

## **LiFT Caux facilitation reflections**

A month has passed since the four days at Caux and now I/we undertake making some reflections on the facilitation of the LiFT event there. First, some comments on the work leading up to the event around the design. There was at first a complex set of criteria to design for; a four day event inside of a larger event, multiple targets in terms of sustainability, leadership and the collaboratory itself, all with the desire for a specific tangible product outcome around a sustainability map for countries of participants. Eventually all of this was taken into consideration and a design was made. As the event approached, it became clearer that the intended target audience of participants was not materializing and that we would likely need to make adjustments to the planned design as we went along.

During the pre-day check-in, the full group was present and a number of tensions in relation to differing needs and agendas for participation became clearer. However the first day was run pretty much as originally designed, and by the end of the day the tension between the original design and the desires of a number of participants was made explicit. This led to some redesign of the next day's process, using a brief Open Space session to allow participants to self-organize around topics of meaning and interest for them. The energy was settling a bit more and by the end of the day much of the tension was receding.

The third day also opened with OS to self-organize, and we also invited participants to go out on learning journey's to see what else was going on around us. Day four was organized around integrating and some personal reflection/coaching as well as three group presentations/representation of their experience.

In terms of the actual facilitation, there was a lot of dynamic steering towards an unclear target. Trying to somehow please everyone (i.e. the original agenda around sustainability issues and the local host's desire to work on that, some participant's desire to learn about the collaboratory and others to learn about leadership, etc.) led to choices that tried to keep participants engaged by giving them freedom to self-organize and then minimally steer them with activities that were generic enough to be useful for the variety of interests in play.

It was clear that there were tensions among the larger LiFT team in terms of how to deal with all of this. I (JR) also noticed that in the moment choices around some of the framing and facilitation were sub-optimal in that earlier (i.e. the evening before) planned approaches or at least elements of them were forgotten, leaving awkwardness for some who prepared to engage certain things and found the opening for that not presented. This could be seen as a symptom of how the various tensions were interfering with staying clear and present to the evolving design adjustments.

Standing further back, the most prominent reflection is that the collaboratory, while flexible and amenable to substantial adaptation, does require at least some clarity of focus and participants to have a sufficiently vested interest in the issue to channel the energy and work of the group (in terms of both tangible outcomes and group process work) in a productive way. Without these conditions, it felt too much like simply having some nice conversations, which while valuable to many participants individually, did not really generate a collective sense of progress on the issue.