Guideline for Establishing a Policy Lab

Towards innovative and effective policies for sustainable land use

MOSAIC

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Abbreviations

IAD	Institutional Analysis and Development
GDPR	General data Protection Regulation
KB	Knowledge Broker
PL	Policy Lead
RRI	Responsible Research and Innovation
SPI	Science-Policy Interface

Glossary

This glossary aims to provide a foundational understanding of key concepts relevant to the setup and operation of policy labs within the MOSAIC research project. Establishing a shared understanding of these terms is intended to support interregional, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary learning.

- **Policy Lab**: A collaborative space where researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders co-create, test, and implement innovative policy solutions.
- **MOSAIC Knowledge Broker**: A member of the policy lab team who facilitates connections among research stakeholders at the local, case study, and project-wide levels, ensuring knowledge flows across all layers of the MOSAIC initiative.
- **MOSAIC Policy Lead**: A policy lab representative responsible for linking the lab to current and emerging policy processes and actors, ensuring strategic alignment with policy agendas.
- **Living Lab**: An open innovation environment where stakeholders—including users and citizens—co-create and test solutions in real-life contexts.
- **Knowledge Exchange**: The mutual sharing of ideas, expertise, and information between researchers and practitioners to inform policy development and improve practice.
- **Co-creation**: A collaborative process in which researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders jointly develop solutions to ensure they are relevant, usable, and impactful.
- **Stakeholder Engagement**: The active involvement of relevant actors throughout the policy process to incorporate diverse perspectives, needs, and knowledge.
- **Knowledge Translation**: The synthesis and adaptation of research findings into accessible formats and language to support their use in evidence-informed decision-making.
- **Iterative Design**: A cyclical process of developing, testing, and refining policy interventions through continuous feedback and learning.
- **Action Research**: A participatory research method in which researchers engage directly in the policy process to generate practical solutions while advancing academic understanding.
- **Policy Experimentation**: The testing of new or alternative policy approaches in controlled or pilot settings to assess their effects prior to broader implementation.
- **Systems Thinking**: An approach that considers the complexity and interdependencies of policy issues, aiming for holistic and sustainable solutions.
- **Design Thinking**: A human-centered, creative problem-solving method that emphasizes empathy, ideation, and iteration to develop innovative policies.
- **Evidence-Informed Policy**: Policymaking that is guided by systematically collected and analyzed research evidence—both qualitative and quantitative—to improve outcomes.
- **Policy Evaluation**: A structured assessment of a policy's design, implementation, and impact to determine its effectiveness and inform future improvements.
- **Policy Innovation**: The development and application of novel policy tools, processes, or ideas to address emerging challenges or enhance existing practices.

Introduction

About MOSAIC

For many decades already, the scientific community warns about the detrimental impact of current **land use practices** on biodiversity, soil fertility, water reserves, climate change, to name a few, eroding the safe operating space for humanity on Earth (Richardson et al., 2023; Rockström et al., 2009). Yet, despite the piles of reports with irrefutable evidence, not much change can be seen on the ground. Facts, figures and scenarios of the future we are heading for appear not to be enough to convince land use decision makers to make more sustainable choices.

MOSAIC therefore wants to contribute to a better understanding of why this is the case, and, more importantly, contribute to the solutions. To that effect MOSAIC investigates the **drivers behind land use choices**. Are farmers, business managers, nature conservationists, policy makers and other land use decision makers **aware** of what is at stake? And what role can they play in finding a solution? What kind of land use do they favour and why? What motivates them to go for their choice? How can their decisions be aligned or reconciled with policy targets in the fields of climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity and renewable energy? What **tools and incentives** can help to align these individual land use decisions on the ground with high-level policy targets and international agreements aimed at the conservation of our common home?

To investigate these questions, six **Policy Labs**, comprising a diverse array of decision makers in Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Portugal, Switzerland, and a European Lab, are set up as pivotal platforms for MOSAIC's transdisciplinary research. Each one is linked to a specific case of land use decision making. These Policy Labs help the researchers investigate these questions and allow practitioners to co-create relevant knowledge, so the gained knowledge becomes truly actionable for them.

