Enriching European Landscapes with Agroecological Practices



M2.1 Living Lab Protocol

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EELAP Living Lab Protocol

Enriching European Landscapes with Agroecological Practices

1. Introduction

Purpose of the Protocol

This Living Lab Protocol provides a **common methodological and operational framework** for all Living Labs (LLs) established or supported within the EELAP project. It is intended as a practical guide for facilitators, researchers, and stakeholders involved in the co-creation and implementation of agroecological innovations at local and regional levels. The Protocol supports harmonised design, implementation, and evaluation of Living Lab activities while allowing for flexibility based on national, biophysical, and socio-economic contexts.

Alignment with EELAP Objectives

EELAP (Enriching European Landscapes with Agroecological Practices) aims to promote the transition to agroecology by **integrating long-term practices such as agroforestry into farming systems and policy frameworks**. The project supports stakeholder-driven innovation processes to scale agroecological practices from farm to landscape level. This Protocol aligns with EELAP's six Work Packages, particularly WP2 (Living Labs), and contributes to other WPs by fostering multi-actor knowledge exchange, business model development, spatial planning, and regional policy alignment.

Agroecology as Science, Practice, and Movement

The EELAP Living Lab approach is underpinned by agroecology, understood as:

- A science, studying the ecological interactions in agricultural systems;
- A set of practices, such as agroforestry, cover cropping, or regenerative grazing;
- A social movement, promoting food sovereignty, fairness, and resilience.

This multi-dimensional understanding aligns with the 13 Principles of Agroecology as defined by Agroecology Europe. These principles guide the selection, implementation, and evaluation of agroecological practices in the project.

Agroforestry within Agroecology

EELAP considers agroforestry a core agroecological practice that overlaps with, interacts with and can be combined with almost all other practices.


Agroecology
soil health and regeneration
biodiversity enhancement
socio-economic viability
Agroforestry
climate change adaptation mitigation
diversification and resilience
circular nutrient flows
water management

2. Shared Framework and Principles

Definition of Living Labs (EnOLL Perspective)

In the EELAP project, Living Labs (LLs) are understood as user-centred, **real-life innovation ecosystems** where stakeholders jointly explore, co-design, and evaluate solutions that advance the transition toward agroecology.
Drawing on the European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL) concept, EELAP LLs act as open, collaborative environments integrating research, practice, policy, and society.

Rather than test technologies, they focus on process innovation — creating shared understanding, building capacities, and aligning stakeholders around agroecological objectives. LLs are therefore social infrastructures for dialogue, mutual learning, and coordination, bridging the gap between policy ambitions and practical implementation.

Core Values: Real-Life Context, Multi-Stakeholder, Co-Creation

EELAP Living Labs operate according to three foundational values:

- **Real-life context**: Activities are rooted in authentic regional and policy settings. The LLs reflect local agroecological challenges and opportunities within diverse landscapes and governance frameworks.
- **Multi-stakeholder collaboration**: LLs connect farmers, foresters, advisors, public institutions, researchers, and NGOs to address the agroecological transition collectively.
- **Co-creation**: Instead of disseminating pre-defined solutions, LLs cultivate collective intelligence. Knowledge is co-created iteratively among stakeholders through dialogue, reflection, and synthesis.

Quadruple Helix & Systems Thinking

EELAP applies a Quadruple Helix approach — integrating actors from four key sectors:

Helix Dimension	Role in LLs
Academia	Provides knowledge, analytical frameworks, and evaluation methods.
Industry and SMEs, including farmers	Connects agroecology to value chains and market-based opportunities.
Public Authorities	Links outcomes to policy frameworks and planning instruments.
Civil Society	Represents local experience, cultural values, and end-user perspectives.

This structure reinforces systems thinking — recognising that sustainable land use and agroecological transition require cooperation across ecological, economic, and governance dimensions.

Agroecology Elements and Principles Guiding LL Implementation

All Living Labs are guided by the 13 principles of agroecology defined by Agroecology Europe. These are based on the 10 elements of agroecology developed by FAO and approved by its 197 member states. These 13 principles ensure that activities are not only technically sound but also socially inclusive, economically viable, and ecologically regenerative.

