SOCKETS

SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT
WITH KEY ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

co-creation brief

Engaging innovation eco-system communities to encourage transitions

SOCKETS LEARNINGS ON SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT



SOCKETS (SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES)
HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION'S HORIZON 2020
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT NO 958277

TEKNOLOGIRÅDET DANISH BOARD OF TECHNOLOGY · VU · Athena Institute Connecting science and society for a better tomorrow · Airi ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA PER LA RICERCA INDUSTRIALE · tecnalia Inspiring Business · DANISH TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE · ecsite EUROPEAN NETWORK SCIENCE CENTRES & MUSEUMS · MUSEO NAZIONALE SCIENZA E TECNOLOGIA LEONARDO DA VINCI · Science Centre AHHAA · CRA

SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT TO CO-CREATE INNOVATIONS

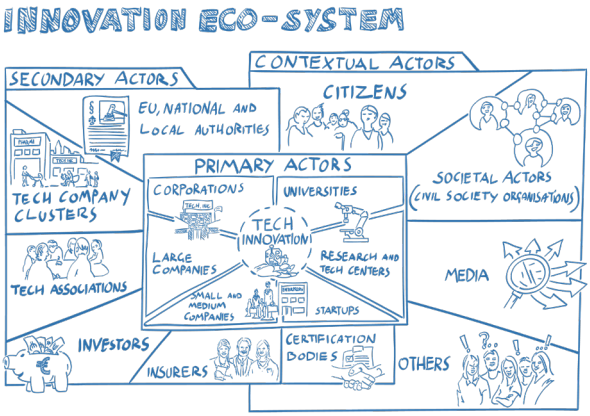
Early and continuous societal engagement is the key to improve quality, desirability, and sustainability of innovations.
With this belief, the SocKETs project held six Labs across Europe to explore and co-create inventive solutions based on Key Enabling Technologies, in three application fields: circular economy, eHealth, industrial automation.
We used a stepwise approach consisting of a mapping of innovation ecosystem made by desk analysis and interviews, followed by a series of workshops and interactions in-between:

- ✓ **Mapping of the innovation ecosystem,** by desk analysis on technological and socio and cultural aspects
- ✓ **Stakeholder interaction in 3+ workshops:** design, maturation & prototyping, celebration
- ✓ **Evaluation and recommendation**
- ✓ **Reporting** (including visuals) and follow-ups with stakeholders.

Overall, we organized more than 18 events, engaged with over 200 stakeholders for about 8 months, including 50 societal actors and over 50 citizens.

WHAT TOOLS WE USED

Participants have been engaged/recruited thanks to facilitators' networks. Selected participants helped identifying new connections: industry ones gave links to other professionals in the sector, and Civil society Organizations and NGOs helped to involve citizens.



During the Lab we used different societal engagement methods, as shown in the figure (a full list is available in the SocKETs tech guide).

OUR EXPERIENCE

The positive and, hopefully, most durable outcomes were the increased awareness and knowledge among the ecosystem players and the creation of new and wider networks across different value and supply actors and society. These are a precondition for success in finding innovative approaches toward sustainable products and processes.

Well-designed participatory processes could provide significant outcomes in terms of suggestions to develop innovation solutions and to address impacts of technological innovations, as emerged during the Labs. Citizens could provide genuine, new and unexpected insights. Indeed, the feedback of stakeholders to them was generally positive. Their reasons to participate included inspiration, networking, and discussing challenges and impacts of technological innovations. Gathering knowledge, curiosity and addressing specific issues and problems

related to specific innovation were other motivation factors, in particular for citizens. However, there are also limitations to these processes.

- Several technology developers and industrial stakeholders showed some reluctance to engage with hand, citizens showed a lack of confidence in their own skills and knowledge and perceived themselves as unable to engage in such co-creation processes.
- Collaboration and discussion dynamics among different stakeholders need some time to consolidate trust and enable effective co-creation activities.
- Co creation activities are resource demanding and their outcomes maybe be difficult to predict, intangible or long term (e.g., as a result of an idea or a collaboration started during the process, that will have an impact only after a long period).
- There is always the risk of performing just an informative exercise, without concrete outcomes.
- Putting a topic in the spotlight could bring the risk of mediatisation, misinterpretation, and deviation from the original goal.

OUR LEARNINGS

1. Anticipation and flexibility to manage multi-stakeholder complexity:

- Do not see co-creation as a stand-alone, linear activity, but as a circular process based on mutual trust and shared values. Flexibility and responsiveness are needed by the managers of the co-creation process to attend ideas or demands posed by participants.
- Participatory processes cannot be controlled nor steered into a particular direction. These processes demand flexibility and a high degree of anticipation to react to unexpected issues that can occur at any time, allowing participants to develop networks and reflect on issues that are not in their every- day agendas.