MOSAIC's modelers will build upon this knowledge about drivers and motivations to characterize expected future land use patterns – an indispensable tool in land use policy processes. Based on spatial, social and economic insights, potential displacement effects can be made visible, as well as evolutions jeopardizing European biodiversity, climate and renewable energy goals.

To enable this, the Policy Labs get the support of a **digital learning environment** in which MOSAIC bridges the siloes of researchers' and practitioners' worlds. During the project, this environment allows for knowledge transfer, learning, evaluation and collaboration between researchers and practitioners, both within the cases and in cross-case settings. After the project, this learning environment will live on to give answers to the research questions outlined above, questions about the practical implementation of these learnings; and will it function as a source of inspiration for those wanting to render land use more sustainable in other places as well.

This way, MOSAIC will showcase in six cases how policy, science and society can work hand-in-hand on concrete solutions to accelerate the transition towards more sustainable land use.

About this report

This guideline report builds upon literature and experience of the MOSAIC project in conducting Task 2.1 'Establishment of the policy labs', in which six policy labs were established across Europe to enhance the impact and relevance of Research & Innovation (R&I) in shaping a future-proof land use policies. It represents D2.1 'Guidelines Policy Labs' (Figure 1).

The novelty of this guideline primarily lies in its **systematic, operational and practical step-by-step approach** to establishing a policy lab to co-design policy innovation on land use governance. It transforms broader theoretical concepts and dispersed information into actionable, hands-on guidelines, incorporating specific methodologies and considerations. The integration of concrete examples from the MOSAIC project also contributes to its practical relevance and contributes to its overall novelty.

It is designed for all who seeking to drive policy innovation and who work at the science-policy interface. Potential users include professionals from governmental organizations, universities, research institutions and funding bodies and NGOs.

This document will guide you through the process of **setting up and managing a policy lab**, outlining key building blocks and strategies to navigate potential challenges. It also provides practical examples from the MOSAIC project, illustrating how these key building blocks can be defined and support policy lab functioning. It is worth noting that Work Package 2 (WP2) will produce additional deliverables that may be of interest to those involved in policy lab development and implementation. These include tools for facilitating co-creation processes and guidance on the ongoing management of a policy lab. However, the focus of this particular document is on the initial set-up phase. As the popular saying goes, "a good start is half the battle," and this guideline aims to ensure that the foundational steps are well supported and clearly structured.