13 Agroecology Principles (Agroecology Europe)

1. Recycling
2. Input reduction
3. Soil health
4. Animal health
5. Biodiversity
6. Synergy
7. Economic diversification
8. Co-creation of knowledge
9. Social values and diets
10. Fairness
11. Connectivity
12. Land and natural resource governance
13. Participation

In the EELAP context, these principles are operationalised through participatory dialogue, capacity development, and policy feedback, ensuring that LL outputs contribute directly to more coherent and sustainable agroecological systems.

Agroforestry contributes to:

1. Resource recycling, nutrient cycling and biomass
2. Input reduction
3. Soil health
4. Animal health
5. Biodiversity
6. Synergies
7. Economic diversification
8. Social values and food.

Common Structure of Living Lab Activities (Rounds 1–4)

To harmonise the operation of LLs across five countries, EELAP follows a shared four-round structure of thematic activities.
Each round corresponds to a specific focus area and contributes to the project's work packages (WPs 1–5). The rounds ensure progressive development — from awareness building to policy integration.

Round	Focus Area	Main Link to WPs	Expected Outputs
Round 1: Awareness and Knowledge of Agroecology	Awareness raising and exchange of knowledge on agroecological practices adapted to national and regional contexts.	WP2	Shared understanding of agroecological concepts; identification of regionally relevant practices.
Round 2: Business Models and Value Chains	Exploration of business models and value chains for agroecological practices, focusing on socio-economic benefits at regional level.	WP3	Insights into value chains; examples of viable business models; fact sheets.
Round 3: Landscape-Feature Planning Tools	Feedback on existing spatial and landscape planning tools; proposal of improvements to meet stakeholder needs.	WP4	Practical recommendations for adapting tools; locally informed spatial strategies.
Round 4: Regulatory and Institutional Frameworks	Assessment of regulatory drivers and barriers; co-development of policy recommendations for integrating agroecology.	WP1;5	Policy guidance; draft recommendations for future CAP and regional frameworks.

All four rounds integrate interactive workshops, guided excursions, and collaborative reflection sessions — creating a cycle of continuous learning and improvement. This ensures alignment across countries while allowing flexibility for national adaptations.

Innovation Process Stages (Explore – Co-Design – Reflect – Integrate)

EELAP's innovation logic follows an iterative process that mirrors the structure of the rounds:

1. **Explore** – Identify needs, challenges, and opportunities at regional level.
2. **Co-design** – Collaboratively develop pathways for agroecological transition (e.g. business models, planning approaches).
3. **Reflect** – Analyse outcomes, exchange lessons among LLs, and refine approaches.
4. **Integrate** – Feed validated results into policy and regional development processes.

Rather than focusing on experimental trials, this cycle facilitates knowledge integration, mutual learning, and evidence-based policymaking, ensuring that EELAP Living Labs become catalysts for long-term transformation.

3. Stakeholder Engagement and Co-Creation

Typology of Living Lab Stakeholders

Effective LL implementation relies on the active participation of diverse stakeholder groups whose decisions shape agroecological transitions across farms, landscapes, and governance systems. In EELAP, stakeholder identification is grounded in a territorial approach, ensuring inclusion of actors relevant to each regional context while fostering transnational comparability.

Key stakeholder categories involved in the EELAP LLs:

Stakeholder Group	**Role and Relevance**
Farmers and Foresters	Primary land managers and implementers of agroecological practices; bring practical knowledge and field-level experience.
Advisory Services and Agronomists	Support decision-making at farm level; link scientific knowledge with practice; help assess feasibility of agroecological approaches.
Municipalities and Local Governments	Responsible for spatial planning, public procurement, and landscape governance; key actors for local policy uptake.
Regional and National CAP Authorities	Administrators of agri-environmental support and regulators of land use; essential for policy feedback and alignment.
NGOs and Civil Society Organisations	Represent environmental, social, and consumer interests; act as mediators and knowledge brokers.
Market Partners and Value Chain Actors	Enable agroecological products to reach consumers; drive development of fair and viable business models.
Researchers and Educational Institutions	Provide evidence, analytical tools, and capacity development; support evaluation and upscaling.

This multi-actor constellation embodies the Living Lab ethos — bringing together different perspectives, knowledge systems, and incentives to co-create contextually grounded solutions.

Stakeholder Roles in Co-Identification, Co-Assessment, and Co-Design

Stakeholders are not passive recipients of innovations but active co-creators throughout the LL process. Their engagement is embedded in all stages of the four LL rounds (see Section 2) and linked to the key EELAP work packages (WPs 1–5).

