

Tools for facilitating co-creation: - Methods and guiding principles



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Introduction

In this toolbox you will find hands-on guidance for facilitators of local co-creation initiatives to enhance urban biodiversity. Tools that will be helpful in facilitating collaboration among a group of participants with different social and cultural backgrounds, skills, perspectives and agendas. Tools which originate from a social psychological perspective suitable for facilitating the collaboration 'within' a co-creation initiative. Whereas the Co-Bio Guide on Co-creating Urban Biodiversity provides the tools and steps you will need for setting up the initiative and managing it like a project (link to the guide).

To facilitate co-creation processes aimed at solving a certain task, i.e. increasing biodiversity in a specific urban area, is to take a role of 'informal leader'. When facilitating co-creation processes you take on the role as a leader without a formal mandate, but with the task of mobilizing and engaging relevant actors from the voluntary sector as well as public organisations in the task, supporting collaboration and mediating conflicts. This toolbox takes you through some principles and tools to help you in the role as facilitator.

Initially a set of guiding principles for leading and facilitating co-creation is described: How to lead with a co-creative mindset as well as the facilitators' role of 'boundary spanner' connecting people, resources and logics in co-creative processes. The following section offers you as facilitator a range of tools for mapping and mobilizing participants for the co-creation process, aiming at 'getting the right people in the room'.

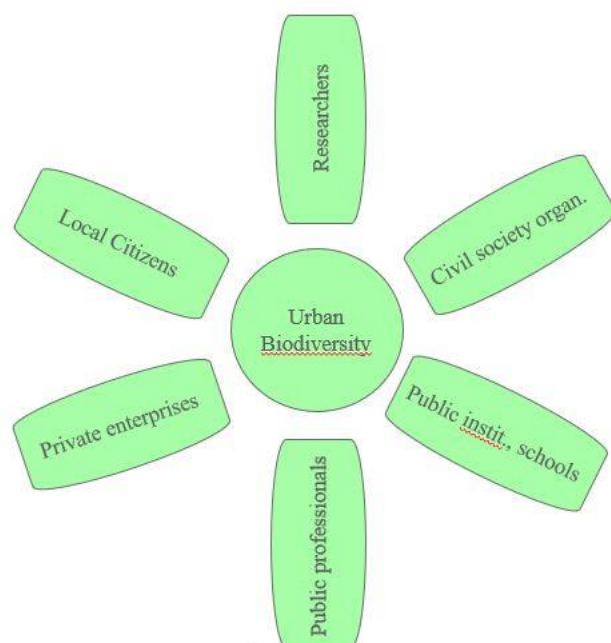
The remaining part of the toolbox focusses on how to facilitate collaboration, once the participants are 'in the room'. How to get collaboration off to a good start by developing trust and a common understanding of the task among participants. How to facilitate cooperation among diverse participants as well as how to mediate conflicts, handle power differences, and maintain engagement. Attention is also paid to the importance of 'spreading the word' by informing and engaging the community and the general public.

Facilitating co-creation: Guiding principles

The Co-Bio project aims to promote urban biodiversity created through collaboration. The project addresses the current biodiversity crisis and the need to preserve and recreate more nature and habitats in European cities and urban areas. The focus on urban biodiversity provides an opportunity to form local partnerships and to develop knowledge, competences and tools to rebuild biodiversity, create awareness and mobilize local action.

This is where the idea of co-creation becomes relevant. Co-creation is a democratic process, which aims to support collaboration among relevant stakeholders from different sectors, i.e. civil society, public institutions and the private sector, to solve a specific issue or problem. The aim is to engage local professionals and volunteers across sectors in a collaborative process, developing local initiatives for enhancing urban biodiversity.

A basic principle in co-creation is: 'the challenge sets the team'. So working with co-creation in urban biodiversity means mobilizing and facilitating collaboration among the different actors that are relevant for understanding and solving the challenge at hand and may serve as a 'core group' driving the initiative. The model below illustrates this principle.



