

LiFT Case Book

LiFT Leadership
for Transition

Hosting Collaboratories: Insights and learnings from different cases

Editors: Iris Kunze, Elke Fein



8. Collaboratory in Šibenik, Croatia, 2017

By Bettina Geiken, Iris Kunze, edited by Elke Fein

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Hard facts

<i>Date:</i>	September 19 – 23, 2017
<i>Duration:</i>	3,5 days
<i>Place:</i>	Šibenik Hub for Ecology (SHE) in Šibenik, Croatia
<i>Topic:</i>	Education for Sustainable Communities
<i>Host:</i>	A4F (Alliance for the Future) and its local member SHE
<i>Participants:</i>	33
<i>Initiator:</i>	Host, facilitator, thematic expert and LiFT partner Markus Molz (A4F)
<i>Facilitators:</i>	Markus Molz, Bettina Geiken, with guest facilitators

Specific challenges:

- Preparation started late, producing time pressure beforehand and leaving little time to prepare actual facilitation design
- Lack of coordination and alignment within the LiFT team about preparation, facilitation and design, combined with high, multi-level pretenses of the host
- Rather remote location in Europe, small seminar room posing logistic challenges
- The organizer, thematic host and “case giver” was also the main facilitator
- The local host in Šibenik was also a participant in the Collaboratory, their double role in the process (as logistics provider and thematic participant) sometimes caused flaws

Specific Resources:

- Extensive network of contacts and work of the initiator and main facilitator, resulting in a group of well-selected participants, all with experience and expertise in the field of transformative education,
- high degree of familiarity of participants with collaborative and co-creative approaches, strong interest in the methodological meta-level (participants = multipliers)

Specific Learnings:

- A complex multi-day Collaboratory event needs more long-term, thorough, iterative preparation that should be done in a team, including the most important stakeholders.
- Roles must be crystal clear, and overlapping roles should be avoided wherever possible.
- Facilitation should be in service of a given group’s process, rather than following its own agenda. Plans and design elements might need to be changed or dropped altogether if the situation requires it.
- The best structure is only as good as implementation allows it to unfold. Structure and skillful facilitation must be balanced. Sometimes, less is more ☺.

Preliminary remarks

Given that during this Collaboratory, we were able to have quite a number of participants who were willing to be participant observers and feed their substantial observations into this case study, this case study consistently gives the perspective of both the facilitators and the participating observers in most of the chapters, allowing for multiple inside and outside perspectives on this event. At the same time, we provide less visual illustration (in the form of photos etc.), because a detailed documentation of this event is available separately, as an [Eliademy file](#).

A. Preparation and context of the Collaboratory

Hosting Organizations and network of stakeholders

The event was initiated by LiFT partner **Alliance for the Future (A4F)** and hosted locally by the **Šibenik Hub for Ecology (SHE)**. SHE is one of several member organizations of LiFT partner **Alliance for the Future (A4F)**, a European federation of organizations and networks working in the area of transformative education (<http://alliance.4future.site/>).

A4F is part of a broader spontaneous global movement for cultural renewal; aiming to inspire people to adopt purposeful and sustainable ways of life. A4F's mission is to be a nexus of transformation catalysts, and to connect transformative change makers and their communities, organizations and initiatives at the European level in order to enhance their capacities of system innovation and of transformative education, research, action and leadership. In this sense, a Collaboratory on transformative education was a perfect match for the mission and vision of A4F.

SHE is an innovative start-up, one year old at the time, running an ecological bistro and a hub space for yoga, seminars and other kinds of meetings in the old town of Šibenik, Croatia. (<https://www.shebenik.com/>).

On a transnational level, the main host's then employer, the European **ECOLISE** network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability¹, was also a supporting partner of the event. Ecolise is a coalition of national and international networks of community-led initiatives on sustainability and climate change, as well as of organizations supporting a community-led transition to a resilient Europe. It's so-called "week of sustainable communities" was to take place in parallel to

¹ The members of ECOLISE include international networks of community-based initiatives such as the Transition Network (representing over 1200 Transition initiatives), the Global Ecovillage Network (15,000 ecovillages), the Permaculture movement (3 million practitioners globally) and ICLEI, the association of local governments for sustainability; national and regional networks; and other specialist bodies engaged in European-level research, training and communications to support community-led action on climate change and sustainability. By bringing these organisations together, ECOLISE seeks to establish a common, Europe-wide agenda and a platform for collective action.

the LiFT Collaboratory, and was thus incorporated into the latter by a half-day video conference.

With transformative education being at the very heart of A4F mission, A4F was the **thematic host** of this workshop. Its managing director was the main responsible for selecting and inviting the participants of this event, based on their knowledge and practical experience in the field. He had personal conversations with practically all participants of this Collaboratory beforehand.

Note that the thematic host was also the main facilitator of the event, a choice that was ambitious and partly connected to the initiator's familiarity with the topic and his personal acquaintance with all involved individuals.

The **participants**, all of whom have been personally invited to the event by the initiator/main host, came from 32 different initiatives and organizations working in transformative education and learning all over Europe, some of them already collaborating in projects with A4F. Out of those 30 participants, a number had multiple initiative affiliations (see boxes 1-3).

For some of the participants, LiFT was able to provide travel reimbursement.

Box 1: *Networks, projects and initiatives represented at the Collaboratory in Šibenik 18-23/9/2017 (in alphabetical order, part 1)*

[Art of Hosting community](#)
[Art-Studio "12 Qualities"](#)
[ARTS – Accelerating Transitions](#)
[Auro University](#)
[Auroville](#)
[Auroville International representative for Croatia](#)
[Because We Carry](#)
[Bioregional Learning Centre](#)
[Business leaders forum](#)
[CELL - Centre for Ecological Learning Luxembourg \(Earthship project\)](#)
[Center for Human Emergence - Social Architect Training Program Collaborology](#)
[Crossfields Institute International](#)
[Diversity charter Slovakia](#)
[DRIFT \(Dutch Research Institute for Transitions\) projects](#)
[Eat Responsibly Project](#)
[ECOLISE](#)
[Ecoversities Network](#)
[Ecovillage of Sieben Linden](#)
[Electronic Culture and Semiotics Department, Charles University](#)
[Research and educational programme "Body as a medium"](#)
[Evoneers Journey / SIRCLe project](#)
[Feniks, NGO for developing full human potential and innovative actions](#)

Comment from observer

An important question to understand more deeply the dynamics of the workshop would be to have concrete data on who was financially supported to attend, who came with an own agenda and who is working together with the lead facilitator or others on concrete projects.

Meta-Reflection

This comment points out that for some participants it might have been an issue to notice pre-existing arrangements that could have been perceived as possibly favoring some participants over others in certain contexts, and thus possibly clashing with an expectations of a certain kind of equality.

If the catalysing function of the thematic host (A4F) was to be fulfilled, it made a lot of sense to invite only a certain number of participants who were all personally known to the organizer and main facilitator, and who, so he estimated from his personal contacts, would be able to make a significant con-

tribution in terms of synergistic co-creation to increase system innovation in the area of transformative education.

Meta-Reflection

This state of affairs might in fact also have been a limitation in that the perceived abilities to contribute were based on somewhat projective and over estimated evaluations by the host, leading to frustration for all/many when people were suddenly expected to track and attend to a level of complexity of interactions, themes, processes etc., that were probably beyond many of them.

Issue at stake/concern/main focus

The workshop was announced as a “**transnational confluence of transformative learning initiatives**” focusing on the topic of “**Education for Sustainable Communities**”. The idea of calling the event “Confluence” was a result of a co-creative session of a few members of the hosting organization A4F. The term tried to put a word onto the intention of this event, namely to not only bring different initiatives together and allow them to network, but to also to provide a space for their different intentions and activities (all of which were already feeding into the field of **transformative education (TE)** to interweave and flow into each other, in the same way that different streams of water would join. The term therefore not only contained the quality of a conference (from latin: con-ferre, „bring or carry together, contribute), but also included the notion of fluidity and permeability of the different initiatives, that could lead to synergistic co-creation based on a sense of ease and effortlessness.

In other words, there was no specific target to be achieved. Rather, the intention of this Collaboratory was to work around the idea of creating lasting momentum, by bringing together pioneers engaged in the field of transformative education, giving them space to share their experiences, and by facilitating a co-creative process contributing to building an innovative eco-system in the area of TE. A certain number of prototypes for such a broader transnational network of initiatives were already present among the organizers and some of the participants, and quite some time was scheduled to present all those initiatives.

