

## Feedback to the LiFT Summer School, Vienna July 2018

### Results of the participants' questionnaire

*By Iris Kunze*

As part for the evaluation of the training, we designed a feedback questionnaire which we asked the Summer School participants to fill out in the closing session which 20 attendees did. We asked about the online preparatory training, the Summer School in Vienna, the Collaboratory as method and options for its improvement, the teaching quality, service and logistics, and about the learnings the participants take with them (questionnaire see appendix).

Section A below first summarizes the outcomes, illustrated by selected, representative quotes. Section B discusses a reflection of the feedback.

#### A. Outcomes of the participants' questionnaire

A summary of participants' answers to the quantitative questions with five options each shows the following tendencies:

##### About the preparatory Online Training

- The background materials were seen as mainly good or very good.
- The focus of the preparation calls received average rates besides some better evaluations.
- Similar results were given for the question on how the training helped to prepare the design of a Collaboratory.
- The question on how much fun and interest the training brought mostly received good rates.
- The majority of respondents gave average scores to the usefulness of the Eliademy learning platform.
- The opportunities to actively participate in the development of the ongoing event had been rated positively.

In response to the open question about which aspects they particularly liked with regard to the online training, many mentioned the break out sessions for getting to know each other better and to gradually dive deeper into the subject and the method. They also appreciated the flexible times, at which it was offered, the freedom to choose their own tasks, the group work, the reading materials, the reflections and discussions. The practical applications were also mentioned positively, such as preparing something concrete like the guiding question and the Collaboratory elements. The level of engagement was appreciated, but a decrease over time was also criticized by one person. Some critical voices found the online trainings to be not structured clearly enough and missed more communication and explanation on what the training was about. Another recommendation was to start the online training earlier.

##### About the Summer School in Vienna

- With three exceptions, all participants rated the Summer School to have advanced their knowledge of the Collaboratory in a good or very good way.

- Similar rates were given concerning the knowledge about how to design and facilitate a Collaboratory.
- The Summer School was also rated to have well or very well advanced their knowledge about facilitation in general, with a few exceptions.
- The overall expectations towards the Summer School were highly and more than highly met for the majority of the participants, with three exceptions who gave an average score here and one exception who disliked it.
- The majority warmly recommends this training to others with three exceptions who gave average rate.

### **On expectations towards and their fulfillment by the Summer School**

The expectations of a number of participants had been about experiencing and better understanding how to put the Collaboratory theory into practice, which were mainly met. Someone appreciated the learning of how to facilitate multi-stakeholder groups. One participant would have liked to do even more design work themselves. Someone missed out on the purpose of each element of the theory U. In contrast, another one said, that their expectation of designing the U process was fully met. A few voices hint that the Summer School and designing of the Collaboratory exceeded their expectations as compared to the preparatory online training. A number of voices wished to have a better communication in advance on the structure and tasks of the Summer School participants. Someone learnt, enjoyed and contributed more than s/he expected, another participant transformed their expectations when noticing that the Collaboratory “is more advanced stuff than my expectations”.

In terms of aspects of the Summer School they particularly liked, connecting and networking with other participants was mentioned very often, including the atmosphere which had been created together, also the quality of cooperation with different people and the diversity in the group. The moments of reflection and sharing and the shared enthusiasm were seen as valuable. The experience of facilitation and getting involved in a free, self-managed and self-organised way was especially appreciated. Quotes: “The learning by doing was surprisingly efficient”; “a sense of calmness without stress”; “the structure, which encompasses all important aspects of learning”. The co-creative process was seen as valuable, but more guidance would have been appreciated. Physical activities were missed.

### **On what participants take with them and how they feel after the Summer School**

The participants mentioned many aspects they take with them. Some gained more competence in facilitating meeting spaces for adults and communities of practice. Someone better knows how to make a Collaboratory happen in other places, another one gained a better understanding of how to work in multicultural contexts. Multiple participants feel enriched by good conversations, new contacts and perspectives and a lot of deepening understanding about the structure and the process. Also, useful learnings through facilitation practice and beyond facilitation could be gained. Someone felt “empowered, humble and uplifted having met so many fine people”. Learnings that have been mentioned were patience and more clarity about one’s own needs and limits. Some quotes:

- “I will add some elements applied in the Collaboratory of the Summer School to my own project: Breath twice before you speak. Open space is very useful.”
- “I have learnt that I am responsible for all my (no) actions”.
- “Also the topic fitted me and gave me insights and empowerment”

One point that was criticized was a perceived lack of communication concerning some aspects of the planning and structure and tasks of the Summer School.