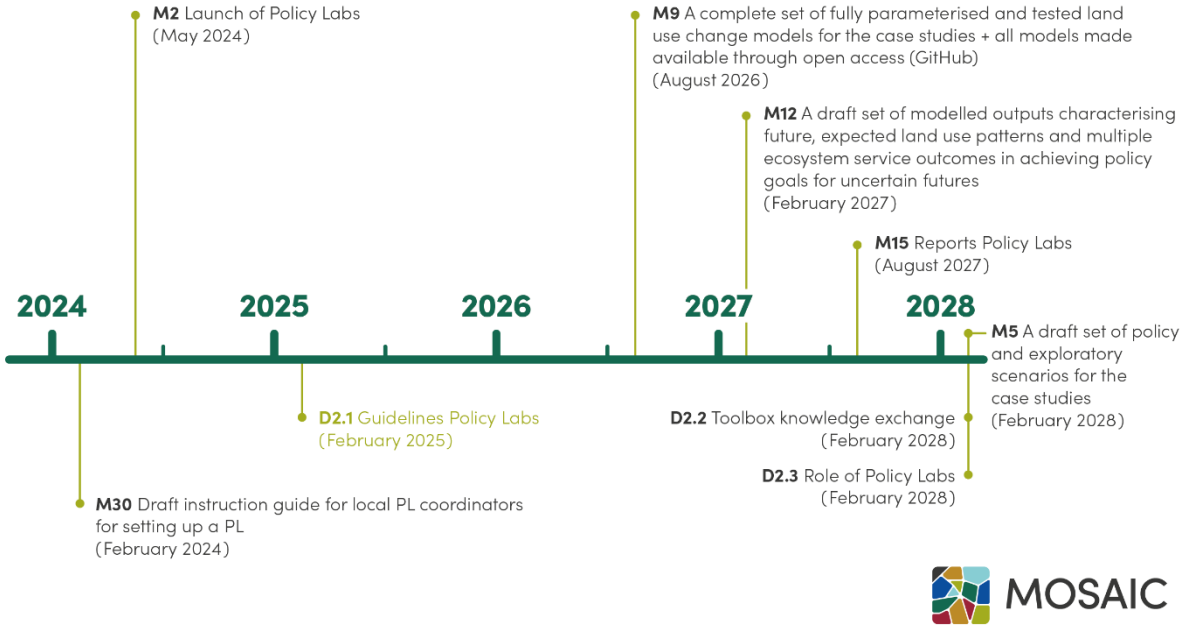

Figure 1. Timeline of the MOSAIC project with deliverables and milestones for WP3

1 Policy Labs

1.1 Definition of a policy lab

Policy labs have emerged within Horizon Europe projects as an innovative approach to policy development and experimentation. While definitions and applications vary, the concept consistently refers to collaborative, experimental methods designed to bridge the gap between research evidence and policymaking. As policy labs gain wider traction, a growing number of configurations have appeared—many of them in urban land use governance, such as Urban Living Labs (Von Wirth et al., 2019) and Transformation Labs (Pereira et al., 2020).

Despite differences in their goals, organizational setups, and methodological approaches, policy labs share several defining characteristics. Whicher (2021), Whicher and Crick (2019), Schäpke et al. (2018), and Nohra et al. (2020) describe them as multidisciplinary teams –often embedded in government– where multiple policy domains collaborate with one another and engage diverse stakeholders, including citizens. Hinrichs-Krapels (2020) underscores that policy labs are not one-off participatory events, but sustained processes of engagement between policymakers and various communities. Thematic areas addressed by policy labs are diverse, encompassing health care, traffic congestion, employment, and waste management (Olejniczak et al., 2020).

In the context of sustainable land use, policy labs are particularly valuable for navigating complex challenges such as competing land-use claims (e.g., agriculture versus conservation), institutional fragmentation across land and food governance, and the enduring gap between scientific knowledge and policy implementation (Hinrichs-Krapels et al., 2020). They also respond to two pressing issues in contemporary knowledge systems: the need to strengthen the science-policy interface to produce actionable knowledge with societal impact (Washbourne et al., 2024), and the imperative to reorient environmental and land-use sciences toward societal and political priorities (Lahsen and Turnhout, 2021; Turnhout et al., 2020).

The MOSAIC project builds on the policy lab model by integrating established principles from Living Labs and multi-stakeholder engagement processes, both of which are widely used in Horizon Europe initiatives. While policy labs share similarities with Living Labs, they represent a distinct category with a clearer focus on policy innovation. Living Labs typically treat policy as one element within broader innovation ecosystems, whereas policy labs are explicitly designed to develop and test evidence-based responses to complex governance challenges (Bouma, 2022; Hossain et al., 2018; Wellstead et al., 2021; Whicher, 2021).

In this guideline, term "policy lab" refers to an interdisciplinary, collaborative space in which researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders co-create evidence-based insights and co-design innovative policies related to land use and governance.

1.2 A foundation based on six building blocks

As the popular saying goes, “a good start is half the battle,” and likewise the success of a policy lab depends significantly on its set-up. Therefore, the establishing phase is a critical component for a successful policy lab and lays the foundation for a fertile science-policy interface that fosters evidence-informed policy innovation. As mentioned in 1.1 there is no fixed definition or architecture of a policy lab, and by extension there is no predefined layout for the set-up of a policy lab. In the MOSAIC project we did, however, define six building blocks that lay the foundation for a policy lab (Figure 2). For these six building blocks we drew from established design principles in academic literature on policy labs and living labs on the one hand, and the experiences and cross-regional exchanges within the first phase of the MOSAIC project on the other hand (Figure 2):

- **Core Group**: A dedicated team to lead the effort.
- **Core Focus**: A specific area of focus for the lab.
- **Policy Mapping**: An understanding of the policy framework relevant to the focus.
- **Stakeholder Engagement**: A two-phase process of identifying and involving key stakeholders.
- **Coherent Workplan**: A structured and actionable plan.
- **Message Definition**: A clear and compelling communication strategy.