However, there was a clear **issue at stake**, expressed as follows in the information package that participants received beforehand:

“We will focus on the challenge:

- **How can we join forces to design and deliver transformative learning opportunities that help catalyse the Great Transition in local contexts?**
- You are invited to discover complementarities, find opportunities, pool resources, develop projects, and thus contribute to co-create a larger transformative system.”

This approach was well aligned with ECOLISE’s goals, namely to “share and co-create knowledge and to catalyze effective co-operation among member networks and other stakeholders”, thereby “raising the profile and highlighting the potential of what is already happening across Europe and be-

yond”, as well as “influencing European and national policy development and delivery to empower, enable and build upon the benefits of community-led action” (see www.ecolise.eu).

Transformative learning and education as understood by A4F happens when research, learning, teaching and action are coming together. It is not about just talking about it, but engaging in actual prototyping for system change.

Meta-Reflection

At the same time, as gradually became clear, this was an ‘ideal’ position, and there was likely a lot of tacit content and expectation to it, not all of which was made explicit – and thus, present to the audience. Also, this caused the Collaboratory design to not always put appropriate building blocks in place for this kind of *prototyping* to happen.

Besides focusing on the above topic and challenge, the workshop was also a **multiplier event**, given that most participants were multipliers (educators and facilitators) themselves, with the aim of disseminating the Collaboratory methodology and beta-testing parts of the LiFT curriculum for its upcoming summer school. Therefore, the design and facilitation approach included substantial elements of self-organization, as well as spaces for meta-reflection, while adopting the attitude, whatever goes “wrong” is a learning opportunity.

In result, **the Collaboratory operated at three levels at the same time**, obviously adding significantly to the complexity of the event:

1. The level of the actual Collaboratory with the participants (present and virtual)
2. The level of LiFT and the research it was doing on the process itself
3. The level of embeddedness into the Europe-wide initiative of ECOLISE of the week of sustainable communities

Degree of the participants’ familiarity with process

Most, if not all participants were familiar with facilitation work, some of them were facilitators themselves. Many were involved in the development of methodological databases for transformational education, and/or had already applied different methodologies in different contexts etc. Most participants were also familiar with the concept of U-theory, but none of the invited participants (outside the LiFT Team) was familiar with the Collaboratory itself as a method.

As the main facilitator put it: *„The challenge is that participants are already front-runners who are trying to do things differently and are challenging the established system. The challenge of this event was to build a shared perception, and/or a collection of experiences from lived reality of challenges that the change agents for transformative education are facing, when confronting this established system.”*

As indicated at several occasions throughout the LiFT materials, the different Collaboratories hosted by the project served as experimental spaces. One of the initial hypothesis, which the project set out to test throughout its events, was to what degree and how the Collaboratory can be adapted to work in many different settings, with participants from different cultures, holding diverse worldviews and opinions on a given topic etc. Another one was to study the transformative potential inherent in the process for the participants. The Šibenik case was therefore a particularly interesting setting for working with and testing the efficacy of the Collaboratory method: In Collaboratories run with either young people or participants from the business sector, a “Wow” effect could often be observed, simply because the experience of connection and co-creation was something really new and innovative. Would it even have that strong transformative and “Wow” effect with people who are more used to collaborative approaches? This question will be taken up in the final reflective section C.

Preparation

A4F as the organizer and main host has been assuming – and hoping for – a strong consolidated co-creative way of operating of the invited participants. However, both before and during the Collaboratory itself, it gradually became clear that this hope/assumption was not necessarily accurate, at least not in the sense that A4F had stated it (maybe not explicit enough?) in the invitation.

During the months leading up to the Collaboratory, the host and lead facilitator has tried to stimulate a co-creative involvement prior to and in preparation for the Collaboratory process through a questionnaire and personal follow-up. The aim was to see who would be willing to take on a specific role (including co-design and co-facilitation) and contribute methods and/or input during the Collaboratory. However, very few of the invited participants made use of this opportunity.

Box 2: **Networks, projects and initiatives represented at the Collaboratory in Šibenik** (alphabetical order, part 2)

[Global Ecovillage Network](#)
[Global Education Futures](#)
[Hosting social innovation](#)
[Initiative Zivilgesellschaft](#)
[Institute for Paradigmatic Reforms](#)
[Institutions for the Future - nextRenaissance initiative](#)
[Integral Review](#)
[International Center for Integrated Assessment and Sustainable Development \(ICIS\), Maastricht University](#)
[IPK Educational Network \(IPK = Integral Paradigm of Knowledge\), IPTL- International Partnership for Transformative Learning - Academy of Visionautics, Isoropia](#)
[Italian Permaculture Academy](#)
[Knowledge Federation](#)
[MUNDUS POLYPHONICUS](#)
[Next Step Integral Education seminars](#)
[nextRenaissance initiative in the Czech Republic](#)
[Non-violent communication Czech Republic](#)
[One Year in Transition](#)
[Pioneers of Change](#)
[Protopia Labs - Mindfulness and Contemplative Practices in Higher Education \(Miami University\)](#)
[Radej Retreat for Conscious Living, Regional youth centre Košice](#)
[rootAbility - empowering student-led change for sustainability in higher education institutions](#)

What most people actually signed up for seemed to be the opportunity for networking and meeting like-minded colleagues and activists. Our evaluation of both the feedback during the Collaboratory and the interviews taken with participants afterwards suggest that a majority of those present participated not so much for the content, but for meeting the other participants. However, some also came purely because they trusted the initiator on the content and overall intention. This makes clear that there was a certain **diversity of expectations** among participants, as well as of priorities and understandings of the intention of the event. One **tension** arising from this was between more person-oriented and more task- or topic-oriented participants.

Therefore, as we noted later, the more the program focused on substantial questions – thus interfering with more relational expectations, the more they felt dissatisfied. On the other end of the spectrum, the more task- or topic-oriented people found it hard to wait until the co-creation process lead to the emergence of a new kind of action, which was to produce a certain tension throughout.

Besides this **discrepancy of expectations**, the scarce feedback received from the designated participants was probably one reason why preparation started relatively late. Even though the host and organizer put together all relevant logistic and practical information, there was comparatively little substantial preparation within the LiFT team in view of Collaboratory design

and facilitation ahead of the event. As became clear later, this was partly due to a misunderstanding of their role by the former who had not been able to attend some of the previous LiFT events and thus lacked the experience of the benefit of an intensive preparation within the team.

Another challenge for the facilitators in the given context was the particular situation that many of the participants were facilitators themselves, who might also have a critical eye on the process and meta-level dimension in general.

The work on preparing and setting-up the program, agenda and design has to a large extent been taken over by the lead facilitator, an experienced process designer, rather than having been an extensive co-creative team effort, as in some of the earlier events. The former drafted a program by adapting the different default phases of the Collaboratory to the given context and time horizon, which has been jointly discussed in two zoom meetings with some members of the LiFT team, plus a couple of other participants who were willing to intervene during the Collaboratory, a few weeks before the meeting. Due to these additional, external participants coming in, the character of these

Box 3: *Networks, projects and initiatives represented at the Collaboratory in Šibenik 18-23/9/2017 (alphabetical order, part 3)*

[SHE – Šibenik Hub of Ecology](#)
[SIC - Social Innovation Community](#)
[Social Architects Training and Community of Practicing](#)
[SUSTAIN – Learning for the cities of tomorrow](#)
[T-Group, TAC - Transition Academy](#)
[TDU more-democracy / participatory politics](#)
[Think Tank Glopolis, Thinkcamp non-profit cooperative](#)
[Trans / Transition Group Savica](#)
[TRANSIT \(Transformative Social Innovation\) project](#)
[Transition Italia](#)
[Transition Network](#)
[U.Lab Hub Leipzig](#)
[Unavision initiative for non-formal learning and community building](#)
[University of Applied Science Potsdam \(M.A. Urban Future](#)
[Transforming Organizations & Ecosystems Research Project](#)
[University of Central Lancashire International Institute for Sign](#)
[Languages and Deaf Studies, International Deaf Empowerment](#)
[Foundation](#)
[University of Oslo, Wageningen University,](#)
[WiR-ZUSAMMEN, Z2X – Festival and community of young visionaries](#)
[ZRNO SOLI /Grain of salt](#)

meetings was less about drawing on the previous LiFT experience for designing the new case, but more about everyone bringing in their experience and (diverging) understandings of what a Collaboratory should be. Ultimately, the group essentially validated the proposed draft.

Finally, the more detailed setting and distribution of tasks and interventions has been elaborated a few days before the event, while the facilitators were already at the location.

