consider some aspects of it already in the preparation phase, i.e. when deciding about the form and format of your event.

The Collaboratory being designed to actually invite participants into action, post-event activities are a core objective of any such workshop. Ideally, post events should emerge from the open space at the end of the Collaboratory, and then enable and reinforce the process to materialize results further on the road after the main event is over. The possibility and likeliness of follow-up events or other such activities therefore seems to be higher when the Collaboratory has been hosted locally, i.e. with local participants and around a locally relevant issue, where it is easier logistically for participants to come together again.

If conditions allow, a spectrum of follow-up activities is possible:

- The most straightforward option is to link the follow-up of the Collaboratory with another future event that the local hosts and/or issue owners are conducting anyway as part of their ongoing projects, and that outputs can thus feed into.
- Separate events can be hosted that are specifically designed to check in with follow-up projects, harvest their progress and support them to carry on whatever next steps appear important.
- A second Collaboratory can be envisaged about 6 months later right from the beginning, intended as a follow-up event for working forward with the outcomes of the first. This strategy appears particularly promising in higher education contexts where it is possible to work with the same set of students over semester-long projects.
- In some cases, it might even be valuable to host a whole series of Collaboratories. For experiences contact LiFT partner Katrin Muff and Thomas Dyllick.

Experiences:

LiFT being an international project where all events had had a transnational component, we did not have the means to take care of follow-up activities at the local level ourselves. Therefore, we rather encouraged the local hosts to take on that role. Iin fact, the question "How shall the results of the Collaboratory be used afterwards?" *should* be carried by the local stakeholders and the problem owner(s) in the first place. For this reason, the follow-up phase has been in LiFT's focus to a lesser degree.

Yet, follow-up events or activities actually have emerged in the cases of LiFT Trondheim (2014), Vienna (2014), Luxembourg (2015), Trondheim (2016), Sieben Linden (2017) and Croatia (2017). For more detail see chapter 4 and the **LiFT Case Book**. Our experience shows that the ratio between projects generated *during* the Collaboratory and projects realised *after* the Collaboratory remains pretty poor unless a more **systematic follow-up strategy** is part of the overall intention. This state-of-affairs could change substantially if the Collaboratory was used as a working tool more naturally, i.e. if the target group of stakeholders was part of a more long-term working context with an ongoing agenda and challenges to work on over a longer period of time.

2.8 Other potentially relevant things to consider

While there might be other factors worth considering, our overview about relevant factors that are likely to influence the success of a Collaboratory up front mainly revolves around those described above.

Do come back to us with more ideas as you gather experience and discover other factors that have not been discussed in this chapter!