In the sections that follow, each of the six building blocks will be introduced with reference to relevant literature, grounding each component in established theoretical and empirical work. These building blocks reflect the consortium’s initial effort to translate a broad and complex body of knowledge into a practical and workable framework for setting up policy labs. Recognizing the tension between theoretical comprehensiveness and operational feasibility, the project team aimed to strike a balance between an extensive list of success factors and the need for a manageable, actionable structure.

In a later phase of the project, we will evaluate whether these six building blocks sufficiently capture the key dimensions necessary for a successful policy lab, or whether additional components are required. Furthermore, we will assess throughout the project to what extent this framework effectively aligns theoretical insights with practice-oriented implementation in diverse policy and governance contexts.

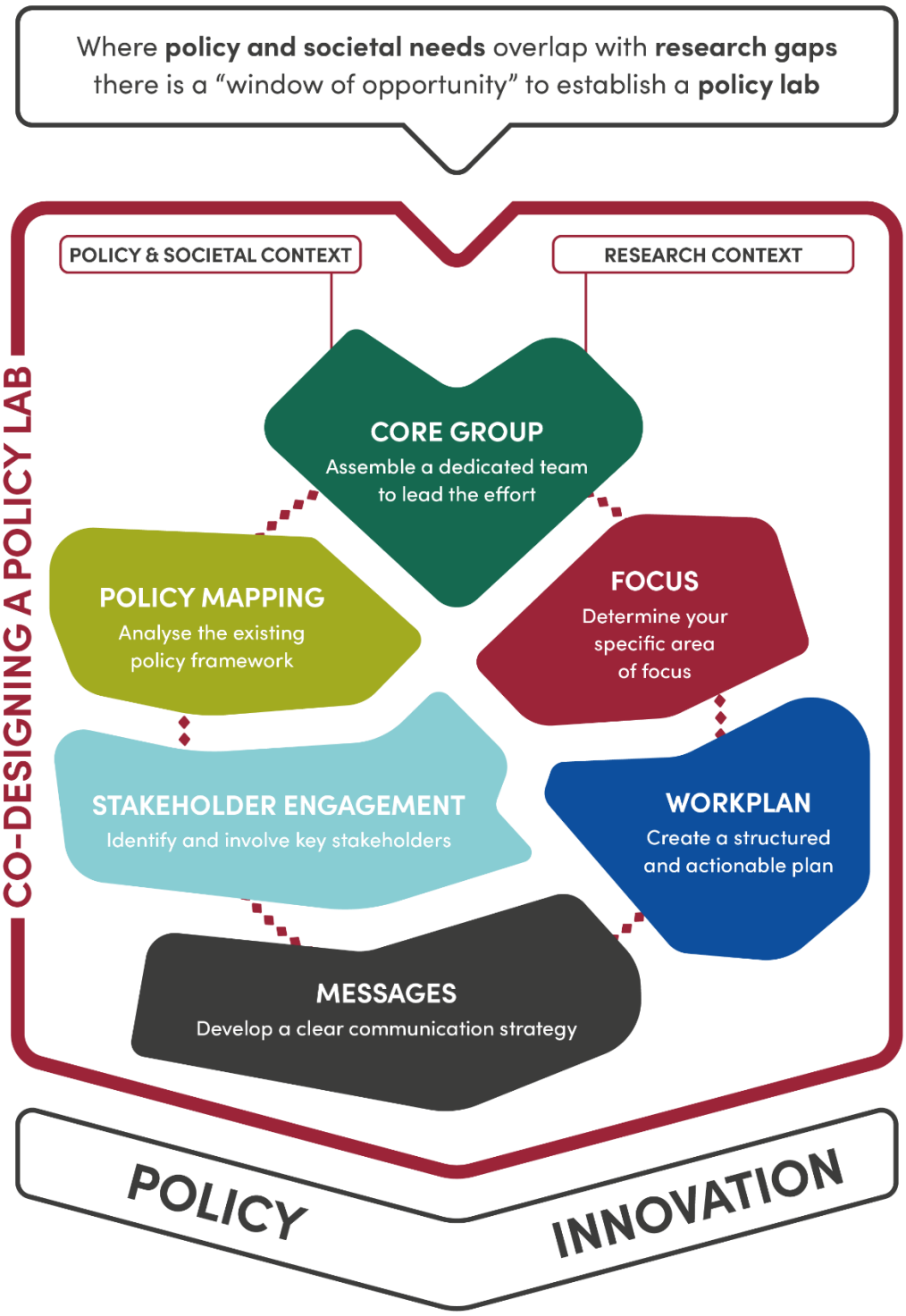

Figure 2. Graphical abstract on the key building blocks to establish a policy lab

2 Building Blocks of a Policy Lab

How each of these building blocks contribute to effective interaction and innovation within policy labs is described in the following paragraphs.