2. Balancing stakeholder heterogeneity:

- Include a high heterogeneity of stakeholders in the co-creation process, do not focus on technological experts only and invite stakeholders that are already interested in the topic. Ensuring representation of each ones' interests and stakes is a driver, and a motivation for their effective engagement.
- Involving CSOs, associations, think tanks, citizen platforms, foundations, and other actors from civil so- ciety is crucial to provide alternative visions and perspectives that are often overlooked in R&I discus- sions dominated by industry interests.
- Sectorial stakeholders (research, industry, etc.) have a clear gain from the process in terms of creating networks, exploring ideas, etc., while it's likely less for citizens, that mainly increase their awareness. In this sense, it is essential to inform and make citizens aware on the benefits and motivations for them to take part in co-creation processes with technology developers.
- Advocacy groups brings knowledge and motivation, but they might bring their views and put them be- fore the common goal.
- Lay people struggle to react to some technology and technology-related

discussions, and thus may lack motivation to participate, but nonetheless they always bring genuine and new insights through their knowledge and competences.

3. Context analysis and early citizen participation:

- Keeping an innovation ecosystem perspective, made of all quadruple helix actors, enrich the discussion.
- Do not involve citizens only at the end of a co-creation process. Plan the right momentum in the co-creation process for a meaningful participation of citizens and a fruitful dialogue with technological experts.
- Reflect upon and define the type of actor that are relevant according to the objectives and topics of the co-creation process. Particularly, when engaging with citizens, an early definition of the type of citizens to be involved in the co-creation process is needed.
- When recruiting citizens to be engaged in the co-creation process, find alliances or collaboration with local community groups interested in the topic of focus (for instance, social housing organisations, pensioners' groups, schools).
- Try to maintain the same actors/participants involved throughout the whole co-creation process, identify a core group of people with high level of engagement and build their loyalty to the process so that they provide consistency and traceability to the process.

4. Set the objective (themes, level of impact, innovation eco-system stakeholders):

- Involve co-creation partners from an early stage in defining the objective. Do that by organising meetings prior to the co-creation events with experts, citizens and other relevant stakeholders.

5. Create a safe space:

- Choose informal, comfortable, easy-to-access spaces to facilitate the co-creation process. Make a set-up of the facilities to suit the process and the stakeholders and citizens taking part, allowing the formation of a climate of trust, empathy, and cooperation.
- Maintain the interactions in between specific co-creation activities so that the relations of trust keep growing and the actors involved keep engaging throughout the whole co-creation process.

6. Design and facilitation matter:

- Do not consider facilitation of the co-creation process as a minor issue. Find an experienced and neutral facilitator, with knowledge on different engagement techniques and with the capacity to stay flexible and if needed employ different tools that were not planned.
- Cooperate with clusters, industrial associations, advocacy groups, and science museums or centres is an added value which helps in finding and recruiting participants, as well as in facilitation.
- It is complex and time and resource-consuming to recruit participants, understanding their specific motivations, and tailor-made rewards and follow ups.
- Efforts and strategies for recruiting participants should never be underestimated. This implies among other things time resources for mapping, making targeted invitations with clear pitches, follow up to persons to ensure registrations and retention (might be even remuneration to citizens).

- Do not assume that the people you engage with are aware of the objective and pathway of the co-creations process. The objectives and steps of the process need to be explained while being open to adaptations and trying to attend the expectations of participants.
- Local interaction and a small group of participants are the most effective ways to engage them and have a fruitful discussion, even though they mainly bring only local perspective and could have only local impacts.
- The length of the whole process makes it difficult to keep stakeholders engaged all along.
- Do not put too much emphasis on detailed technical issues and description. Explain technology in a simple and straightforward manner. Do not overwhelm citizens with technical explanations.
- Facilitation skills are intertwined with the chosen tool or method, so emphasise this when implementing new techniques.

7. No right or wrong tools, only tools that are useful:

- There are no right or wrong tools or methods for technologies, innovations, or fields of knowledge: they depend on the context and goals. Many of the tools and methods employed in the SocKETs test cases are related with different social dynamics that are needed to establish connections with people, exploring synergies between participants, listening to participants, helping them to work collaboratively, building social capital, etc.
- Start with simple tools in participatory processes to familiarise yourself with them. Don't overburden participants, managers, or facilitators with complex dynamics and exercises.

8. Co-creation needs time and trust among participants:

- Do not expect immediate outcomes in terms of product/service development

CONCLUSIONS

Societal engagement it's a long and complex process, dialogue, multidisciplinary and collaboration are crucial. If well-designed, this participatory process could provide a significant help in developing innovation and addressing impacts of technological innovations, even if specific outcomes maybe be difficult to predict and there is the risk of performing just an informative exercise.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ON SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

1. Anticipation & flexibility to manage multi-stakeholder complexity
2. Balancing stakeholder heterogeneity
3. Context analysis, above all regarding citizen participation (specific enough to affect the decisions of actors)
4. Set the objective: themes, level of impact, innovation eco-system stake-holders
5. Create a safe space
6. Design and facilitation matters
7. No right or wrong tools, only tools that are useful
8. Co-creation needs time and trust among participants

Read more on our Guide on tech Innovation and societal engagement!

SOCKETS PARTNERS

SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT
WITH KEY ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

CLICK TO READ MORE

Our societal engagement guide

Our Let's tech together online exhibition & game

Our video interviews with stakeholder

sockets-cocreation.eu