Looking back onto the preparation phase of this Collaboratory with “handpicked” participants, our **main learnings** revolve around two major observations: First, there has been a serious **gap in communication** both within the LiFT team and between the host and the participants on different issues, such as the aim of the Collaboratory, the understanding of co-creation etc. Second, it seems that the single most important factor in this was that too many **implicit assumptions** had not been made explicit during the preparation phase, as well as during the Collaboratory itself, due to several kinds of constraints, in particular, a lack of time and space for reflection during the event.

- **Being aware of the organizers’ own assumptions** is important.

In this case, implicit assumptions concerned several aspects: the process of preparing and hosting the event, the intention and what could be achieved by it, as well as what could be expected from participants. As to the latter, the assumed strong co-creative capacity was not necessarily present in all participants, or did not become visible during the Collaboratory. In order to detect possible mismatches, it could be interesting to take some time to check one’s own assumptions before inviting participants to such a specific Collaboratory, and/or adapt expectations while gathering data on pro-activeness during the preparation. A measure of the engagement could be the amount of questions about e.g. logistics are being asked, despite an available information package, or a lack of actual propositions coming in during the preparation phase to contribute to shape the event.

- **Feedback cycles between organizers and participants during the preparation phase**

The fact that not many participants actively contributed prior to the event could have been due to a number of reasons:

- a) the main organizer feeling responsible for taking on most of the preparation work himself (except for local logistics taken over the local organizing team); therefore, failing to build up a co-creative field carrying the event beforehand and that participants would have been able to go into resonance with and connect to
- b) in their everyday life reality, many activists in the field are very occupied to balance their visionary and often unpaid work with the financial constraints of life
- c) the location was just as attractive as the topic of the event, resulting in people being less committed to the topic that organizers had hoped
- d) the intention of the Collaboratory was too ambitious and/or communicated with too large a range of possibilities for interpretation
- e) some participants might not have brought in the same embodied understanding of what co-creation can mean (see below) and how to use intention to shape future initiatives, as did the organizer(s).

- **Diverse understanding of co-creation**

Co-creation is a fairly new paradigm in leadership and organization, and accordingly, most people are not used to it, even though the word might be familiar. Yet, it likely triggers different responses and modes of behavior in different people. In any case, there is a difference between co-creating an event as a group of “whole persons” and “consuming” an event as an individual.

As to the observation of having both person-oriented and task-oriented people in the group of participants, the co-creation approach transcends both orientations, creating various developmental triggers for each of them. For instance, one needs good relational skills, but it is not about the relationships themselves. At the same time, it is not about already existing content, it is about something that is still in the making, to be created. The known is just a starting point, and you have to agree with stepping into the unknown, accepting moments of insecurity and void.

A reflective question resulting from this for future research could be: What does it take to tune people into the co-creation mode, and to reduce the interference from habits coming from their usual, more conventional modes of operating?

Comments and questions from observers in debriefs and reflective sessions

The main organizer being both the topic holder and the lead facilitator was a possible source of confusions (the issue being very clear for him, while not for others).

- *Can the topic holder also be the facilitator? Given that often, separation of these two roles is not an available option, how can tensions between them be adequately addressed?*
- *What are the risks when the topic holder is also the facilitator? How can this be made explicit in the Collaboratory design?*
- *What could be certain blind spots you may have as topic holder? Do they require to bring in someone as co-facilitator who has no stake in the outcome?*

The main facilitator was the one who had invited almost all participants personally. Other LiFT team members have not been involved to invite others. He was therefore the central node – and bottleneck – of the network, as well as of the whole event.

- *Did the main facilitator possibly follow a “hidden agenda”?*

One participant stated in an interview that there seemed to be quite a specific idea of creating a program hosted by people around all locations in discussions leading up to the Collaboratory event. However, nobody else (besides the organizer) was aware of this:

“I wonder why this idea was not mentioned explicitly in the invitation and whether there was a hidden agenda: in terms of not stating what was intended to happen for the sake of not preempting the process and allowing for “co-creative” and “emergent” qualities by keeping the invitation question more general and vague. However, this may have distorted the process, because implicitly, there was already a more specific desired outcome implicit in the process, which didn’t

allow for true co-creation and emergence of something unexpected.”

If this was the case, then the Theory U approach seems inappropriate, and another method would have been more suitable, one that is more about specifically stating an existing intention/vision and then designing the invitation and process specifically around who wants to co-create this vision and how this can be done.

Meta-Reflection

It is likely that the lead facilitator had an implicit (not checked on) assumption that the LiFT team expected the process to follow the building blocks of the Collaboratory relatively strictly. Moreover, this somehow turned into a constraint. In fact, both lead facilitators, as well as other members of the support team felt this kind of constraint of the method, leading it to being viewed as a clear mismatch to the actual intention. However, these reflections only emerged gradually during the debriefing and intermediate evaluation sessions.

B. The Collaboratory itself

Facilitation

The **process design** that the organizing team, in particular the two leading facilitators, came up with contained a variety of elements that had not been experimented with before. Among them were a longer excursion into nature, a video-connection to an EU-wide event (in Brussels) as part of the sustainable communities week, and a video-conferencing with global fellow participants who were not able to participate in person. For the video-conferencing sessions, the main facilitator was also the connection point between the different events/participants, which put a lot of charge on him. All these elements obviously also increased the organizational and technical **complexity** of the event.

As pointed out before, the assumption was that the group of participants had a high degree of self-responsibility and inner flexibility. It was this assumption that made it in fact reasonable to include all these “fancy” elements (see [process description on Eliademy](#) for more details) which did in fact make this event specific, but also demanding to host and “hold”. Yet, the small facilitation team was thrilled and confident enough to hold this complexity.

In this section, we will describe the structure of the event first, before turning to an analysis of how the process unfolded, what went (less) well and how we made sense of these things in hindsight. Note that a separate first level documentation including photos, an overview of hands-on results etc. of each phase of the event has been put together as an Eliademy document which is accessible online here: <https://eliademy.com/catalog/catalog/product/view/sku/dd26a65df3>.

The **observation and documentation** of the event was, again, done by a self-organized observer team, a practice that had first been implemented successfully at the LiFT workshop in the ecovillage

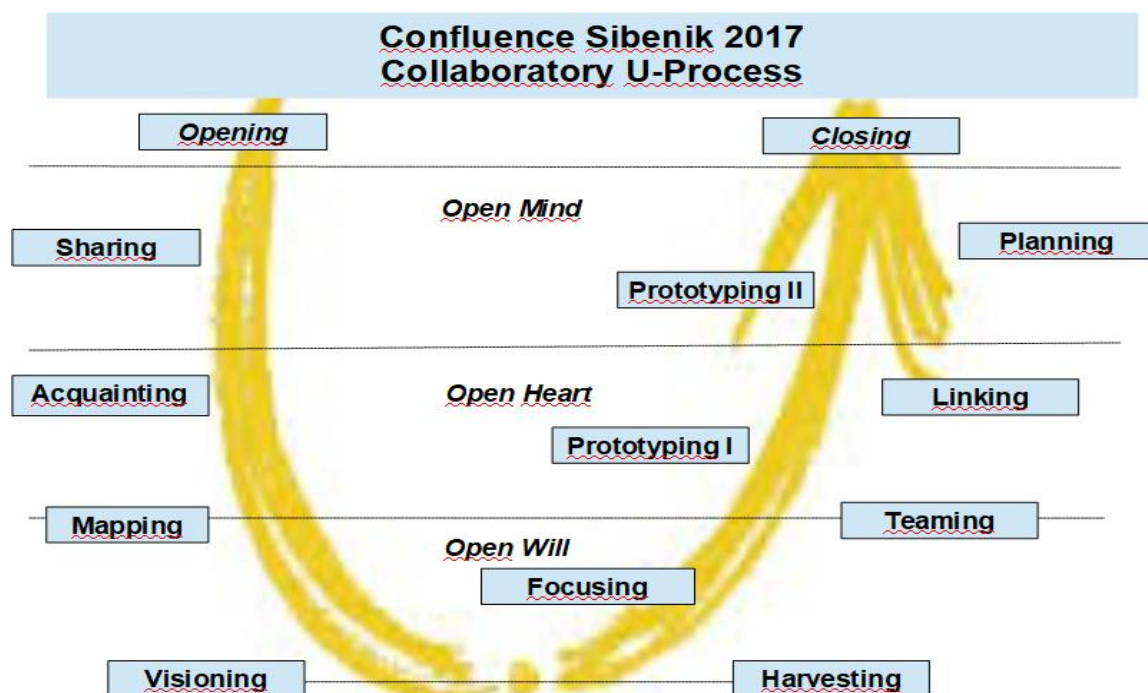
of Sieben Linden (see [case study, chapter 6](#) of the [LiFT Case Book](#)). The table below shows the core of the observation and documentation rationale, including three levels of observation:

How to observe

	EXTERNAL	INTERNAL
DESCRIPTION	What you see happening in group + key content of discussions	How you feel & your thoughts in response to what happens
REFLECTION	What is the meaning / causality / patterns ?	Your way of paying attention: why is it you notice certain things, what are your filters? How does that influence what you're observing?
EVALUATION	What works well / could be improved regarding the participants learning process	What are the implications for the collaboratory process design / facilitation?

