

Achieving Impact

SHARING, DISSEMINATING AND CREATING A LEGACY

This 'How to Guide' explores ways to maximise the impact and use of the outputs of co-innovation projects.

The multi-actor project LIAISON (Better Rural Innovation: Linking Actors, Instruments and Policies through Networks) has been studying ways of speeding up innovation in agriculture, forestry and related sectors. Transformation and change in these areas are the results of actions and interactions between a diverse range of people brought together and engaged in generating, exchanging and using knowledge. Participating in co-innovation partnerships is in itself a process and its wider impact results in cultural, values and behavioural change across the group as well as at an individual level. This How to Guide explores the benefits of having a clear, detailed and well-planned **dissemination strategy**. It explores how groups can **embed achieving impact** into co-innovation activities and improve the ways in which success is **measured and evaluated**.

PLANNING AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Getting it right from the start – what is the story of change?

Innovation and knowledge resulting from the group's co-innovation process will be disseminated and embedded within the partnership, but if it is to achieve greater impact and transformation it also helps to influence others outside of this core group. Doing this effectively requires planning and the

involvement of the right people from the beginning and throughout the process.

A communications plan targeting beneficiaries and others that can influence decision making and change in practices should be created at the start. The plan should address how the project's outputs will be shared, how these new practices, ideas or research came to be and what was learnt along the way to share these with as many people as desired.

LIAISON TOOLS

Journey mapping and **Impact Stories** – provide a method to translate experiences of learning through co-innovation, presented in a way that can be effectively communicated to others.

What are effective models for dissemination?

Sharing ideas and results with a wider audience, depends on the funding and resources available; from the experience of larger scale projects explored by LIAISON, there was merit in establishing dedicated activity to provide a focus and impetus for dissemination. However, for smaller initiatives it can be more difficult to gain momentum for a new idea within their limited resources. This is why linking in with existing, or forming new innovation networks, can be beneficial.

A key challenge is simply to achieve effective listening – people need to make the effort and take the time to listen to other people’s perspectives, experiences and ideas! The willingness to listen is an important step towards building trust.

There are many opportunities available for projects to improve knowledge-sharing and dissemination from the start. For example, ‘practice led innovation networks’ and ‘farmer innovation groups’ or similar structures can help develop co-innovation between a consortium and beyond throughout the project’s life and into the future.

See the *Connected Partnerships How to Guide* for more information.

LIAISON case studies found different ways in which this was done, for example:

- [Tous Paysans](#)¹ which involved stakeholders from the beginning of the process created a video and flyer to help disseminate the collective method and the results.
- [AgroCycle](#)² developed a comprehensive 'educational' platform focused at children to share their key messages.
- [Food Heroes](#)³ had a novel approach to engagement commencing the project with an exhibition (at Dutch Design Week) to showcase the project before it even properly started.
- [10Frame Beehive](#)⁴ used social media for dissemination

Embedding co-innovation outputs into existing knowledge exchange activities

An effective way of sharing the project’s developments and results to a wider audience is by involving farming and forestry advisors from the start, even in preparing the project proposal, as they will have a key role in supporting the adoption of new practices.

As explored in the *Connected Partnerships How to Guide*, the co-innovation process is improved when ‘fertilised’ or ‘stimulated’ by ideas from outside the group; a consortium can profit from collaborating with relevant external groups who could support its communication strategy, such as farmer or consumer associations. Farmer networks in particular help to spread the knowledge from farmer to farmer.

For certain types of innovation such as a new practice it is important to focus and engage with ‘champions’ to help to disseminate an innovation within a specific target group. A *champion* is someone who has already built credibility with the target group. Involving them can be an effective strategy in building wider engagement and achieving longer-term impact.

‘MAKING A DIFFERENCE’ – HOW TO ENCOURAGE ADOPTION

How far does the group want its co-innovation impact to go?

Multi-actor projects should agree on how far and wide the outputs of their dissemination activity should go. Sometimes this will be pre-determined by the funder who will have a view on the level of change or desired impact. As outlined by Moore et al., 2015⁵ this could be: “*scaling out, scaling up, scaling deep*”. *Scaling out* refers to changing institutions at the level of policy, rules and law. *Scaling up* is about increasing the number of people who are impacted. *Scaling deep* focuses on changing relationships, cultural values and beliefs.

The importance of scaling to achieve change and effective transformation should not be dismissed. It is also not, however, one directional as knowledge flows throughout an effectively managed co-innovation process helping to form and evolve the outputs throughout the duration of the activity in

¹ liaison2020.eu/casestudy/tous-paysans/

² liaison2020.eu/casestudy/agrocycle/

³ liaison2020.eu/casestudy/food-heroes/

⁴ liaison2020.eu/casestudy/10-frame-beehive/

⁵ Moore et al., 2015 Moore, M. L., Riddell, D., & Vocisano, D. (2015). Scaling out, scaling up, scaling deep: strategies of non-profits in advancing systemic social innovation. *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, (58), 67-84.

order to refine the outputs ready for the target beneficiaries.