Advantages of co-creating biodiversity

Co-creating urban diversity is a place-based activity, that will naturally be linked to a geographical area and place. This makes it relatively easy to identify the relevant stakeholders. Also, the task of enhancing biodiversity in urban areas is tangible and specific, involving practical work and leading to visible results. This makes it easier to mobilize and engage participants.

Source: Tortzen & Agger, 2023

The role as ‘boundary spanner’

As co-creation entails bringing local citizens, voluntary organisations, public professionals and experts together, you as facilitator must take a role as ‘boundary spanner.’ The role of the ‘boundary spanner’ is to connect actors as well as their resources and logics in the co-creative process.

‘Boundary spanners’ combine professional competences with emotional intelligence when leading co-creative processes, i.e.:

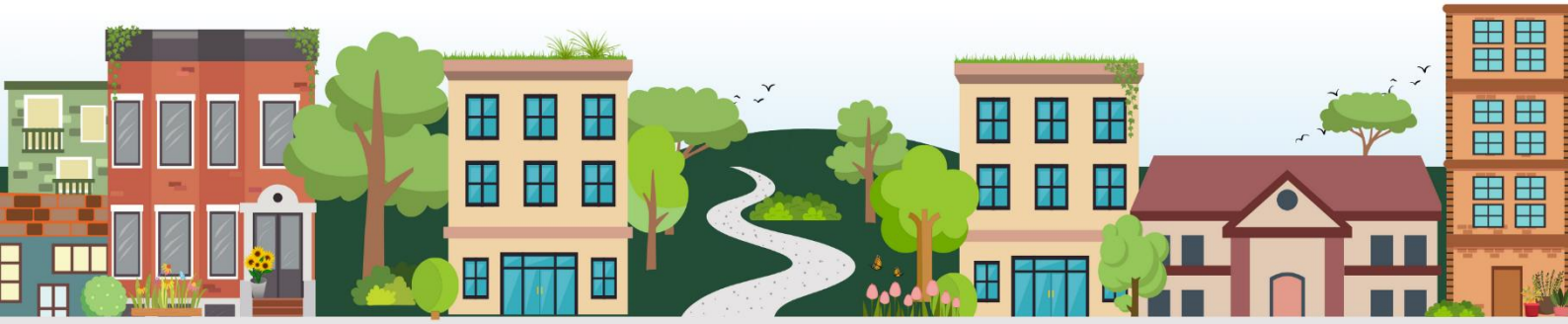
- Recognizing that the challenge (urban biodiversity) cannot be solved by one actor alone, but calls for cross-sector collaboration
- Acknowledging the interests and needs of different actors and valuing their resources and contributions
- Working to build relations and communities among actors
- Acting ‘on the edge’ of their organization, striving to obtain support and resources for the task at hand from their own organization as well as from external partners

Leadership in co-creation, thus, must thus be both facilitative and connective. It may be a good idea, therefore, to co-facilitate with a close colleague if possible.

Co-creation processes require a special type of leadership

Co-creation processes require a special type of leadership. Compared to a more traditional understanding of leadership, where the mandate to lead is unambiguous and rooted in a hierarchy, co-creation processes may seem messy, unclear, complex and diverse, as participants belong to different organizations with different logics.

You may say, that leadership of co-creative processes is continuously negotiated, as leaders of co-creation processes collaborate with external actors over whom they have no formal capacity to make decisions. This implies leading external partners who may decide to leave the



collaboration at any minute, should a situation become too complicated or the task meaningless. Consequently, leadership in co-creation processes entails skills of creating ‘companionship’ among participants by articulating the ‘gains’ and ‘values’ each participating partner may obtain through collaboration.

Facilitating co-creation of urban biodiversity, thus, implies a leadership task of: bringing together different **stakeholders** to collaborate on a **shared purpose** by merging the **resources and knowledge** of different actors through **linking leadership**.