The observer team itself met at least once every day to reflect and debrief the day's observations and learnings.

The overall process followed the Theory U template, offering specific elements for each phase of the U. The details of these had been prepared shortly before the start of the event by the two lead facilitators:



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DAY 1 - Morning

Opening: After an introduction by the hosts and facilitators, the event started in an experimental way right from the beginning. Instead of the usual getting-to-know-each-other phase (for which more time would be dedicated later), participants were invited into a sensing-round exercise during which two objects are passed around, and participant had to feel them eyes closed. This created a tentative, quiet and relaxed atmosphere, inviting trust into the process as an exploration into the unknown. After this followed a sharing round, and impressions and associations were collected on a flip chart. Asking explicitly for felt qualities brought forward positive ideals and high, even though rather general and abstract ambitions. These were often expressed in metaphoric ways which created reverence and awe, rather than questions on what to work.

After this exercise, people were invited to move their chairs back and for some movement in **thematic constellations** based on different questions, as a first way to help them to get to know each other. In this second playful exercise, people thus spread out in the room in relation to different categories such as locality, age or self-perceived role. The participants grouped themselves within the possible spectrum of each question. The exercise obviously had the purpose to get an impression of the group, who is in the room, backgrounds and intentions that participants brought with them. This worked out nicely in terms of creating a lively dynamic and sense of curiosity. It also had the effect of moving the bodies after the first quiet exercise, even though the room was quite small. One could meet other people who were close to oneself according to a certain topic or aspect, and some people were asked to state why they positioned themselves in this way. This kind of social and thematic constellation is a good tool to help both participants and facilitators to get an impression of the group on all levels, depending on the questions that are being asked, from personal to purpose and the topic of the workshop.

At this point already, the schedule started to be delayed, the time plan had been too optimistic when considering that after the introduction and two “warm-up” exercises, there was still to be a fishbowl before lunch. Another logistic challenge that became evident from the first day was connected to the LiFT event being the first public gathering taking place at the newly renovated venue. The local host lacked experience and routine with catering for larger groups, especially since the kitchen was located two floors downstairs, and the seminar room had no facilities for preparing tea and coffee, so all beverages had to be carried up from the restaurant below.

Sharing perspectives - Fishbowl:

After a coffee break, which became longer as planned, because individual coffee orders took too much time (the hosting organization SHE was doing this for the first time), the next phase of the Col-laboratory, a fishbowl, was introduced.

*Often the relational space was disrupted by practicalities. During the event, **tensions between the participants and the host** arose about the former being in service of the place versus the place being in service of the process.*

One facilitator explained: „Normally they (the SHE staff) should be in service of our process. But they are just learning how to deal with so many people. Besides taking care of the group, we also have to take care of not creating more problems for them downstairs.“

This format is commonly conceived and used for the **downloading phase** of a Collaboratory. In a setting of chairs made up of two concentric circles, one inner and one outer circle, people are sharing their knowledge and experience in relation to the given topic in a context of increased awareness and active listening. The format also serves to increase the amount of perspectives that are shared on any given topic, thus broadening the scope of peoples' understanding of it.

While the fishbowl usually starts with a round of "experts" providing their perspective in no more than 5 minutes each, before all other participants are invited to enter the conversation in the inner circle, several of the four kick-off speakers expanded their time in the first round. Unfortunately, facilitation was not strict on the timing here though, so in result, only a short amount time was left before the lunch break for the audience to come in. This caused what was meant to be a fishbowl to change its quality. The expert statements that were meant to kick off a larger conversation rather turned into small key notes, with the rest of the group being transformed into listeners, rather than participants of the conversation. In result, the format could not unfold its usual potential and function of making visible the broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences that were present in the room.

Observations from participants:

The main facilitator explained that after the initial statements of the 4 experts (2 women, 2 men) people could go into the fishbowl – but only if they have to add a new perspective. Compared to the time that was available for the Fishbowl itself, his methodological introduction had been too long and maybe caused a big threshold for participation.

The experts were asked to enter the Fishbowl individually, which created a strange situation: only one (lonely fish) person was sitting there in the beginning.

This setting missed to create group interaction and relationship. Later in the Fishbowl, hardly any of the speakers referred to previous speakers. It was rather a series of statements. Plus, the experts mostly expanded their time frame and the two facilitators did not hold a clear space to limit the time. Only 10 minutes before the lunch break, the circle was opened to other participants (13:20h) and two participants from the audience entered the fishbowl. Probably due to the near lunch break and the long talks, there was no more energy for more contributions.

Some immediate **learnings** from the first half day include:

- So-called sociometrical constellations are a good tool to have everyone get a good sense of who and what is in the room.
- Sensing exercises can be a good opening exercise for a group that already brings in a high level of curiosity and trust into the process (and facilitation), but time for the feedback round can easily derail, depending on the needs of the audience.
- Schedule sufficient time for warm-up exercises, particularly when if they require feedback rounds and constellation work with larger groups.
- Limit methodological instructions to a minimum, but do highlight very clearly the intention of the different phases.

- Keep time relatively strictly for each individual in the fishbowl, to ensure enough people can participate.
- Take into account declining energy levels towards lunch time.

The intention of the organizers was to create several moments for informal socializing around the participants' shared backgrounds, knowledge and experience during the 3 days, and it was planned to have these outside of the small seminar room, in order to allow each participant to present their initiative(s) and/or organization(s) in more detail in a setting that would provide enough space for informal conversations afterwards. Given the number of organizations/initiatives that were present (see boxes 1-3) we decided to start directly on day 1, even though the weather was not perfect.

DAY 1 Afternoon

Acquainting – informal boat trip:

In spite of windy, cool weather, the facilitation team, together with the local host, decided to stick to the original plan for a more laid-back outdoor activity that would allow everyone to move, go into nature and socialize with the other participants in a very informal setting. The boat trip took us to the peninsula located south-west of Šibenik, a nature reserve opposite the harbor. On the way, we visited the **St. Nicholas' fortress**, constructed during the 16th century in order to protect the town from the Turkish attacks from the sea. In fact, the facilitators were not aware of the fact that this was a detour that took away some of the time we had available later for the presentation of the initiatives in the nature reserve.

The wind was the biggest challenge, but once on the peninsula, we found several calm spots, where 4-5 initiatives could present themselves. Unfortunately, the plenary session that should have taken place at a spot where St. Anton of Šibenik had meditated some hundred years ago, had to be cancelled due to the cold wind at that point. So participants were “blown away” in a double sense, by the weather and by the amount of synergies that started to emerge during the sharing from initiatives. Once back to town, participants were free to self-organise their evening and conclude day 1.

Observations from Participants

The afternoon boat trip to a nearby island was a good setting to make challenges visible and aware, in spite of the windy, cool weather.

With the walk around the island, making stops at certain points to give certain participants time to present their initiatives for 5-10 min each, we went back to the getting to know stage methodologically – which seemed good for the group process and was welcomed by many participants.

Arriving back to SHE, we sat together inside for dinner, cozy and with lively interaction. In the evening, all impressions and findings were „harvested“. My observation shows that the group has not yet developed much trust neither in itself nor in the facilitators' ability to „hold the space“ (Theory U). There is an overall but not explicitly shown sense of expectation. Also, many members displayed a tendency for utopian formulations.

Some **learnings** from the second half day include:

- Going out into nature can create a different experience for the whole group and supports the process of building connections among participants.
- When having a third party organize an outdoor activity, make sure you have clarity on what this trip will look like in terms of route and timing.
- In case of bad weather, create several alternative options that are viable in case the outdoor one is not possible.
- If the seminar room is quite small, or if the chairs are not comfortable enough for the group to stay in the same place for the whole day, insist with the local host on finding viable alternatives.
- Take enough time during the preparation to get to the bottom of these logistical and organizational details. Ideally, these things should be checked during an on-site visit ahead of the event (see [LiFT Methodology Book](#)).

