

TEALabs

Territorial Agroecological Living Labs

Interview with project coordinator Daniel López García (CSIC, Spain)

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CONTEXT AND GOALS

Which crops and farming systems do you work with, and what key challenges are you addressing?

The project focuses on territorial agroecological transitions, on how different actors within a given territory cooperate to promote food systems change. The Living Labs are located in both peri-urban and more rural settings, with a strong emphasis on horticultural systems, including fruit and vegetable production.

Three Living Labs are based in highly urbanised metropolitan areas such as Stockholm, Madrid, and Rome, while two others operate in more rural contexts. However, all Living Labs share a common focus on short food supply chains and direct marketing schemes. Their primary objective is to supply local demand for agroecologically oriented or organic food.

The core participants involved in the LLs are mainly groups of organic producers, but the project explicitly aims to include conventional farmers to support broader transitions. Small and medium-sized farms need to organise themselves into collective bodies in order to remain viable within a globalised food system.



Who are your main stakeholders, and how do their needs shape the project? How are farmers and local stakeholders involved?

Farmers are central stakeholders and are involved through different forms of collective organisation. The project also works closely with local authorities, NGOs, civil society organisations, consumer associations, and other local actors, following a strong multi-actor approach.

Many of these stakeholders share the objective of strengthening local agroecological transitions and ensuring a stable supply of local food for local markets. The project supports the creation or consolidation of collective farmer organisations, recognising that collective structures are essential to meet local demand, support political advocacy, and sustain agroecological food systems.



METHODS AND INNOVATION

What new or creative approaches have you used to engage stakeholders and adapt to local conditions?

All Living Labs are built on pre-existing structures and cooperation processes that were already in place before the project started. The project's objectives are

therefore grounded in previous experiences of collaboration between researchers and local actors.

Methodologically, the project relies mainly on co-design approaches and participatory action research, applied from a territorial perspective. These participatory methods aim to overcome the traditional separation between social and ecological processes and between producers and local populations, by being combined with relational thinking.

Each Living Lab develops its own approach and rhythm, adapted to local conditions. The work started with interviews, engagement of Living Lab facilitators, and the preparation of initial meetings. A meeting with the LL facilitators is planned at the end of January and will be followed by periodic meetings. Local LLs are having their own kick-off meetings in person in these weeks.



What challenges have you faced so far, and how are you dealing with them?

The initial challenge was related to administrative and funding delays. But the main key challenge is ensuring that research outputs are genuinely useful and relevant for local actors. Coordinating the project's research aims with this objective and respecting the specific trajectories and priorities of each Living Lab is particularly demanding. Indeed, the project aims to maintain a common methodological framework while allowing strong local adaptation: designing coherence across Living Labs, while respecting trans-local diversity.

EARLY INSIGHTS

What early results or surprises have emerged since the project started?

One early insight is the project's ability to strike a good balance between theoretical reflection and practical application. The combination of conceptual discussions with real-world territorial processes has been particularly enriching for the partners involved.



How are local stakeholders responding?

In Madrid, for example, two meetings have already been held with farmers. Stakeholders show strong interest in working on a wide range of topics, including political advocacy, landscape-scale design, ecosystem management, and marketing channels. However, limited time availability requires careful prioritisation of activities.

Across all Living Labs, stakeholders are enthusiastic about connecting with other farmer groups and experts. Synergies are also being developed with other projects and within WP7 of the Agroecology Partnership, including methodologies to be tested.

VISION AND ADVICE

What is your long-term vision for agroecology in your field?

The long-term vision is to build a strong form of agroecology rooted in natural ecological cycles and oriented toward social and environmental justice. Agroecology is essential for ensuring food security and resilience in the current global context.

It is crucial to build, in the present, the foundations for a livable future. This requires strong networks of actors capable of promoting agroecology and advocating for it at all political levels.

What advice would you give to future project coordinators?

Future coordinators should focus on continuity: working with the same actors over longer periods and building on existing processes and previous projects. Connecting the new calls of AGROECOLOGY Partnership with the ongoing ones experiences is essential to maximise impact. Real territorial change takes time. Achieving meaningful and lasting impacts often requires long periods of time, beyond the three years of the project. We need to highlight the importance of long-term commitment and sustained funding to meet the expectations placed on EU-funded projects like ours.



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Project title: TAE Labs (Territorial Agroecological Living Labs)

Topic: Territorial agroecological transitions in short supply chains for fruits and vegetables

Start date: 01/09/2025

Coordinator: The Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), Spain

Number of partners and Living Labs: consortium of 7 organisations, including 5 LLs in 5 countries

Project website:

<https://www.agroecologypartnership.eu/en/projects/tealabs>

Contact details: daniel.lopez@cchs.csic.es