Roles include:

- Co-identification of relevant agroecological practices, regional barriers, and opportunities (Round 1)
- Co-assessment of business models, socio-economic impacts, and trade-offs (Round 2, WP3)
- Co-design of planning solutions and recommendations to adjust spatial tools and regional policies (Round 3, WP4)
- Co-development of action plans and policy recommendations for institutional integration (Round 4, WP1;5)

Stakeholders are thus essential contributors to knowledge generation, validation, and dissemination, ensuring outcomes are grounded in practice and supported across governance levels.

Engagement Methods: Workshops, Focus Groups, and Excursions

EELAP promotes engagement through a variety of participatory formats tailored to regional contexts and stakeholder needs:

- **Thematic workshops** – Core activity in each LL round; structured around dialogue, reflection, and co-creation.
- **Guided excursions and field visits** – Foster experiential learning, peer exchange, and inspiration from real-life examples.
- **Focus groups and interviews** – Used for deeper exploration of motivations, barriers, and specific stakeholder experiences.
- **Joint co-design sessions** – Facilitate collaborative development of business models, spatial planning recommendations, and policy proposals.
- **National and transnational exchange meetings** – Encourage cross-border learning and alignment among LL facilitators and stakeholder representatives.

All engagement activities follow a structured but flexible format, supported by shared templates (e.g. workshop agendas, fact sheets, reporting forms) to ensure harmonised documentation and comparability across countries.

Motivation and Benefits for Stakeholders

Understanding and addressing stakeholders' motivations is key to sustaining engagement over the full project cycle. The benefits of participating in EELAP LLs are diverse and often complementary.

Motivation Type	**Examples of Stakeholder Incentives**
Economic	Improve farm resilience, reduce input costs, access new markets or CAP payments.

Motivation Type	Examples of Stakeholder Incentives
Regulatory	Contribute to shaping local or national policy; align with upcoming requirements (e.g. CRCF, CAP reform).
Knowledge	Gain insights into agroecological practices, planning tools, and business models; share experience with peers.
Social/Political	Be recognised as a pioneer or leader; enhance cooperation with public bodies and other land users.

By making these benefits explicit and visible, facilitators can better tailor engagement strategies and improve participation continuity.

Addressing Language and Knowledge Barriers

Recognising the diversity of contexts across the five participating countries (SK, SL, HU, DE, IE), EELAP LLs proactively address potential barriers to inclusion:

- Multilingual communication: Core materials (factsheets, policy briefs, workshop agendas) will be translated into national languages; presentations use plain language and visuals.
- Knowledge bridging: Complex scientific or regulatory content will be distilled into accessible formats using infographics, animations, or moderated discussion.
- Digital support: The project will provide user-friendly online tools and documentation platforms (e.g. website) for remote and asynchronous access to materials.

These measures support equitable and informed participation, ensuring that stakeholders from different backgrounds and capacities can contribute meaningfully to the LL process.

4. Thematic and Operational Focus of LLs

Selection and Clustering of Agroecological Practices

The thematic backbone of the LLs in EELAP is a curated selection of agroecological practices that align with climate change mitigation and adaptation goals. These practices include a wide range of farm-level and landscape-scale interventions.

To facilitate comparison and knowledge exchange between LLs, these practices are clustered into thematic groups:

- Soil and Nutrient Management: cover crops, biochar, nitrogen-fixing crop associations, manure management, nutrient efficiency.
- Agroforestry and Perennial Systems: afforestation/reforestation, forest grazing, tree/shrub fodder systems.

- Livestock and Pasture Management: rotational grazing, legume overseeding, methane-reducing feed supplements.
- Climate and Energy Innovations: farm bioenergy, GHG auditing tools, carbon removal practices.

Each LL will prioritise relevant practices based on local environmental, agronomic, and socio-economic conditions, as well as stakeholder interests. A full list of agroecological practices will be provided in the next version of the Protocol, the current clustering is preliminary.

Site-Specific Adaptation of Practices

While the selected practices offer a harmonised framework, their successful implementation depends on tailoring to local contexts. This adaptation will be informed by:

- Participatory needs assessments during LL engagement rounds.
- Integration with existing land uses and farming systems, such as arable, livestock, or mixed farming.
- Consideration of physical, legal, and institutional constraints, including land tenure, CAP eligibility, and planning regulations.