This document focuses on the establishment phase of the policy lab. While we present key steps, we emphasize that this is a continuous and iterative process—progress in one area may require revisiting others. The set-up presented here will be evaluated and further connected to subsequent phases later in the project. We invite readers to approach this as an evolving journey rather than a fixed sequence.

2.1 Core Group

The *Core Group* serves as the central steering body of the policy lab, responsible for setting a clear direction and ensuring that this direction is maintained to support the lab's effectiveness in driving policy innovation. The successful functioning of a policy lab—and its capacity to bridge the persistent science-policy gap by translating scientific knowledge into actionable policy—depends fundamentally on the presence of a dedicated and well-coordinated central entity (Hinrichs-Krapels et al., 2020; McGonigle et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2023), referred to in this guideline as the *Core Group*.

Emphasizing the role of such a guiding team is essential for the success of policy labs, as it enables cross-disciplinary integration, defines clear roles for public authorities, and cultivates collaborative networks among diverse stakeholders –all recognized as key design principles for effective policy lab operation (Hernández et al., 2018).

This guideline contributes to the existing literature by offering a clear and structured articulation of the *Core Group*'s role in the functioning of a policy lab—specifically focusing on two indispensable roles: the Knowledge Broker and the Policy Lead. These positions represent the research and policy spheres, respectively, and are central to bridging the science-policy gap. Drawing on the science-policy competence framework developed by the Joint Research Centre (Schwendinger et al., 2022) and the work of Bandola-Gill & Lyall (2017), this guideline outlines their responsibilities and emphasizes their critical role in fostering sustained collaboration between research and policymaking communities.

Together, the Knowledge Broker and Policy Lead form the operational core of the policy lab, responsible for integrating research insights into policy processes while simultaneously bringing real-world land use challenges back into the research domain. Through this dynamic feedback loop, they ensure that the policy lab remains grounded in scientific evidence while being responsive to practical governance needs. Their ability to build trust, facilitate communication, and align diverse interests is essential to addressing complex land use challenges with actionable, evidence-informed solutions.

Each policy lab requires a tailored agreement between the Knowledge Broker and the Policy Lead, adapted to the specific local context. This agreement should define their roles clearly and allocate tasks and responsibilities accordingly. The following section provides guidance and inspiration on how these roles can be effectively structured and operationalized in practice.

2.1.1 Knowledge broker defines the research gap – research context

The knowledge broker is a researcher with a deep **understanding of the research context** related to the challenges and topics that the policy lab aims to address. This individual is skilled at translating local challenges and opportunities into specific research gaps and questions.

The knowledge broker plays a crucial role in ensuring interdisciplinary research on the local context, coordinating efforts across disciplines (e.g., in the MOSAIC project, land-use modelling, social sciences examining drivers of land-use change, both quantitative and qualitative) to conduct comprehensive and coherent case studies.

If the knowledge broker is embedded within a project, such as MOSAIC, they can leverage interdisciplinary knowledge from the project. If not embedded within a project, the knowledge broker must proactively seek out and integrate relevant knowledge related to policy innovation topics.

What is the specific role of the knowledge broker in the policy lab? (Figure 3)

- **Co-designing the policy lab**: Assist the policy lead in identifying a window of opportunity to strengthen the policy-science interface (section 2.2, core focus).
- **Knowledge transfer**: Ensure the integration of scientific and experiential knowledge, as well as research results, into the policy lab, acting as a bridge between research and policymaking.
- **Facilitator**: Facilitate knowledge exchange within the policy lab (e.g., workshops with stakeholders, sessions during conferences). This includes preparing a playbook (script) for meetings, defining workshop formats, and moderating sessions.
- **Planning and feedback collection**: Plan and collect feedback and needs related to the activities within the policy lab.
- **Reporting**: Report on policy lab activities and methodologies to other researchers involved in the policy lab, fostering interdisciplinary knowledge production.