In short, leadership in co-creation processes entails **creating the right conditions for collaboration to take place**.

How to create the right conditions for collaboration

Research points to the following leadership interventions as key to successful co-creation:

- Analysing the field of stakeholders relevant for the task at hand and mobilizing and linking ‘the right people’
- Exploring and recognizing the different participants’ motivation and interests
- Developing a common understanding of the task supported by the different sectors and stakeholders
- Building trust and handling conflicts and power differences among stakeholders
- Continuously supporting collaboration through facilitative leadership

Source: Tortzen & de Jongh 2021

The tools presented in the following will help you create the right conditions for collaboration.

Tools for getting the right people in the room

How to map and mobilize participants

In the Guide on Co-creating Biodiversity (link) you will find some project tools for mapping relevant participants for a specific urban biodiversity initiative. When mapping the field of stakeholders and seeking out who to involve in a certain co-creation initiative, you may take a **task-oriented approach**, mapping possible stakeholders in terms of the initiative in question.

On the one hand: Stakeholders, **who will be affected** by the initiative – i.e. owners, , maintainers, users or neighbours of a certain area of land.

And on the other hand: Stakeholders **who may affect** this initiative, i.e. contribute resources in terms of land, professional knowledge, practical skills, power and connections, social network, storytelling and communication skills, funding etc. When working to enhance urban biodiversity, an essential resource, of course, is ownership of land. Therefore, including stakeholders that will allow access to an area, is crucial. Often, the easiest way to get access to urban areas, is to collaborate with the municipality (see the guide).

This task-oriented and systematic approach to stakeholder mapping may give a good overview and some ideas about the stakeholder landscape.

Tool: Mindmap of stakeholders

Draw a mindmap to explore all the different kind of stakeholders related to the task at hand and reflect on their possible stake as well as possible resources and contribution to the initiative.

Questions:

Who will be affected by the initiative:

Who owns the area

Who live nearby?

Who is maintaining the area?

Who is using the area for recreation or other purposes?

Etc.

Who and what may affect the initiative:

Who has the knowledge, we need?

Who has practical skills?

Who may contribute economic funding?

Who is well connected?

Who has political power and influence?

etc.

Explore what is already there

A different approach, is to **explore existing initiatives** to connect with and build on. It is important to remember, that co-creation initiatives do not always need to start from scratch and evolve according to a 'project logic'. Sustainable co-creation projects are often based on 'what is already there', linking existing initiatives, agendas and stakeholders, thereby supporting collaboration and enlarging their impact.

A more pragmatic way of mobilizing participants for a co-creative biodiversity initiative is to think in terms of ‘what is already happening – and how may these initiatives be linked?’ by building alliances and connections. This entails mapping active stakeholders, institutions and existing activities that are currently addressing related agendas or tasks – and linking them in a common initiative. This exercise may open your mind for stakeholders, you are not normally aware of and are not used to collaborate with. |

Case: Combining social and environmental sustainability

The Greek NGO Organization Earth combines social and environmental sustainability by inviting marginalized citizens, such as refugees and inhabitants of deprived urban areas, to participate in i.e. maintaining urban gardens, preparing common meals etc. These initiatives imply collaborating carefully with stakeholders across social, cultural and language differences.

When working with urban biodiversity, relevant stakeholders could be local citizens interested in gardening or birdlife, local kindergartens or schools that aim to teach children about biodiversity, researchers and experts collecting data for their research as well as local politicians and city managers with strategic ambitions of enhancing urban biodiversity in the city.

Case: An idea workshop to mobilize participants

In Tyrstedlund Naturpark (nature park) in the city of Horsens, Denmark, the aim was to develop an area of 80.000 m² into a ‘laboratory’ for biodiversity, demonstrating different ways to enhance biodiversity. To mobilize local inhabitants interested in contributing, the facilitator set up an idea workshop and invited local inhabitants to join. The workshop consisted of both knowledge, hands-on experience and brainstorming: A ‘biodiversity expert’ known from TV gave a lecture on biodiversity, participants were taken on a tour of the area, identifying and registering existing species. And finally, they were invited to brainstorm on ideas for developing the area – and to sign up for a working group. Around 60 locals participated, and 12 stayed on for the working groups.