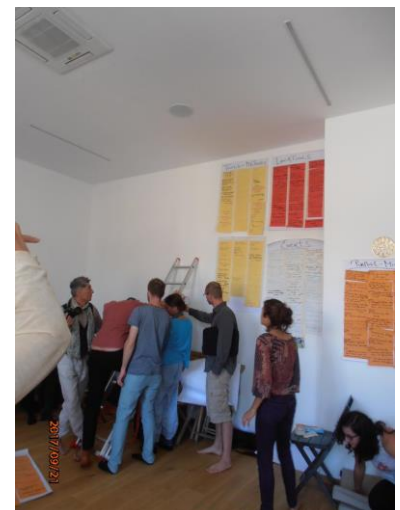
DAY2 – Morning

Mapping:

The day started on the sunny roof terrace of SHE, with a short sharing between the participants and with some reflections from the observers about day 1. This served to reconnect to the experience of day 1, as well as for integrating three new participants who only had arrived in the evening of day 1.

The next step that happened on the roof terrace was a “**mapping exercise**”, designed to bring to the surface the “ecosystem of transformative education” as it was present at the event. It served to collect and connect the people, but also to collect and put together information on **purposes, projects, initiatives, experiences, capabilities, knowledge resources, tools, resources, networks, services, educational programs, events, and locations** that this ecosystem is made up of. Participants were actively included and asked to take responsibility for organizing the collection of information for the different categories. Everyone was invited to put their information onto cards of different colors for the different categories. Hundreds of cards were written, which were then put on flipchart paper, to be posted onto the wall in the room below.

While being impressive as such, this exercise again took more time than expected. The following coffee break was too short to stick all of these cards onto posters to the walls, so there was still a busy atmosphere in the room when the participants came back. With many still busy and in their minds with physically putting up the flipchart papers, this “invaded” the moment of transition to the next phase. This was especially problematic, because next, the schedule continued with the “visioning”, the most important – and ideally deepest phase of a U process. The visioning is usually designed to smoothly follow a dialog phase, slowing



down the process once more after information has been taken in (downloading), and has been processed and digested (dialog). However, in the given case, the mapping exercise of the previous phase had more in common with a downloading mode than with a deeper kind of dialog.

Observations of Participants

Starting on the roof terrace outside, on the 3rd floor of SHE, the main facilitator invited the participants to a sharing with another person for 10 minutes. Three new people had arrived that morning. After that, the reflections of the observers are shared, and we are advised to consider all participants as extended sensing organs.

This could have been a setting to enter into the heart level and a deeper sharing mode of communication. But the facilitator did not clearly announce any communication rules (for instance about ways of listening and talking), so conversations mostly stayed on a chat and discussion mode again and did not reach the deeper level of a sharing mode on the heart level. Participants did get lively in contact with each other, but not all participated.

Some immediate **learnings** from this session include:

- A self-organized **mapping** of existing ecosystems can generate lively activity and yield an enormous amount of data that can be useful for the continuation of the process.
- If this approach and tool is chosen, some time should be dedicated to the question of how to handle this wealth of information in the available time of the event, in order to actually feed it into the process in a meaningful way.
- If less time is available during the process, consider starting the mapping already ahead of the event, so that you can directly work with the results.

Visioning-Harvesting-Focusing:

The **Visioning phase** of a Collaboratory, aiming to touch the bottom of the U, serves to create an inner space for each participant, from which the “New” can come in, after having let go of what is already known. It provides a space for participants to let responses emerge to the question “What does the future want from us?” or “what wants to come into the world through us?”

The guided visioning started with a grounding phase, to help everyone to get back into their bodies after the busy and somewhat chaotic mapping exercise. This was followed by a guided meditation with only few prompting questions to allow for the future vision to calmly unfold within the consciousness of the participants. Giving the previous experience of the audience with exercises involving silence, the “silence endurance factor” (SEF) of the group was relatively high for western standards, especially considering that there had not been a proper dialog phase to better prepare the visioning.

The visioning was followed by a **harvesting phase** which was conducted in silence. The participants were invited to stay in silence and go upstairs to the roof top terrace, where a long poster had been prepared for drawing and painting the visions onto. The silence was intended to deepen and prolong the previous phase.

About half of the participants engaged individually in drawing and painting onto the poster banner, others stood around the poster, watching, contemplating, adding elements here and there etc. After some time, the facilitators asked the participants to take a tour around the poster to take in the images and then share some insights. A number of images reoccurred at different places on the poster. Participants shared what they had experienced during the visioning, what they have painted and what this meant to them. This sharing contributed to a more subtle heart connection within the group, thus also building a deeper level of trust. So in some sense, this phase compensated for some of the dialog quality that had not happened before.

Observation from an observer

Interestingly, a lot of images reoccur, like the image of an eye, a tree surrounded by people, natural landscapes, circles and spiral movements. This is the bottom of the U. The emerging pattern that connects all participants to its purpose.

... And then, quite unexpectedly, our local host (the owner of SHE) came in, sharing some strong emotions about hosting this event and bringing in a number of organizational issues, connected to the upcoming lunch break and plans for the afternoon. Through this intervention, which the facilitators did not have the opportunity to frame and prepare, the format and current quality of awareness was clearly interrupted and derailed; the focus onto the topic immediately got lost. This created a situation of unease and uncertainty for the facilitators and acted as a sudden break with the previous, more subtle energy of the group.

Observations from observers

Visioning phase:

It was difficult to shift into this calm space, especially after all the chaos of placing the cards from the mapping session on the flipcharts and hanging those on the wall. The second facilitator asked people to find a seat or lay down, announced a visioning and took us on a dream journey, during which we were led to evoke our own vision of the future and our role in it. The instructions about the body and the visioning were clearly explained and could be followed easily. Yet, the purpose of the visioning or a guiding question could have been introduced more clearly. Some participants also gave the feedback that they could have had even more time in silence during the visioning.

Harvesting the visioning:

The silence seemed to foster a deepening process. Through sharing deeper experiences, the communication turned more open, and transformed towards the heart level. Feelings were shared, and a gentle understanding of a group space emerged.

Then, Irena bumped into this subtle space, sharing her strong emotions and fear about hosting this event, related to the challenges connected to space and food. The format was somehow disturbed, and the focus on the topic was lost. The facilitators seemed to be a bit unsure, whether or not to allow this strong emotional intervention and how to bring back the suddenly lost deep group atmosphere. I do not remember any specifics..., but from then on, organizational issues have been discussed until the lunch break.

At this point, a few words about the actual **facilitation team** might be helpful, as well as about how facilitation was understood and perceived during this workshop. The two main facilitators were members of LiFT partner A4F, with the initiator and organizer of the event being the lead facilitator. He was supported by several colleagues who took over the lead and facilitated specific sessions in the course of the process.

As we came to learn in result of our observation and reflection practice, the **understandings of the term and the idea of a facilitator** differed quite substantially among the participants, ranging from an “accompanying host” to a “strong leader of the process”. This obviously created diverging expectations that the facilitators were confronted with. As indicated before, the facilitators themselves had the assumption of a rather competent, self-organized audience that would not need a lot of guidance besides offering the necessary space and focus for creativity – an assumption, which was not accurate either. In result, the facilitators had to juggle several substantial challenges at the same time, from less-than-optimal conditions at the venue (lack of space, catering logistics, partly bad weather), to diverging assumptions and expectations to a lack of alignment with the local host. Even though the facilitation team had a well prepared plan of its own and was extremely flexible and willing to adapt to existing, as well as new upcoming challenges, the combination of all of these difficulties was not always easy to handle.

Comments collected by the observers*How did you perceive the facilitation?*

While he was moderating sessions, I often perceived a lack of enthusiasm and motivation and a sense of being stressed by the main facilitator. Even sometimes a sense of annoyance (that could have come across as arrogance perhaps?) when people asked questions about the process, as if the answer was obvious. Perhaps the main facilitator didn't want to have to tell people what to do and rather hoped for more self-responsibility among the participants.

Some participants mentioned that they felt judged (e.g. for being emotional) and that at times,

they perceived the facilitators as “arrogant” and “insensitive”. They felt the facilitators were trying to be integral, but were not really including feelings, fears, needs to be present, personal stories of who people really were.

“The main facilitator at times was quick to move on when people shared emotionally charged issues that ‘didn’t fit with the process’ at the time.”

