

Here is an example of how the Dynamic Learning Agenda has been used in practice in the context of the EU-funded FUSILLI project.

About FUSILLI

FUSILLI is an EU-funded project including 12 municipalities, NGOs, and research partners across Europe. The project started in January 2021, running until December 2024. The core ambition of the project is to overcome barriers for developing and implementing integrated, systemic food policies that support the transition towards sustainable urban food systems. To achieve this goal, the 12 municipalities coordinated *Living Labs*, spaces and/or locations in which they experiment with new food policies and actions that aim to make the food system more sustainable.

Municipal staff members function as the coordinators of the Living Labs. They work on the intersection of the municipal administrations, local politics, coordinating the Living Lab and working with other stakeholders in their city, and FUSILLI as the project that they work for. So, even though every city has different political, institutional, cultural and environmental contexts that determine food system transformation, the Living Lab coordinators have their unique position and task in common. That is why the Living Lab coordinators form a *trans-local* knowledge sharing and learning network in the FUSILLI project, to exchange experiences on the challenges they face and the strategies to address those. The methodology used to facilitate this is the Dynamic Learning Agenda, and a group of transdisciplinary researchers was responsible for setting up and implementing DLA activities and tracking the process.

The Dynamic Learning Agenda-methodology in FUSILLI

January 2021-December 2021 – preparatory phase: The Dynamic Learning Agenda process was kicked off with creating a baseline understanding of the learning questions and challenges that the Living Lab coordinators were already facing, and the project partners invested time in getting people acquainted with the DLA as a methodology. Two methods were used:

- Back-casting working: at the start of the project, an online workshop was held in which the Living Lab coordinators were asked to first envision a future state of their local food systems, and then think back which structural challenges they (might) encounter working towards that future.
- One-on-one introductory conversations in which the researchers explained the DLA to the Living Lab coordinators and asked about initial learning questions and challenges.
- Halfway through the first year, Living Lab coordinators were asked to write a report on their learning questions, the activities they put in place, and reflections they had on whether those were successful.

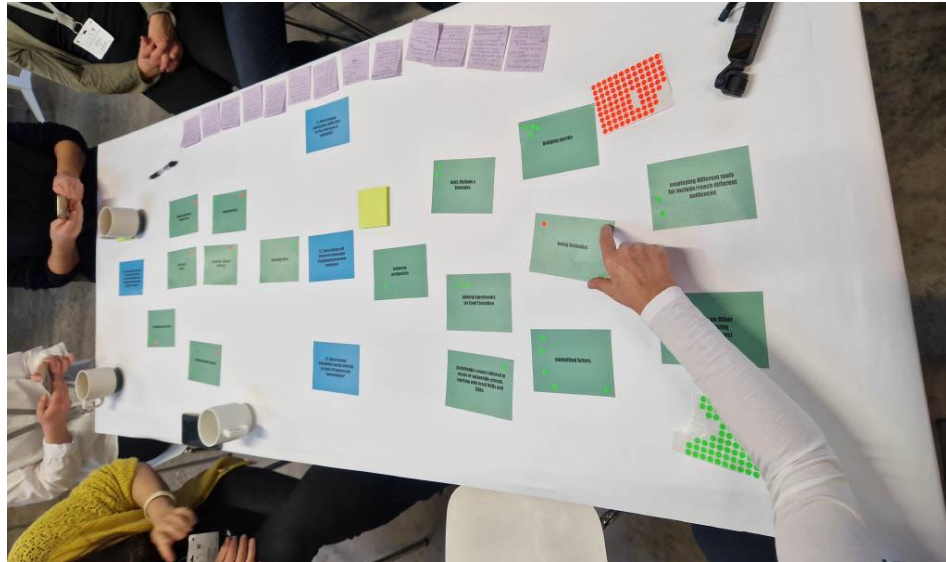


Figure 1 FUSILLI project DLA session

January 2022-May 2024 – core phase: this period formed the main part of the DLA process. This period started with an evaluation workshop, looking back at the first year, and explaining to the Living Lab coordinators how the Dynamic Learning Agenda was given shape in the project. The researchers set up a cycle of approximately 6 months in which two activities would take place:

- Living Lab coordinators were responsible for writing one DLA report reflecting on their 'old' learning questions, the activities they put in place to address those, reflect on whether those were successful and formulate 'new' learning questions if relevant. They were provided with a Microsoft Word-template and an Excel template in which to log this information, and everyone was free to shape those documents in a way that felt comfortable for them to work with, and either carry out the reflection and writing process alone, with their team members or others involved in their local processes. In total, 4 reports were written by every Living Lab coordinator during this period. The researchers provided written feedback to each report, stimulating Living Lab coordinators to expand on or deepen certain topics.
- The researchers organized workshops every half year, which would build on the most pressing, overarching learning questions that arose out of analysing the Dynamic Learning Agenda reports as the process unfolded. In total, 3 in-person workshops were organized during this period in which Living Lab coordinators jointly reflected on challenges and strategies.

May 2024-December 2024 – closing phase: during the final months of the project, the researchers took the time to evaluate the Dynamic Learning Agenda process as it was implemented in FUSILLI. This was done in two ways:

- A round of closing interviews were held by the researchers with the Living Lab coordinators, which focused 1) on the content of their DLAs (i.e. the learning questions, challenges, activities and reflections, as they developed over time), and 2) on

evaluating the DLA in FUSILLI, focusing on the preparatory phase, the reports, and the workshops.

- A closing workshop was held in which the Living Lab coordinators were asked to first look back on the progress of the last three years and identify structural challenges that remain through time, that even though they might have tried to address them, will also remain after the project. Second, the Living Lab coordinators reflected on the successful strategies in addressing those structural challenges. This closing workshop thus aimed to strengthen the main lessons learned coming from the individual DLA processes.

Strenghts of the DLA approach

- Frequency: the half-yearly reporting period gave ample time for cities to prepare and schedule when to write their DLA reports, and coincided well with the half-yearly project consortium meetings.
- Ownership: the DLA in FUSILLI offered freedom to each Living Lab coordinator to be set up in a way that felt most comfortable to them. The workshops were meant to support them in playful ways in writing their subsequent reports. Throughout, the researchers stimulated Living Lab coordinators to take 'ownership' over their DLA activities, and this resulted in high amounts of participation and motivation.
- Reflection: by offering feedback to individual reports, and by creating the space to share structural challenges in plenary workshops, the DLA activities contributed to Living Lab coordinators finding recognition in others' experiences, and jointly taking the time to zoom out on the larger processes and more structural issues that come into play in processes of urban food system transformation. This ability to 'zoom out' proved helpful to secure space for *reflection* in a project that was otherwise tightly structured around short timeframes and deadlines for high demands.

Weaknesses of the DLA approach

- Frequency: the half-yearly frequency might have given too much time, so that Living Lab coordinators that wanted to 'do their best' did their best to systematically incorporate all of the questions that they and their colleagues could think about. It allowed them to be exhaustive, whereas a strenght of the Dynamic Learning Agenda could very well lie in the fact that it is a personal act that depends on informality and being incomplete.
- Moderation: to create ownership, the researchers barely gave feedback on the Dynamic Learning Agenda reports. In hindsight, starting earlier on with steering people to think more and deeper into what they reported on could have strengthened the process, e.g. through giving more in-depth feedback on reports or having one-on-one meetings with Living Lab coordinators to jointly reflect on the reporting.

- Connection to other tasks: the Dynamic Learning Agenda reports were not connected to the predescribed list actions that the project asked the Living Lab coordinators to carry out, nor followed the project 'phases'. Some Living Lab coordinators edited their DLA reporting templates to connect to phases and project actions, whereas others did not. Streamlining the DLA to fit with other project work could have better supported Living Lab coordinators to deepen their reflections or help them see the relevance of it.
- Making things concrete: the DLA lacked an actionable component, such as asking what Living Lab coordinators would plan to do after one reporting period to change in their activities, i.e. which activities they could couple to reflections from earlier DLA reporting periods.



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