The adaptation process will be continuously refined through interaction with local stakeholders and feedback from other WPs.

Overview of Living Labs in Five Countries

EELAP establishes or supports Living Labs in five EU countries (feel free to modify):

- Germany (DE): Focused on upscaling of agroforestry, expanding the network and number of agroforestry sites, improving added value networks, safeguarding existing agroforestry systems;
- Hungary (HU): Building on existing permaculture and organic initiatives with strong community involvement, processing and marketing agroforestry products;
- Ireland (IE): New Living Lab with links to research farms and state bodies in grassland-based systems, establishment of agroforestry systems, grants and policies;
- Slovakia (SK): Developing agroforestry-based systems on both arable and forest land, linking policy with practice, best-practice business models → Product development: Attractive support schemes for agroforestry systems in Slovakia (both public and private);
- Slovenia (SL): Conversion of brush encroached agricultural land to silvopasture, enhancing plant biodiversity of calcareous grassland, best-practices demonstration.

These LLs represent a diversity of agroecological contexts, stakeholder networks, and innovation ecosystems. They will act as regional hubs for demonstration, learning, co-creation and policy support throughout the project lifecycle (M1–M36).

5. Implementation Roadmap

This section outlines how Living Lab (LL) activities will be coordinated across the five project countries, the timeline and stages of implementation, facilitation roles, and the tools and templates provided to support consistent, yet flexible, execution at national and regional levels.

Coordination of Living Lab Activities Across Countries

The overall coordination of LL activities is led by the WP2 team (coordinated by P4), in close collaboration with national facilitators and LL leads in each of the five participating countries: Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Slovakia (SK), and Slovenia (SL). Coordination efforts aim to:

- Ensure harmonisation and comparability of methods, outputs, and reporting across LLs.
- Facilitate cross-country knowledge exchange and mutual learning.
- Maintain alignment with project-wide objectives and timelines, particularly with respect to WPs 1, 3, 4, and 5.
- Provide support and capacity building to LL facilitators and stakeholders.

Regular check-ins (quarterly), dedicated facilitation meetings, and online exchange platforms will support this coordination, while respecting the need for national adaptation and flexibility.

Overview of Implementation Stages (M1–M36)

LL activities are structured into four iterative engagement rounds over the 3-year project timeline. These are aligned with project milestones and support thematic deep-dives linked to WP1-WP5.

Stage	Timeline	Focus
M1–M6	Set-up & Planning	Mapping of stakeholder networks, preparation of facilitation plans, translation and adaptation of templates.
M7–M12	Round 1	Awareness, knowledge of agroecology, mapping local practices and needs.
M13–M18	Round 2	Business models and value chains (WP3).
M19–M24	Round 3	Planning tools and spatial governance (WP4).
M25–M30	Round 4	Capability, institutional frameworks and policy (WP1, WP5).
M31–M36	Consolidation	Finalisation of outputs, contribution to policy recommendations, dissemination.

Each round will include participatory events (workshops, field visits, focus groups), followed by documentation and reporting. Between rounds, reflection and adjustment phases will enable iterative learning and adaptation.

Facilitation Roles and Responsibilities

Successful implementation of LLs depends on capable, well-supported facilitators. Their roles include:

- Engaging stakeholders and building trust among diverse actor groups.
- Organising and moderating workshops and participatory activities.
- Synthesising inputs from stakeholders for integration into WPs.
- Documenting outcomes in structured templates.
- Acting as the liaison between local actors and the broader project consortium.

Each LL has at least one named facilitator, supported by a national team. The WP2 coordination team provides guidance, peer exchange opportunities, and backstopping support for all facilitators.

Monitoring Progress and Feedback Loops

A light-touch, participatory monitoring system will track LL progress and provide opportunities for continuous improvement. Key tools and mechanisms include:

- Reflection sessions: After each round, facilitators will join a collective reflection to share lessons learned and plan adaptations.
- WP feedback loops: WP3–5 leads will engage with LLs at specific stages to provide input and receive feedback on tools, models, and recommendations.
- Outcome mapping: Facilitators will document perceived changes in stakeholder awareness, collaboration, and practice over time.

Annexes: Country-Specific Implementation Plans

To complement the common framework, each country will prepare a tailored LL implementation plan. These will include:

- Description of selected LL sites (biophysical and socio-economic context).
- Stakeholder landscape (mapping).
- Prioritised agroecological practices.
- Calendar of planned activities.
- Anticipated challenges and mitigation strategies.