Interaction and differences between facilitators and participants’ outlook on things

In turn, in the reflective sessions, the facilitators complained about a “missing cognitive complexity” in some participants, i.e. their not being able to think at the level of higher-order goals. Also, they perceived participants’ emphasis on “many goals” instead of focusing on “one goal” as an expression of “green” consciousness, avoiding and diluting the possibility for clarifying “one core goal”. This was even considered as an escapist behavior (“Fluchtverhalten”), which was quite an assumption to make....

Meta-Reflection

It was good to see these assumptions and self-reflections surface during the debriefing sessions.

However, it would of course have been necessary to be aware of them directly as they arose, in order to be able to act upon them and chose adequate responses in the facilitation situation itself.

One learning from this, confirming earlier learnings from previous LiFT workshops is that a good facilitator is in service of the process of the group, rather than their own personal agendas.

This often means to let go of their own plans and objectives for the process, thus to some degree giving up control over how things unfold.

Ultimately, as Collaboratory facilitators, we are facilitating the process of the given group, and we need to take into account the degrees of stretch that this group is able to make.

DAY 2 – Afternoon

Focusing (Crystallizing):

In the Collaboratory rationale, this phase uses the joint, collective vision and adds intention and focus to it, such that creation/manifestation will happen more easily. Quoting Otto Scharmer: „*energy follows attention*“, it is very important to know where we put our attention and with which intention.

Given the limited size of the room and the invitation by the municipality of Šibenik to use spaces in the fortress on top of the city, the facilitation team decided to accept this opportunity, which meant to have everyone walk up to the fortress and to continue with the next session of the Collaboratory there. The walk up the hill also allowed for continuing the acquainting activity and create 3-4 stops on the way, for 5 minutes each, inviting more initiatives of group members to present themselves. Once at the fortress, we had to decide between using a relatively small space inside, next to a coffee bar, or staying outside on a terrace despite sub-optimal weather conditions (wind, possibility of rain). Obviously, both of these settings were not ideal for our purpose.

One of the participants who had joined the group that morning, Claudine Villemot-Kienzle from the Center for Human Emergence, had prepared the following contribution to the confluence. She moderated this session, using the “Vistar” method for evolutionary circles, to extrapolate the overarching goal or higher purpose for transformative education.

This method’s disciplined format supports transformative meetings where individuals can co-create synergistically. The instructions are simple, intended to keep a space of emergence, rather than discussion, but can be challenging for busy minds:

- (1) before contributing, raise your hand,*
- (2) a contribution should take between one and three minutes maximum,*
- (3) no questions or comments on contributions allowed,*
- (4) no cross-talk between contributions.*

Three questions were put into the room:

1. What could be an **overarching goal**/bigger picture/reference point/concept for transformative education?
2. What are the **next steps**?
3. What is our **message to the policy makers** that we are to meet virtually the next day?

Two note takers collected upcoming answers.

Comments from observers

Crystallizing phase:

After lunch, there was a last minute schedule change. The group was invited by the mayor and had to walk up to a fortress. During the walk, people had a lot of lively conversations, and two more stops to introduce projects of participants were a welcomed break during the upward hike.

Once at the fortress, a new facilitator, who had been part of the group only since that morning, moderated the next Collaboratory phase about finding the purpose and aims. The location was a chair circle on a windy and cool terrace in the shade, even with some rain drops. It was not a cozy and protected space at all.

Nevertheless, the facilitator invited us to an „evolutionary circle“, by giving clear instructions with a clear voice. They were about listening to a deeper source of wisdom and let answers emerge like a conduit. After the three questions were read out, participants were invited to name aims in a pop-corn style. (...) Unfortunately, the contributions that came up have not been summarized to the group at any time.

After the exercise, participants expressed that it would be nice to change the location to a more sunny place or go inside (the facilitators did not seem to be aware of the uncomfortable situation).

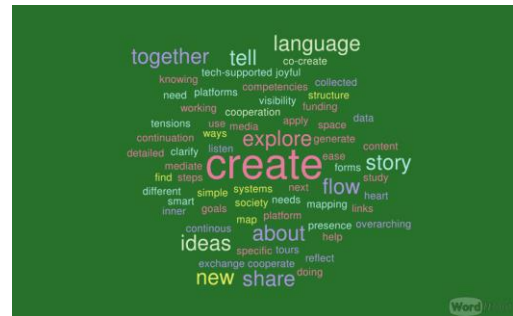
While this session had been carefully prepared, the setting indeed proved to be far from optimal. There was a lack of a protected space, which increased the difficulty of the group to connect both with each other and with the method and guiding questions. It seems that the simple but relatively

strict format posed a challenge. However, some very interesting contributions were made as summarized in the below word clouds.

1. What could be an overarching goal/bigger picture/reference point/concept for transformative education?



2. What are the next steps?



3. Message snippets to policymakers about what is perceived as needed also came up:

- Openness to remove labels, need to step out of fix roles and see the system
- Investments in adult development and development of system-view thinking
- Willingness to learn and engage in transformative experiences themselves
- Inviting policy makers to experiment
- Let us be really part of policy making, trust spaces for vulnerability
- Rethink regulations that stop innovation
- Acknowledge the need for redesigning education for the future
- Finance innovative, activities towards transformative education more generously

So despite the sub-optimal conditions and a certain degree of discontent of the participants because of these, the session still did produce relevant results. This was due partly to the strict moderation style of the lead facilitator, partly also to the extremely cooperative attitude of most participants who, after all, had been invited to the event and thus probably felt a sense of commitment and indebtedness to the main organizer whom they did not want to deceive.

Some **learnings** from this session include:

- Evaluate if last minute changes really add to the overall process or would rather disturb it
- When testing a new method, announce and frame this beforehand more clearly to get people on board, especially if it might stretch what they are used to do. If so, make explicit that this is the intention.
- Get their agreement to this session beforehand, supporting the autonomy of each member of the group.
- If new facilitators come in, introduce them properly and explain their role.
- Have Plan B in case the experimentation would stretch the groups capacities too much.

- Evaluate if the complexity of the situation at hand is still manageable for the facilitators and the group.
- *Vistar circles* are better hosted inside to allow for a felt sense of “safe space”.

Preparing Prototyping, building working groups:

After a break with some finger food sponsored by the major, the next step was to build up on the ideas that had emerged during the *vistar circles*. The aim was to become more concrete and to open the space for prototyping actionable projects in working groups. This was done in the fortress’ amphitheatre overlooking the beautiful island landscape of the Šibenik archipelago.

Yet, before starting with the open space, the main facilitator expressed the need to coordinate the preparation for the next day’s video conference with the policy makers in Brussels, where the LiFT workshop was to make a contribution to the ECOLISE week of sustainable communities. Also, he asked participants to display a certain discipline of behavior and punctuality. After that, he moved on to inviting ideas for open space workshops, asking participants to shortly introduce their topics and to write them on a piece of paper.

Open space

While the call for contributions to the video conference did not generate a lot of resonance among participants, the following Open Space session partly turned into a forum for meta-level critique about the process thus far. The first person stepping into the marketplace first expressed his anger about the process. Even though, after a short silence, he still made a workshop offer, a number of other participants followed this example, in both regards.

Comments from observers

The first person who stepped forward, was emotionally charged about the process and expressed that he is angry and does not feel connected to the group. After a short silence, he made his workshop offer. A participant intervenes, asking why he did not feel connected. Another person remarked that he is also angry and misses space for discussion and conflict, suggesting that the co-creation part was coming too early and was not prepared well enough.

The facilitators did allow some time for this, but without facilitating it or really holding the space for processing the tension.

Many workshop offers were made; but nobody was interested in preparing the input for the Brussels conference on the next day, which therefore had to be done by the lead facilitator alone.

This incident could have been used for a meta-reflection of the group process. Yet, the facilitators chose to refer this concern to the upcoming working groups. In hindsight, it appears that there was too strong of a felt commitment on the side of the facilitators to follow and stick to what was perceived as the **mandatory Collaboratory structure** to be flexible enough to change plans and just re-

spond to the situation. One reflection by them was: *“In a non-Collaboratory situation, we might have changed the program at this point or even earlier, to better connect and address the clearly diverging expectations on this process”*.

Ultimately, about nine topics were suggested, and six working groups were actually formed:

- Building an integral IT-system
- Creating a curriculum for the future
- Working towards more funding
- Joining forces and building a supporting network
- Reconsidering how language can transport our message to the public
- Working on prototypes for Learning Villages
- Finding technological solutions for complex problems
- Transforming the knowledge „engine“ of Academia
- Creating programs for the less fortunate

(For more detail see the separate [multimedia documentation](#) on this event). The working groups were free to self-organize their time, including their dinner and to also use the evening if necessary.