It is productive for co-creation to gather a core group (typically 4-8 members) of participants with a relatively high degree of diversity as well as relevant competences and networks in relation to the task at hand. Also, the mindset of the participants matter. It is supportive to include participants open to working with a co-creative mindset, particularly among representatives from the public sector.

Case: Collaborating with schools about brush fences

Aiming to promote brush fences in local communities to prevent garden waste and enhance biodiversity, a Danish waste company collaborated with local schools to build brush fences in the school grounds. The children had fun filling up the brush fences, the teachers were happy to have brush fences with insects and small animals nearby for teaching about biology and biodiversity. And the children became ‘biodiversity ambassadors’ urging their parents to deposit their garden waste in the brush fences.

Mobilizing participants: Go with the energy

So, once you have identified possible stakeholders and participants for a biodiversity initiative, how to best approach them? Use your personal network – do you know anybody who are connected to the people, you would like to talk with? Existing relations help build trust and

open doors. Start with an informal and personal contact – getting to know each other over a cup of coffee.

Case: Pragmatic mobilization

In the 'CRETHINK initiative (Co-creative RETHINKing for sustainable cities) partners from Denmark, Iceland, Slovenia and Italy worked co-creatively to promote local sustainability cases. For the Italian partner, an NGO, it proved impossible to recruit participants from the public sector. Instead, the Italian group aimed at strengthening their impact in the public sector by including participants with relations to the relevant public institutions.

When approaching possible participants, the following two principles may be helpful:

Tools for mobilizing participants

- Think of your task as **exploring common ground** rather than mobilizing participants into 'your biodiversity initiative'. An explorative mindset allows you to approach possible participants describing your idea and carefully listening to their perspectives and motives, openly discussing possible common gains from working together. This approach contributes to establishing a common ground, which is important for the co-creation process to succeed.
- Co-creation initiatives often **develop like 'riddles in water'**. This is a reason why starting out pragmatically with a small group of engaged participants – maybe even some of whom are your friends or colleagues - may well be the right thing to do. Often, once the initiative gets underway and positive stories are beginning to spread, more stakeholders will get interested and sign up.

So, don't wait until you have mobilized a perfect core group of participants – go with the energy and take small steps forward. Energy, engagement and an open dialogue about different participants' motivations and contributions are the most important starting point in co-creation processes!

Tools for facilitating co-creation processes

The following sections offers you a range of tools for facilitating co-creation processes. Tools that will hopefully prepare you to handle some of the group dynamic challenges inherent in processes of collaboration between a group of stakeholders from different social and cultural backgrounds, with different skills, agendas and motivations. In that sense you may say that facilitating co-creation processes is about helping diverse participants finding common ground and working together to solve a common task.

A good start:

It is crucial, once you have gathered a core group of people who will work together, to build a common understanding of the task and set appropriate boundaries, creating a safe and respectful space in which a group of diverse people can work together productively.

To secure a good start for the collaboration, you must facilitate the group participants aligning expectations and ambitions in terms of the common task (see next section) as well as in terms of the practicalities of working together.



On a practical level, proper planning, organization, and documentation are important elements of an effective group work processes. Therefore, the group should initiate the work by developing a clear basis for working together.

Tools for supporting group work

Information: Collect the following information from each participant and provide it to the group: name, telephone number, email address, preferred time and method of contact, and times available for meetings.

Competences: Explore the professional and personal backgrounds of the participants to determine their knowledge and mindset in terms of the topic and what kind of professional and personal contributions they are willing and able to make to the common task.

Tasks and timeframe: Discuss and plan what major tasks are to be completed by the group in terms of research, idea generation, communication, mobilizing participants, practical tasks etc. Establish realistic timeframes for completing each major task, allowing time for unforeseeable or uncontrollable events, such as illness, unavailable resources, computer failure etc.