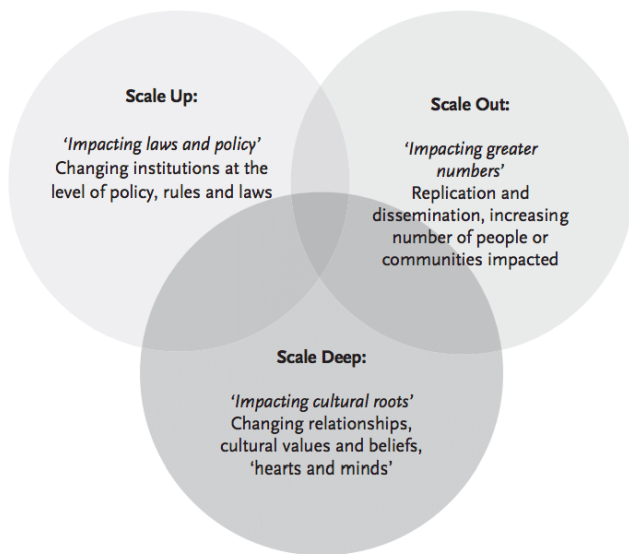


Figure 1 Types of scaling, from Moore et al., 2019

Through the LIAISON project, the range of ways different co-innovation partnerships tackled this objective varied. While there were practices and tactics that helped improve their success, there were also limiting factors to consider. It is also true, however, that not all partnerships might wish to create change, and may have smaller but equally important objectives.

Which of these strategies is best to scale knowledge and innovations?

To achieve effective impact all types of scaling should happen in one way or another. Partnerships will select appropriate strategies to share and help grow the knowledge and innovations generated beyond those involved in the co-innovation project; but not all partnerships aim to scale innovations.

Depending on the expected impact, LIAISON found effective examples of scaling strategies in practice:

- **'Scaling out'** emphasises the replication of successful innovations in different communities (or 'niches') with the hopes of spreading those same results to more people. This has been proved to be

particularly effective when dealing with context specific issues that affect the system they are trying to change. The [Agrolora](#)⁶ initiative worked with water unions and farmers.

- For many initiatives, such as [Programa de Sustentabilidade de Vinhos do Alentejo](#), [Arena Skog](#), [L'Atelier Paysan](#), [10Frame](#) [Beehive](#)⁷, the route to greater impact required advocating and lobbying for change in regulation, or **'scaling up'** to affect policies. The policy level arguably has 'the largest impact' and is capable of changing the 'rules of the game'.
- Strategies for **'scaling deep'** are related to the notion that lasting change has been achieved only when people's hearts and minds, their values and cultural practices, and the quality of relationships they have, are transformed. The scaling deep concept, although not consciously or under this definition, was a concept often highlighted in the case studies analysed by LIAISON, for example the [Nod Verde](#)⁸ case study where the introduction of food hubs helped to change the mind set of the producers when selling directly to consumers as well as assisting consumers to develop a greater understanding of and support for producers.

It is relevant to highlight, however, that sometimes the effort required to scale might not be worthwhile for more limited, timebound or resource-scarce projects.

What are the factors contributing to successful dissemination of outputs?

While it is likely that this activity is embedded throughout a co-innovation project once the final outputs are ready a focused drive to share the results is often required. LIAISON has identified four success factors in disseminating the outputs of co-innovation projects:

- **Openness** – providing clear information on the sources and the basic assumptions for all output and information disseminated by the project

⁶ liaison2020.eu/casestudy/agrolora/

⁷ liaison2020.eu/our-network/case-studies/

⁸ liaison2020.eu/casestudy/nod-verde/

- **Clarity** – providing clear information, making sure implementation is simple, and avoiding jargon whenever possible
- **Motivation** – finding a common interest, specific need or goal, willingness to contribute to the local economy or proactively networking for the use of the output and the enhancement of the project's potential impacts
- **Resources** – sharing the financial risk or costs, being organised with procedures in place and dedicated resource to support with training and advice on how to use the innovation

It is advisable to consider the stages that target beneficiaries of the innovation may need to go through when successfully adopting it. There will be different expectations for all in terms of the speed of innovation and upscaling. For example, farmers may see the adoption of new practices as an incremental process through making small changes if they do not have the available capacity to make a large investment or are concerned about risks. For any business it will be important to have evidence of the impact adopting the new idea will have. LIAISON has developed a **Tool Box** to help groups identify and respond to differing needs and motivations. These can assist in making sure the project remains agile in its efforts, responding to opportunities when they arise and remaining relevant to target groups.