Below are some **Learnings** from this session:

- Be clear about why you propose certain tools in specific sessions and make this explicit if necessary.
- Dedicate enough time to reflect about how to frame whatever you propose to the group in order not to lose connection.
- If irritations arise, be open to take the space to respond to them and process them in an adequate way, if this appears necessary for maintaining sufficient clarity, coherence and flow of the process.
- Coordinate with the larger team about the hosting and holding of the space roles, involve and get support from more team members.

DAY 3 – morning

Brussels Video Conference

The morning of this day was dedicated to connecting to the wider worldwide eco-system of transformative education, first by participating in a live event in Brussels as part of the ECOLISE Week of sustainable communities, which was followed by video connections to other practitioners located in different parts of the world (from New Zealand, Australia, India, etc). This session had been announced in the program, as well as at the beginning of the confluence. When presenting the different dimensions of this Collaboratory, the importance of this session was emphasized, based on the unique opportunity for making the wider eco-system known. The practicalities of the video conference had been communicated in the last session of Day 2, leaving everyone free to participate or not.

Most participants attended. However, the local setting was less than optimal, with comparatively hard chairs in a crowded room. Even though this posed some challenge in terms of concentration, and even though the video conferences took the whole morning, most people stayed throughout, until lunch.

The video conference, which started late due to some technical difficulties on the Brussels side, life-streamed a conference session hosted by the international network of Transition Towns at the premises of the EU Commission. A high ranking official first gave a speech, before six members of Ecolise, all located at different places in Europe were given the opportunity to feed in their policy messages from those places. Our main host and lead facilitator, being also the learning coordinator of Ecolise, managed this session on the end of LiFT. Even though the session started in a more “conventional” way, the audience in Brussels was later also invited into some exercises to connect with each other with an “open heart”. While this clearly went beyond common practices in an EU context, it was very well appreciated by the EU hosts.

Directly after this video-conference, we at the LiFT workshop connected via zoom to six **high profile practitioners** at different places around the world, who could not physically make it to the confluence. They were thereby given a prominent opportunity to share their experiences about the topic. All of them had some substantial and enriching insights to share about how they managed to introduce a transformative education approach in their respective institutions, often “under the radar” of more “business as usual”, yet strategically successful. All six narratives added to the eco-system of transformative education and were a great inspiration to the participants present at SHE.

Comments from observers

At this day, the participants had been asked to show up already before 9h, in order to be prepared for the Brussels video conference. The lead facilitator sat in front of the camera with the collected cards from the mapping exercise in front of him.

Brussel started with delay. Unfortunately, the facilitators do not make use of the time by telling a bit more about this event and why the SHEbenik Collaboratory was part of it. When it finally started 20 min late, the participants listened to the presentations of the (video) conference for about 1,5 hours. One of these was the one – live – from SHEbenik, given by the lead facilitator. At 10:45h, a number of participants left the room to have a coffee downstairs.

Without any break in between, the main facilitator set up the next video conference at 10:45h. The speakers had been asked to present their experiences in 10 min, but ran over time. It took 1h50min until all of them had finished presenting. After that, at 12:35h, still without break, the facilitator invited the working groups from the previous day to present the results of what they had done to the virtual participants. This went on till lunch at 13:30h.

While this morning session was dense, rich in content and intensive, it was obviously also a big stretch for most peoples’ attention spans and biorhythm. In this sense, it can be seen as a typical expression of the tension between high standards and expectations on the hosting and facilitation end versus a number of bio-physical limitations of the given context and setting.

Some of the **learnings** from this event include:

- Provide comfortable chairs, if a long session is proposed, especially if it is a video session where people need to be seated, as attending a video-conference already requires a more steady and focused kind of attention than a normal face-to-face seminar.
- Prepare an option for how to fill “empty space” in time, in case of technical difficulties that can occur at any time and make the scheduled transmission difficult or impossible.
- Do not plan a session to be longer than 2 hours and provide sufficient break and relaxation time in between.

DAY 3 – Afternoon

Working groups:

Given the long “mental” session of the morning, a member of the LiFT team played some music to invite people back in. Another one proposed a standing circle for toning and some massaging to become grounded again in the body before moving on to the next session.

The next session was supposed to check in with the working groups to see how far they had gotten and if any changes in composition or focus were needed. However, the tension between the expectations of a great number of participants and the pre-given “program” had become too strong to just continue along the agenda. So the lead facilitator suggested a **feedback round with a talking stick** enabling everyone to share where they were in their own response to things. The speakers shared very different needs, ranging from more space for sharing emotional issues, to group reflection, to a wish for celebration and ritual, until a continuation of more intense substantive work in the working groups.

Based on these needs, the participants divided themselves up into self-organized groups, each addressing their most pressing issue at that moment. Groups were formed to reflect about the process, continue working on a topic, create a closing ritual and some more. In this way, the process could be continued both substantially and by addressing the disturbances and irritations that had arisen in productive ways.

Comments from observers

After the sharing round about how people wanted to make best use of the remaining time, the facilitators decided to give optional time on the rooftop for emotional and process reflection right now. The working groups met again in parallel, so people who wanted to join the reflection could look for the working groups later on. Even though it looked a bit chaotic in the beginning, this ultimately worked out quite nicely.

Some working groups went to the beach, and people had a swim before working. In the sharing group that found itself on the rooftop, several people expressed their feeling of an unresolved tension and even resistance toward certain approaches. For example, to one, the whole process felt like

jumping from topic to topic without a clear red thread to follow. This made the event appear somewhat impersonal to them, not generating a lot of trust, neither in the facilitators nor in the other groups. It might not have been the right methodology or the right space for such an endeavor.

Also, an imbalance between the facilitators and the participants was noted. Some even expressed their perception of being brushed aside by the facilitators and not being given much space to share personal perceptions and feelings.

The **learnings** from this session touch very basic aspects of group facilitation:

- Facilitators should aim to be well “in touch” with the group at all times. The skill of “reading the room” is essential for adequately perceiving needs and potential frustrations in the group that might otherwise hamper the process.
- Depending on the group, the experience of the process needs to be integrated, before outcome oriented activities can be undertaken.
- This means that facilitators might have to let go of some of their own goals and expectations for the process and make sure they are serving the process of the given group.
- Giving space to meta-level and personal considerations seems to be particularly important for participants, whose focus is relation-oriented, rather than task-oriented and/or for those who have a great wealth of experience in these kind of processes, as compared with more conventional audiences.

DAY 4 – Morning

The closing session

All initiatives who had not yet presented themselves did so at the beginning of this session. Then the results of the working groups were presented, including a transversal project, which had not been presented until that moment and which the main host and facilitator was also involved in. Even though this project was intended to be an overarching container for many of the existing initiatives, the fact that this project had not been presented so far created some sense of confusion and irritation among the participants (see comments below).

Comments from observers

In the closing plenary, the main facilitator invited someone to present two quite complicated slides about a project that the facilitator was also involved in. This slide was up for several minutes. Suddenly a participant intervened, shouting: “*Shut up! This is not a closing session!*” The main facilitator reacted immediately saying: “*It is over now*”. Then there was silence.

My interpretation is that without this intervention, the presentation would have gone much longer still, so it was good that the facilitator reacted immediately.

Furthermore, a main intention of this session was to collect the commitments of the participants to allow for following up with them on certain issues. In fact, one difficulty that often occurs in these

kinds of meetings with activists and change makers is that inspiration is high while the groups is together, but easily declines, once people are back home in their everyday structures.

As a closing ritual, therefore, the facilitator asked people to share one commitment they wanted to make with regard to carrying on the results of the event into the future. This happened in a circle with a talking stick and a member of the LiFT team collecting follow-up commitments. Despite the irritations that had occurred over these four days, an impressive list of commitments came together, which has later been circulated among participants.

Comment from an observer

Afterwards, when participants stated commitments, this happened in a peaceful round with short and precise statements. It seemed that people were tired, and happy to finish punctually for lunch at 13:30h.

After the official closing, people have met for dinner in the SHE restaurant and another restaurant in the old town, where, in fact, a lot of informal and working group processes went on.