Roles and responsibilities: Assign roles and tasks to individual members and subgroups. Be prepared to re-negotiate plans, tasks and roles as the initiative develops. Decide how to assign roles and responsibilities to each member in accordance with their preferences and strengths. Participants may serve in more than one role, share roles, or function in different roles during different stages of the initiative.

How to build trust and develop a common understanding

The initial phase of the group's collaboration is key to succeeding in the long run. Therefore, you must urge the group to spend time on developing a common understanding of the task and building trust. It may well be, that the participants are eager to start the work in practice and just want to 'get going', but as facilitator it will be a good investment to prepare for spending some time on trust-building activities before setting out to solve the task. Clarity in terms of the purpose and roles and a framework that allows participants to articulate concerns and doubts, is conducive for collaboration.

Mutual understanding and trust among participants is key to good collaboration, particularly among actors carrying different perspectives and logics. It is common to 'underestimate' the differences and look them over to 'get going' with the task. As a facilitator your task is to facilitate dialogues that may evoke and give legitimacy to the participants for their motivations, interests and perspectives on the project. The purpose is to create a 'safe collaborative space'

where participants feel free to express their motives and opinions. Participants who feel acknowledged and listened to tend to be more open towards other participants perspectives.

Tool: How to facilitate trust

Trust and relations among participants may be supported through trust-building exercises. F.inst. by letting participants talk/interview each other one-by-one to make them feel safe and support them in expressing themselves. One way to make differences and conflicting interests explicit is by addressing the driving forces and agendas of the participants with questions like:

- What is your motivation for participating in this project?
- What are your hopes and worries about this collaboration/this project?

Other facilitation tools for developing and maintaining trust and relations among participants are working with a collaboration contract to establish inclusive ground rules and the use of time outs in meetings of the group.

Tool: Develop a collaboration contract

Work with aligning the participants' expectations in terms of the purpose and desired outcome of the collaboration as well as the roles and frame, e.g. by developing 'collaboration contract' among the participants. Developing the contract will clarify to all participants what common task they are working on and what is expected of them during the collaboration. As facilitator you have the task of ensuring that the contract is continuously re-negotiated among the participants as the initiative develops.

Tool: Use 'time outs' in meetings

In facilitating the collaboration of the group, it is vital to allow for 'time outs' where the collaboration of the group is discussed at a meta-level, allowing 'difficult emotions' such as insecurity, doubts or frustrations to be addressed.

Also, it is important to allow room for continuously discussion and re-negotiation of the groups' tasks, roles and responsibilities, as the initiative develops.

How to facilitate cooperation among diverse participants

Collaboration in a group is easier, when participants feel safe to confront and interact in an open and effective way, overcoming misunderstandings, friction and sometimes different points of view. This implies taking up the challenge of creating constructive relationships with the other members of the group.

The following are simple but effective facilitation techniques that may be used to make the most of the combination of the different competences and expertise involved as well as to promote the exchange of information and resources:

Tool: Opening Circle

Placing participants in a circle facing each other sets the tone for an interactive session, where everyone may feel free to participate and engage with each other. Adding a talking-stick to the circle also helps to send the message that although lead roles will be shared, when someone does have the lead or has asked to talk, the group is expected to give full attention to that individual.

Tool: World Café

Divide the group of participants into small groups (from three to five people) that gather around tables and discuss a common topic. After the first conversation, someone stays at the table as a “host”, while the others move to a new table. The host summarises what has taken place at that table and those who are new share their previous conversations. In this way, the threads of the various conversations are woven together.

Tool: Mapping, artistic visualisation and prototyping

Using mapping involves collecting information verbally from participants on a given topic area of interest, and then recording it on a flipchart or some type of ‘map’ that the group can logically follow. For example, you might gather information on who might be interested in your project and where or how to reach out to them.