Crucially, improving wider uptake of the project's results requires involving the right people from the very beginning of the project: for example, partnerships where farmers and farmer associations were not initially involved struggled to engage and reach practice-based networks to implement their results. Tools that map and plan the desired social network surrounding a co-innovation project can be accessed from **LIAISON's Tool Box**. These can be helpful as key decision-making tools when it comes to involving the 'right' type and variety of stakeholders.



LIAISON has compiled a handbook on participatory methods for co-innovation initiatives, and a Tool Box of evaluation and impact assessment tools.

What might get in the way of sharing results and the uptake of new ideas?

A group can increase their success in sharing their findings by considering how they to adapt their message and the relevant information to make it accessible and interesting for particular target audiences. When doing so, it is important to be aware that there are some practical or structural obstacles that need to be identified and overcome.

For example, if an activity requires an investment, access to funding will be key for the overall success of its adoption and impact. Groups should dedicate time to exploring where funding can be accessed from or form partnerships to help lobby for investment. Consequently, access to funding can often turn out to be an extra 'project' within the project.

There could also be cultural and communication barriers that make it difficult to convey the messages and benefits to effectively incentivise the adoption of the output amongst beneficiaries or customers. This is when involving these target groups throughout the co-innovation process can prove particularly fruitful as it helps to identify and respond to barriers as they are identified. Adoption of some innovations can be slowed down by regulatory and legal issues. In some of the case studies explored by LIAISON a successful strategy adopted was to get more people replicating the innovation to add power/weight behind the

LIAISON TOOLS

Actor/Role Identification (ID) and Personas: Understanding Our Stakeholders – can increase reflexive awareness of cultural variety.

innovation and to demonstrate impact as a way to influence institutions and regulators to consider changing their stance. To find out more see [Programa de Sustentabilidade de Vinhos do Alentejo](https://liaison2020.eu/casestudy/vinhos-alentejo/)⁹ and [L'Atelier Paysan](https://liaison2020.eu/casestudy/latelier-paysan/)¹⁰.

Lack of confidence around the prospects and needs of a business, or a degree of scepticism about the value of the innovation can hinder projects; this can often be alleviated if others are seen to adopt it.

⁹ <https://liaison2020.eu/casestudy/vinhos-alentejo/>

¹⁰ <https://liaison2020.eu/casestudy/latelier-paysan/>

RESPONDING TO SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

How difficult is it to recognise impact at a systems level?

Following an analysis of 32 in-depth case studies selected by LIAISON it has been possible to identify a few factors experienced by the various groups in recognising a project's impact. It seemed to be quite difficult, particularly for farmers and foresters to collectively realise the full extent of the impact being made. Some of the limitations included:

- Understanding the actions and changes that could mitigate their impact on the climate, but not valuing their personal role in responding to the climate emergency
- Recognising and appreciating the value of the activity to the wider community, but not necessarily getting involved
- Difficulties in changing people's mind sets – it can be hard to support the creation of an attitude receptive to change
- Economic sustainability can be easier to assess and evidence than other indicators such as environmental and societal

Take time to understand, track and translate the differences amongst stakeholders' situations and objectives, as well as build confidence in farmers and foresters of their capability to achieve considerable impact when working together.

Engaging the next generation

Across the case studies explored by LIAISON and rural communities in general there is a shared concern about youth migration and lack of succession opportunities for family farms.

Co-innovation projects, with a focus on innovation and new solutions, can provide an effective way to engage the next generation in activities and support their involvement in rural activities. One of the LIAISON Ambassador projects [Green Workshop Wenland](#)¹¹ focused on this issue through inviting university students to 'design workshops' as part of

an initiative to attract skilled workers and young people to the area.

In considering how the next generation may be effectively engaged, it is also important to account for gender and diversity.

LIAISON TOOLS

Gender Appraisal and **Empowerment Appraisal** – these are helpful tools in evaluating the presence of biases and supporting empowered, diverse participation.

INTO THE FUTURE – WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

How can a public/private partnership be effectively managed to ensure its impact?

A common requirement when stimulating and upscaling innovation through a public-private partnership is finding out early on whether the participants have the same objectives, particularly in terms of what happens once the co-innovation process is completed. There might be different ambitions in terms of upscaling (e.g., a private partner might not be interested in upscaling an innovation due to Intellectual Property (IP) issues and the risk of losing competitive advantage) and there are also differences in organisational culture, capacities, and funding between the private and public partners.

During the early stages of development of a co-innovation project potential issues regarding IP can be best addressed and a decision made on how this will be managed. This will help to determine whether a particular type of funding source is appropriate such as publicly funded projects focused on those issues that allow for open access and are pre-competitive. In some cases it may mean that a particular individual or business will prefer not to take part.

¹¹ liaison2020.eu/abmassadors/greenworkshop/

What if the timeline is too short for dissemination?