### On how the training could be improved

Many aspects and suggestions were mentioned, which are summarized in the following bullet points:

- The location of the ImpactHUB Vienna was perceived as suitable and inspiring location. Nevertheless, the catering area was perceived as small and some criticize missing vegetarian options for lunch.
- Have some more structure and clarity about the plan for this Summer School, especially concerning meeting times and roles. Have more visible structures, including the timing of the training, thus making more effective use of time. Another day ahead of the public event could have helped to clarify things.
- The material was perceived as too academic by some. There is a need for “more practical, first hand resources to be able to design the backbone of the Collaboratory”. Also, participants asked to make more materials and handouts accessible online, including better design guidelines.
- The working groups could have been smaller to give more opportunity for experiences. The tasks and responsibilities for the working groups could have been announced more clearly. Some missed more personal feedback on their roles. More time for feedback and for individual coaching was generally wished for.
- More information on the stakeholders and the framing of the event would be useful. The identification and formulation of the real problem or topic and the stakeholders to invite should be an own planning phase in itself.
- Someone asked for more depth in some of the processes, for instance by taking more time for emotional processes.
- Someone recommends less talking, more action.
- “the involvement of multiple stakeholders seems to demand much more attention”
- “Some facilitators could not see the forest for the trees when it came to the value of dialogue processes, because they were so closely connected to the outcomes they had desired.”
- There was a lack of coordination between the first week on the LiFT Summer School and the second week of the collaborative project of the Edutopia week.

### About the Collaboratory as method and format

#### On where the Collaboratory is appropriate to use

We asked the participants for which stakeholder processes they see the Collaboratory as appropriate. A lot of insights came as open answers on different aspects.

Concerning the topics, it was recommended to use the Collaboratory...

- “for team processes, political issues, in business, community building and for solving conflicts”,
- “for controversial topics with clearly different perspectives and stakes”,
- “when there is a pressing, open and broad enough question”
- “conflictual matters on different societal levels, complex challenges and interrelated human interaction”

Concerning the aims to be reached with a Collaboratory, it was recommended...

- “for equalizing polarized environments”
- “for decision making across several interests”

- “it can help multi-stakeholder groups to move forward towards a paradigm shift”
- “a topic tightly held by an initiator/ host who can bring in and keep engaged all stakeholders”
- “if one does not expect a certain outcome”

Concerning target groups and stakeholders, participants thought that the method is appropriate for

- “cohesive groups with a clear challenge”
- “stakeholders with different backgrounds but a common goal”
- “stakeholders that are open for unconventional methods and for new processes”

### **On suggestions of other contexts to apply the Collaboratory**

Participants found that the Collaboratory could be appropriate for developing ideas, design processes, political and environmental discourses. Educational settings were especially mentioned in view of widening perspectives and going deeper than just “talking”. Collaboratory trainings for school teachers could promote different kinds of learning. Here are some more suggestions:

- “For team building and for helping defuse stock situations.”
- “It could be used to trigger change in business as usual”.
- For getting away from “moments of getting stuck.”
- “As an alternative training format for content dissemination in a company”,
- “to develop a common future for an organization”,
- “using Fishbowl instead of frontal lectures and podium discussions”.

## **B. Reflections about the feedback**

As an overall outcome, the responses show diverse evaluations on the training. While the actual process with the group – planning a Collaboratory together during the Summer School in Vienna – was generally evaluated very positively, the online training received a wider range of feedbacks. We see that for some participants, the preparatory online training was less helpful and fulfilling as a preparation for the Summer School including the preparation of the Collaboratory. However, this evaluation needs to take into account that not all trainees attended all online training sessions regularly.

Concerning the desire of some for more structure and clarity as to what would happen when and how, we see that our pedagogical approach of PBL, exposing people to challenges of learning by doing and to take responsibility for their own learning, thus “throwing them into cold water” was quite a big stretch for some of them while it suited the more experienced facilitators well.

The answers also show that when filling the questionnaire in the closing session of the Summer School, most participants were still digesting their immediate experiences. They might have been able to give more meta-level feedback some time later.

Overall, the feedback shows that the participants take a number of important learnings and valuable experiences with them. Given that this training at the LiFT Summer School was a first experiment, we are pleased with this result.

## **Appendix: questionnaire**