You may also use artistic visualization, e.g. hands-on art activity in terms of drawing or building models, that incorporates the themes under discussion and helps to illustrate them.

Prototype techniques like scale modelling, storyboarding, simulation, role-playing or drawings may be used for sharing and testing your thinking, and gain valuable feedback from relevant stakeholders to decide what to do next. Prototyping can help test how something looks, feels, works or behaves, before you do a real-life test.

Acknowledge differences – and treat them as a strength

A common pitfall of facilitating co-creative processes is the urge to reduce complexities and exclude voices to reach a quick result. This is counterproductive to obtaining innovative results. Therefore, an important task of the facilitator is to treat diversity as a strength and leave time and space for it to unfold.

This is psychologically important, as people who experience respect and responsiveness will be more ready to respect and accommodate others’ perspectives – finally resulting in a shared understanding and outcome. Treating differences as a strength means working with differentiation (exploring and acknowledging differences) among participants before beginning to work with integration (finding common ground). As facilitator you may help the participants develop a shared and holistic image of the challenge by ‘collecting the puzzle’ consisting of all the different perspectives.

Tools for developing a holistic image of the task

The following tools are suitable for helping participants sharing perspectives and developing a nuanced and holistic image

- Using go-arounds for sharing perspectives
- Drawing a shared timeline of the challenging question inviting all participants individually to contribute with their own story
- Working on a shared mind-map of the challenge, depicting important issues and questions – this will give the participants a shared image of the task ahead

As a facilitator, you should strive to create a room for collaboration, where participants feel safe to talk openly about their agendas and motives.

How to mediate conflicts and handle power differences

Conflicts may arise in a group working together for many different reasons.

Understanding conflicts:

One way of understanding conflicts is by looking at their dimensions:

Instrumental conflicts: Conflicts concerning how the group should work, i.e. how to conduct meetings, go about practical tasks etc.

Conflicts of interest: Conflicts concerning resources or power, i.e. who makes decisions about priorities and resources?

Conflicts of value: Conflicts concerning what participants find right or wrong, i.e. in terms of their view of nature

Personal conflicts: Conflicts arising between participants related to personal characteristics, i.e. dominant behaviour, low self-esteem etc.

Conflicts may involve several dimensions, but the 'center of gravity' often lays in one dimension.

Source: Adrian, 2023

Conflicts – particularly concerning interests and value - may easily arise in diverse groups, as they are characterised by different visions and behaviours, linked to the educational and experiential background of group members. Conflicts are not always a problem but may also lead to progress and mutual understanding.

Possible conflicts may be handled in a constructive way, if you as a facilitator are able to identify a potentially "explosive" situation and defuse it or mitigate the damage and rebuild the harmony of the group. If a conflict arises in the group, analyse it to understand its nature and stage of development (what type of conflict are we talking about? is it already underway? could it be triggered at any moment?) and potential impact. Based on this assessment, you may act in two different ways:

Indifference: if the conflict is trivial and could be resolved between the parties involved, without harm to the group. This may be the case with instrumental conflicts, that are common in decision-making processes and may be interpreted constructively.

Intervention: as a facilitator you must take action if the conflict threatens to compromise the whole project and the cohesion of the group, i.e. if a personal conflict is escalating into other types of conflicts. When you as a facilitator decide to intervene, you should focus attention on the common goal, encouraging people to cooperate to achieve the results envisioned. You may also "negotiate" to reach a compromise or involve people outside the conflict to ease tensions.

Tool for lowering the risk of conflict: Feelings meetings

Conflict reduction may be reached by leaving space for so-called 'feelings meetings' or talks during the collaboration. Such meetings allow the group to involve and support participants as 'human beings' with sentiments and to resolve concerns, problems and conflicts before they become too serious. Often, the possibility to articulate sentiments and be listened to, will reduce frustrations and conflicts.

- Create a safe enough space so that people feel able to open up.