The annexes ensure that while the structure is shared, national and regional diversity is fully respected.

6. Sustainability, Synergies and Legacy

This final section outlines how the EELAP Living Labs (LLs) will create lasting value beyond the project's three-year runtime. It focuses on embedding LLs into existing innovation networks, ensuring continuity through synergies and partnerships, and building capacities that enable stakeholders to carry forward the agroecological transition in the long term.

Embedding Living Labs in Regional and EU Networks

To maximise continuity and institutional anchoring, EELAP LLs will proactively connect with relevant networks and instruments:

- EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: Where applicable, LLs may evolve into or inform the formation of EIP-AGRI OGs, enabling access to CAP innovation funding and technical support.
- LEADER and Local Action Groups (LAGs): LLs will engage with existing LAGs to explore alignment with regional development goals and funding priorities, particularly around agroecology, sustainable land use, and rural innovation.
- National and EU CAP Networks: The project will provide input to thematic groups on agroecology and carbon farming, and share tools, case studies and metrics developed in the LLs.
- European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL): EELAP aims to foster compatibility with the ENoLL framework, and LLs may apply for official ENoLL membership if beneficial.

This multi-level integration will allow LLs to act as nodes of agroecological knowledge and experimentation within broader policy and innovation ecosystems.

Long-Term Impact Beyond the Project

The EELAP LLs are designed not as temporary project structures, but as long-term platforms for co-creation, local governance, and shared learning. Their sustained impact will be ensured through:

- Strong local ownership: Stakeholders, including municipalities, farmer groups, and NGOs, will be actively involved in defining the strategic orientation of LLs.
- Institutional embedding: Where possible, LLs will be linked to existing institutions (e.g. advisory services, universities, rural development agencies) to ensure continuity of coordination and funding.
- Concrete outputs: Each LL will produce factsheets, recommendations, and other supporting outputs that can be built upon beyond EELAP.
- Connection to national policies: WP1 will ensure that LL recommendations are visible to CAP managing authorities and relevant ministries.

Synergies with Other Projects and Innovation Ecosystems

EELAP LLs will actively seek collaboration and knowledge exchange with related EU-funded and national initiatives, including:

- Horizon Europe and Interreg projects focused on agroecology, carbon farming, and sustainable land management.
- National innovation projects and pilot schemes, particularly those involving climate-smart agriculture or agroforestry.
- Private-sector and NGO-led initiatives, including those working on certification schemes, biodiversity, or territorial development.

This proactive engagement aims to reduce duplication, share good practices, and increase the collective impact of agroecology-related efforts across Europe.

Capacity Building and Mutual Learning Across LLs

EELAP will invest in long-term capacity building through:

- Facilitator peer-learning exchanges, including cross-country meetings and mentoring between experienced and new LL leads.
- Joint training materials developed through WP2 and WP6, to build competences in participatory facilitation, agroecological knowledge, and stakeholder engagement.
- A shared repository of LL tools and outputs (translated as needed), accessible to all partners and interested external stakeholders.

Capacity building is not limited to the duration of the project – the intention is to foster enduring networks of practitioners and innovators who continue to support each other beyond EELAP.

Knowledge Products and Dissemination Channels

To ensure accessibility and usability of LL outputs, EELAP will produce:

- Practice-oriented factsheets and guides, co-developed with LL stakeholders, focusing on key agroecological practices.
- Workshop templates, allowing replication of engagement methods in other regions.
- Policy briefs summarising LL insights for decision-makers at regional and national levels.
- Audio-visual content (short videos, podcasts) to support dissemination, particularly among farmers and the general public.
- Social media content to help stakeholders amplify messages and increase visibility of success stories.

All knowledge products will be translated into national languages where needed and aligned with the Communication and Dissemination Plan (WP6).

About EELAP

A transdisciplinary, multi-actor initiative aiming to foster agroecological transition through Living Labs across Europe

EELAP is a European research and innovation project supporting the **transition to agroecological landscapes** with main focus on **agroforestry**. By integrating agroecology at the farm and regional level within **six Living Labs**, it aims to empower farmers, advisors, researchers, and policy makers to co-create fair, and adopt practical solutions that are socially environmentally sustainable, and economically viable.

Agroecology Partnership Project
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Agroscope – Integrative Agroecology

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