For many projects they may only last two to three years due to funding limitations. This can raise various challenges not least the difficulty in showing tangible results in a short project period, especially, where partnerships in a specific area or sector have formed specifically for this project. For this reason, it helps to avoid overpromising when explaining the expected impacts in the project proposal. However, the project can be a first step which, if positive, opens the doors to future projects as the partnership evolves.

Building a sustainable future for the partnership

It can sometimes be difficult to predict whether a partnership will be sustainable beyond the initial period of activity (e.g. lifetime of funding opportunity). One of the most relevant factors that improve the likelihood of future co-operation and collaboration is building trust. Partners will rely on each other to meet deadlines. There will also be times when they disagree. Basic rules around collaboration and communication set down at the start of the partnership will help to solve conflicts and ensure trust-based relationship in the long-term.

For more on working in partnerships see the *Healthy Partnerships How to Guide*.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

What is the most effective way to measure the impact of a co-innovation project?

Impacts and processes are key aspects when evaluating co-innovation projects. Evaluating the process can increase the final impacts of an intervention thereby helping the group to achieve its objectives. In other ways the process of co-innovation may be the impact. Impact is not measured exclusively at the end of an initiative but rather impact assessment can be carried out

throughout the entire process, either continuously or periodically.

The assessment of the co-innovation process and its impact may emerge over a longer timeframe than the initial project duration. This can give all those involved greater satisfaction of having invested money and effort in a fruitful partnership.

The LIAISON project facilitated evaluation co-design with a number of case study initiatives. The approaches trialled were selected to focus on both the processes and relational ties between participants. The critical role of 'learnings and transformations' at an individual participant level is crucial for achieving impact.

LIAISON TOOLS

Economic evaluation tools – a wide range of tools such as Cost-Benefit Analysis, Return on Investment, Social Return on Investment

Scientometrics – measurements such as Impact Factor, Science Citation Index, Author-level metrics, Patents

Altmetrics – include (but are not limited to) peer reviews, citations on Wikipedia and in public policy documents, discussions on research blogs, mainstream media coverage, bookmarks on reference managers like Mendeley, and mentions on social networks such as Twitter

Monitoring tool for impacts (external) – the external impact is referring to the interaction with the social challenges

The capacities of evaluation stakeholders was identified as one area for improvement. There are a number of tools developed to evaluate longer-term impact of the project.

How realistic is it to expect to effectively measure long-term impact?

One of the challenges in co-innovation is evaluating the success – or otherwise – of the interactions and processes that lead to its implementation. This challenge is especially relevant because innovation processes are difficult to control; their results are unpredictable, some “softer” outcomes, such as

relationships improvements and trust building, are difficult to quantify. However, evaluation is needed for several reasons, including learning for future innovation and development, and to evidence the value of co-innovation projects to funders.

LIAISON TOOLS

Appraisal of group dynamics – assesses trust, willingness to share information and general social well-being in a group context.

It is not always easy to state whether a project resulted in specific changes, as these changes may be the result of multiple interventions. Different intervening factors, how the systems operate, multi-national and cumulative impacts from a variety of causes and effects within and beyond the specific project are difficult to include in a project's standard evaluation approaches. In response to this, LIAISON has developed an interactive Tool Box to assist any consortium in planning and implementing their monitoring and evaluation strategies.



LIAISON has compiled a handbook on participatory methods for co-innovation initiatives, and a Tool Box of evaluation and impact assessment tools.

About the LIAISON 'How to Guides'

LIAISON has developed five 'How to Guides' to support practitioners taking part in co-innovation initiatives. For the purposes of this guide a 'practitioner' is any actor seeking to take part in or provide direct support for partners in co-operation initiatives or projects which innovate through a participatory processes.

LIAISON (Better Rural Innovation: Linking Actors, Instruments and Policies through Networks) is a multi-actor project which has been funded within the EIP Agri, an initiative launched by the European Commission in 2012 with its goal of fostering competitive and sustainable agriculture and forestry that *"achieves more and better from less"*.

The interactive innovation approach brings together a diverse range of public and private innovation actors (farmers, advisors, researchers, businesses, NGOs etc.) with complementary knowledge and experience to appraise, gather, co-create and disseminate practical solutions to the real needs of farmers and foresters. These needs are driven by and derived from the real opportunities and day-to-day challenges faced by farmers, foresters and rural businesses. The innovations generated with an interactive approach can deliver solutions that are well adapted to circumstances and which are easier to implement.

- **Coming Together**
- **Good Planning**
- **Healthy Partnerships**
- **Connected Partnerships**
- **Achieving Impact**

These guides highlight what we have learned from **LIAISON's** activities and data collection. The aim is to help all that use them enhance the way they co-innovate in farming, forestry and rural development.

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