- It helps to use tools such as talking sticks or go-rounds to encourage active listening.
- Begin by asking people about where they are at in their lives outside the group. This will give a context for everyone's reactions when you get to issues within the group
- Listen for what is not being said. For example, some people and groups find it hard to admit to negative feelings and tiptoe around conflicts

In general, avoiding hidden agendas and exposing and welcoming differences in terms of motivations, interests and perspectives among participants is an important approach in handling power asymmetries. This may be done by inviting participants to talk openly about their motivations for participating and the agendas that are important to them in the collaboration – and by developing an inclusive space where different motivations and contributions are acknowledged and welcomed.

How to support the participants' engagement

Working with tangible, local initiatives that are meaningful in the local context - which make a visible difference - is supportive for co-creation. A very important driver of engagement, thus, is to obtain 'quick wins', i.e. visible results showing participants that they are able to make a positive difference. As a facilitator you may help participants setting goals, that are relatively modest, but feasible and manageable to keeping up motivation and drive. Also, keeping in mind 'who we are doing this for' is important for the motivation.

Case: Participant-driven cases and small successes

In the 'CRETHINK initiative (Co-creative RETHINKing for sustainable cities) partners from Denmark, Iceland, Slovenia and Italy worked co-creatively to promote sustainability cases. The groups in each of the four cities decided on sustainability topics, which they found relevant and meaningful in their local context. This approach of participant-driven work ensured a high degree of motivation.

The participants also found it motivating to work hands-on with specific topics and to experiment and be able to obtain small and visible successes in the process. The experience of making a positive difference was an important motivator.

It also supports participants' engagement to spread the word about achievements in order to receive broader feedback and acknowledgement (see the section 'spreading the word').

Motivation for climate action: The five S's

Research focussing on the psychological aspects of climate action points to five S's as supportive:

- Social, i.e. acting as part of a community
- Simple, i.e. easy to perform
- Supportive, i.e. providing helpful structures
- Storytelling, i.e. visions about a better future
- Signals, i.e. feedback on the results obtained and positive differences made

Source: Stoknes, 2022

Motivation and participation in co-creation processes is vulnerable and volatile, as the collaboration is based on voluntary engagement and often performed in the participants' free time. Therefore, it is important to continuously motivate the participants. As a facilitator, you can help make it meaningful and 'fun' to participate in the co-creation process by building a good core team. This may be done through continuously recognizing and securing the participants' motivation and interests in the initiative. While other supportive measures could be social activities as well as respecting the time and other tasks of the group-members, organizing collaboration and meetings in ways that fit as well as possible into the participants' life.

Case: Establishing a network of 'ambassadors'

As part of the UNESCO Biosphere initiative of enhancing biodiversity, well being and community building in a local area in Møn, Denmark, a network of 'biosphere ambassadors' was established. To become an ambassador, you must support the ambition of the Biosphere and give your own personal 'oath' on how to contribute to realizing the ambition. 150 different actors, i.e. citizens, landowners, businesses and NGOs have given their 'oath' and have been appointed Biosphere ambassadors giving them access to a community with regular meetings, visits and training. The ambassadors contribute in many different ways, i.e. by planting seaweed, establishing waterholes for endangered frogs or developing sustainable tourism and food production. It is highly motivating for the ambassadors to be part of a supportive network and get to know about other initiatives.

Besides achieving results, being part of a good team is an important motivator for participants in co-creation. Working in a positive and stimulating climate drives people to continue to improve and strive for an efficient and high-quality work ethic.

Tool: Ingredients for building a good team

Clear goals: It is easier to work together if the common goals are clear. As a facilitator your role is to motivate participants and encourage them to give their best by making them feel an essential part of the project

Participant-driven: Participants need to have a voice in the decision-making process to keep up motivation. As a facilitator you may stimulate discussion, helping all team members to find new and more creative solutions. When team members feel acknowledged and valued, they will be more inclined to invent, create innovation and propose ideas.