The Collaboratory had intended to create the conditions for those present to connect to a bigger picture and network in the area of transformative education, as well as to create a strong enough inspiration to follow through on it. From a distance of six months, one can say that this aim has only partly been reached. However, a number of very promising initiatives have emerged out of the workshop and continue to grow and develop. One of them is the European Platform for transformative education, engaged in curriculum development, increasing the visibility of TE initiatives and project design around these goals.

Among the many **learnings** from this session, the more fundamental ones will be discussed in the next section. A rather low-level conclusion could be to be upfront and transparent about any substantial involvement of one of the facilitators/hosts in the issue or projects related to it, particularly if those roles fall together as in this case. However, it is worthwhile to engage in a strategic reflection also at a higher/deeper level. Moreover, this event has shown the many pitfalls of such a constellation – and the degree to which it is problematic to mix roles in the way it happened at the LiFT workshop in Šibenik.

C. Reflection

Looking back onto the workshop in Šibenik with some more distance, **several layers of observation, reflection and evaluation** of the event appear relevant. Besides the immediate feedback we received from participants about specific aspects, one layer was the way the Collaboratory has been prepared, designed and implemented by those in charge. Another one was the process as it happened, and how certain actions, stimuli and behaviors of the facilitators had certain effects and implications for the audience and the overall process.

The evaluations of the event varied between excellent, successful and dissatisfied, depending on the viewpoint, as well as on the primary needs and expectations of the observer. When looking at some of what actually happened, the event was in fact impressive: We got lots of visionary minds together, provided a space for teaming up and cross-fertilizing of ideas and laid seeds for further synergistic co-creation, some of which are going ahead in promising ways. However, when considering *how* things went from a methodological point of view, and what could have gone better, a number of issues and dissatisfactions appear worth considering.

Feedback by participants and observers

Feedback from participants mainly touched upon relational and process-oriented issues. Many expressed disappointment about not having had enough time for networking, building personal relationships with like-minded others and to actually co-create something on this basis within a process that was perceived as a “straightjacket”. Even though the feedback that was shared in the closing round was surprisingly positive, our observers’ notes, as well as conversations on the side clearly indicate that a lot of unresolved tension and even resistance had not been properly processed during the process itself.

Generally, many aspects noted in the feedback gathered by our observers show that important needs have not been met by the process. Several participants mentioned that they found the process “too structured”, because it didn’t allow for more spontaneity, in other words, it wasn’t (always) very responsive to the specific “needs of the now”. Some were missing a better flow between the sessions, others more space for sharing deeper feelings or for going deeper into story-telling, personal exchange and dialogue. The reoccurring phrase “we have only two minutes left” was perceived as a typical symptom of a lacking spirit of dialogue, as opposed to facilitation’s urge to move towards “producing outputs”. Some participants specifically mentioned that they experienced resistance to the *vistar* session, because they experienced the way it was run as “too forced” upon them, while they were lacking sufficient trust and personal connection within the group. They found that the group was not ready yet for having a similar discussion about an over-arching goal.

At the same time, other feedbacks expressed dissatisfaction about repeated interruptions of the flow of joint action. They said that they wanted to just work with the other people, not least as a means to connect more deeply. Therefore, for them, it caused frustrations to have to wait until the second or third day, and even then, the call with Brussels and the remote participants again interrupted work on concrete things together.

“I missed the sacredness of the space. A facilitator needs to be a magician in a way.”

Several voices from among the process observers made connections between these feedbacks (including their own perceptions) and **the way, the Collaboratory method was used** during the event. These can be boiled down to the evaluation that “*the method as it was offered did not work*” in the given context. While “*it might not have been the right methodology or the right space for such an endeavor*” in the first place, as one wonders, we can discern a number of shortcomings of *applying*

the Collaboratory rationale and its building blocks more specifically. Generally, **the focus on building blocks** and thus, on “ticking off phases”, **seemed to outperform the focus on the core principles and rationale** at times.

Indeed, one observer noted that she felt as if being “*thrown from method to method, from tool to tool*”. Her reflection was that the way the different tools and sessions were strung together appeared a bit “technical” and “theory-loaded”, rather than actually responding to what was there in the moment, and thus supporting the group’s process or the co-creation of content. “*The high importance that was laid on the methodology didn’t allow for a more fluid process. It was sometimes perceived as too mechanical/technical and too forced without addressing many peoples’ wish for a deeper connection among them.*” Moreover, her sense was that the facilitator(s), by their strong focus on outcomes, de facto tried to take a “*shortcut from the beginning directly to the end of the U process – avoiding the bottom of it*”, which of course implies a loss of depth and quality on the way.

Another participant sensed that there was “*too much ego and arrogance in relation to the use of ‘the method’ and saying what needs to happen at a certain point, rather than truly being in service of what wants to emerge*”, based on the needs of the participants.

Feedback from the facilitators

Interestingly, the facilitators themselves gave quite a similar feedback. The main facilitator noted that he felt “*confined by the structure*”. During the internal debriefing and evaluation session after the closing of the public event, he stated that he strongly experienced the **over-complexity caused by the three different levels**, at which he had decided to work, and conceded that it was too ambitious to work on all three levels simultaneously. In this situation, he found the “Collaboratory framing” not helpful, and even like a “straight jacket” that prevented him from agile movement with the group. “*I don’t want to have a process where I convene and have to follow a strict pathway that comes from a methodology*”, while what was needed was more simplicity. “*I want to be in the situation and be able to respond in the moment, not to an abstract notion in my head.*”

So while a lot of self-reflection about the actual process happened on both ends, some of the causes of the less-than-optimal implementation of the Collaboratory in Šibenik had their roots way before the actual event. As mentioned earlier, there have also been shortcomings already in the conceiving and preparation phases. Moreover, one of the core learnings from the LiFT project as a whole is about how important **intensive communication and careful alignment work** is for satisfactory outcomes. This concerns both communication within the core (LiFT) team and the host, and with the extended network of partners and involved stakeholders, not to speak about the participants. The extended preparation work is a unique opportunity to work together on building a joint understanding of what the aim and purpose of the event should be, for clarifying implicit expectations, concerns and assumptions etc., before going into more details about roles, constraints, logistics and technical issues. This seems to be the single most important means to build a solid enough basis of trust and cooperation among the “holders” of the event. This, in turn, can then serve as a “holding environment” that radiates the necessary clarity around purpose and can enact a friendly welcome, which

can be sensed and experienced by incoming participants. It is also a good basis for dealing with any unexpected situations (and these are sure to come!) in adequate, gentle and flexible enough ways.

With regard to the initial question about to how, to what degree and for whom the Collaboratory method can produce powerful “Wow” effects, see the meta-reflection below.

Meta-reflection

As a general observation, we have noted again here that Collaboratories run in groups of “front-runners” of change making, i.e. people who are used to working with collaborative methods of different kinds, tend to not produce the same “Wow” effect that we have seen it generate in more “conventional” audiences. In the former, the Collaboratory often rather appears as an “over-structured” process that does not leave enough room for emergence. As one of the LiFT team members put it in the internal debriefing meeting: *“The wow effect depends on what people are used to.”*

So is the Collaboratory a design that works primarily within a certain narrow spectrum of needs, values, etc., and that other types of processes are better outside this range? Not quite. But when designing a Collaboratory process, this aspect should be taken into account in terms of meta-reflecting about what you are trying to do for whom. The challenge is to **choose the right degree of novelty and surprise for the audience involved**. More precisely, the process should be at a meta-level to the current level of knowledge, experience etc. of participants, otherwise it isn’t helpful as it does not provide sufficient degrees of challenge and scaffold their performance.

To sum up, here are our **most important learnings** in a nutshell:

- Do not organize and host a Collaboratory alone, especially one with a high level of complexity. A complex multi-day Collaboratory event needs a long-term, thorough, iterative preparation that should be done in a team, including the most important stakeholders.
- During this process, carefully check and explore implicit assumptions, expectations and agendas of each involved party and work towards a sufficient degree of alignment about core aspects of the agenda
- Roles must be crystal clear, and overlapping roles should be avoided wherever possible.
- Make sure that organizational and logistic aspects support the process and not vice versa.
- In view of tools and elements to build into the process, integrate methods that are known, recognized and valued by the target audience to pick up the participants where they are, as well as ones that provide a certain degree of stretch and challenge to allow for surprises.
- Overall, facilitation should be in service of a given group’s process, rather than following its own agenda. Be prepared to shift from idealistic to realistic expectations. Plans and design elements might need to be changed or dropped altogether if the situation requires it.
- The best structure is only as good as implementation allows it to unfold. Structure and skillful facilitation must be balanced. Sometimes, less is more ☺.
- Tap into the “magic space” wherever possible.