A healthy work environment: The group needs a space that is pleasant to work and spend time in. Respect privacy, check for noise, air quality, natural light. It is also important to provide areas and time to relax. It will create a useful diversion to unplug and relax, which will strengthen the cohesion among team members.

As co-creation processes are characterized by a high degree of complexity and unpredictability, it may be helpful to continuously facilitate learning and reflection among participants on the collaboration as well as the common task.

Tools for reflection

Ways to facilitate reflection among participants to improve collaboration and re-negotiate the task and the process if needed:

- Finalizing a meeting/session with a round of reflection among participants on how the collaboration is going and what might be improved
- Facilitating meta-discussions among participants on the progression of the task, asking questions like: "What is the status of our task?", "Are we working in the right direction?". "Should anything be changed or prioritized differently" etc.

How to spread the word

Do not underestimate the wish of a small group of people working co-creatively with urban biodiversity to make a positive difference and affect the mindset and behaviour of the local community and general public. And do not underestimate their need of being acknowledged and recognized by a broader group of people, including their own organisation and peer-group. As already mentioned, an important driver for participants in co-creative processes is to make their effort and results visible to the local community as well as their colleagues – to 'spread the word' in terms of knowledge about biodiversity measures and possibly engage a broader group in the task of enhancing urban biodiversity. Accordingly, communication activities are an important part of initiatives co-creating urban biodiversity.

Tools: How to spread the word

Groups working with biodiversity initiatives may draw on a range of different tools to inform, engage and mobilize relevant stakeholders and audiences:

Project narratives: developing a project narrative is central for communicating what the initiative is about as well as its history, rationale and future. The project narrative may be used to reach stakeholders and mobilize participants

Social media: using different social media as a way to engage audiences may be a highly effective way, when the mix of content, audience and context makes sense for a particular. Combine the power of images with written text that explains the intervention logic or simply contextualizes activities

Events: may be used to increase visibility of the initiative, mobilizing active participants as well as building new networks. In tangible sustainability initiatives it is easy to attract attention and active participants i.e. with 'planting days' or 'bio-blitzes'. Events that allow the general public a first-hand experience of the sustainability initiative as well as direct contact with the co-creators

Case: Professional advice and visualization helps common ground

In the Danish biodiversity initiative of Tyrstedlund Naturpark (nature park) in the city of Horsens, the facilitator engaged a professional landscape architect to advise on how to place the different biodiversity elements in the area – and to visualize the imagined future development of the area. The professional advice and visualization helped the different stakeholders find common ground on how to best develop the area.

So, as a facilitator of a group of participants working on a co-creative biodiversity initiative, you should strive to include participants with skills and networks relevant for communication activities, as they are very important for creating riddles of participation.

How to cope as a facilitator

Leading and facilitating co-creation processes may be a demanding task, because of the diversity of participants and motivations and the insecurity and ongoing re-negotiation of the task and process. Also, taking the role as ‘boundary spanner’ working on the edge of and between organisations with different logics and purposes, may be hard – and sometimes lonely – work.

Therefore, it is important that you as facilitator seek support and coaching from colleagues that may help you reflect on the processes you are coping with and your role in them. As well as providing you with insights, moral support and – if needed – tools and advice on how to proceed. Also, it may be a good idea to establish a ‘facilitator duo’, sharing the role and responsibility with a colleague.

If you want to read more about hands on facilitation tools, we recommend the following books and websites:

https://dragondreaming.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/DragonDreaming_eBook_english_V02.09.pdf - tools for a participative and systemic methods called ‘Dragon Dreaming’ inspired by the thinking of aboriginal people

www.seedsforchange.org.uk/tools - a website offering facilitation tools for meetings and processes

www.nesta.org.uk/toolkit/collective-intelligence-design-playbook/ - a website offering tools for designing collective intelligence projects

Weisbord, M. & Janoff, S. (2007) Don’t just do something, stand there! Ten principles for leading meetings that matter.

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