Figure 3 What are the tasks of the knowledge broker? Answers based on the meeting (22/11/2023) with all knowledge brokers involved in MOSAIC

Do you wonder if you have the right competencies to be a knowledge broker? Are you uncertain about the specific skills and expertise a knowledge broker needs?

Please visit the self-reflection tool to explore your own competences as a researcher in the science for policy field: Smart4Policy | Home.

2.1.2 Policy lead identifies the need in the policy context

The policy lead is a policymaker actively involved in the policy development process for a specific area. This individual can be a public servant or a representative from a civil society organization, with a deep understanding of the policy context surrounding a particular societal and environmental challenge.

The policy lead possesses a thorough understanding of the local context, including societal and environmental needs (see section 2.4.1 for in-depth stakeholder analysis), and is skilled at aligning these needs with the broader policy context (e.g., policy cycle, institutional analysis—see section 2.3.2). In essence, the policy lead ensures the actionability of the knowledge produced within the policy lab.

What is the specific role of the policy lead in the policy lab? (Figure 4)

- **Co-designing the policy lab**: Set up the policy lab in collaboration with the knowledge broker through a co-design process.
- **Delivering context-specific knowledge**: Provide the knowledge broker with essential context-specific information (e.g., the history of the area, ecological characteristics, the policymaking process) and social networks.
- **Point of contact for stakeholders**: Act as the first point of contact for local stakeholders, channelling their ideas and topics into the policy lab.
- **Providing feedback from practice**: Offer feedback from real-world experience to all interdisciplinary research activities related to the local context:
    - *What is happening in the landscape? What drives these changes?*
    - *What are the local goals in terms of climate, biodiversity, and renewable energy?*
    - *What new policies are being discussed? What tools are needed?*
- **Connecting with ongoing policy discussions**: Identify windows of opportunity by linking with ongoing policy discussions and policy design:
    - *What are important occasions to present interdisciplinary research?*
    - *What results can be discussed?*
- **Facilitating stakeholder engagement**: Facilitate stakeholder engagement when needed for research on complex land use issues.
- **Co-planning and co-organizing workshops**: Co-plan and co-organize meetings and workshops with the knowledge broker, ensuring proper stakeholder involvement, engagement, timing, location, and logistics. Support the knowledge broker in facilitating these workshops.

Figure 4. What are the tasks of the policy lead? Answers based on the meeting (22/11/2023) with all policy leads in MOSAIC

Are you a policy maker and are you inspired in making innovative policy on land use issues? Are you uncertain about the specific skills and expertise to do so?

Please visit the self-reflection tool to explore your own competences as a policy maker aspiring to make innovative policy: Smart4Policy | Home

2.1.3 Challenges in Establishing a Core Group

Establishing a core group for a policy lab involves addressing several challenges. The following challenges are based on the experiences of the policy labs within MOSAIC:

- **Building trust**: A successful core group relies on mutual trust among participants. This can be particularly challenging in a policy lab, where the policy lead and knowledge broker may have differing priorities, expectations, or levels of familiarity with collaborative processes.
- I**dentifying and engaging the right people**: A core group must include key decisionmakers, researchers, and practitioners with the expertise to drive policy innovation. Identifying these individuals can be difficult, and once identified, they might leave the organization (see section 2.4, Stakeholder Management).
- **Balancing policy and research**: A policy lab provides a space for dialogue between different knowledge regimes, which often requires time to establish a common vocabulary (see section 2.4, Stakeholder Management).
- **Overburdened participants**: Policy workers and researchers may already face significant workloads, which can result in lower engagement or inconsistent participation (see section 2.4, Stakeholder Management).

The following example from the European Policy Lab illustrates how to strengthen the core group without overburdening policymakers and researchers, while effectively balancing their needs in a conference setting.

EU PL: Private Land Conservation in the EU

The knowledge broker and policy lead used the occasion of the LIFE ENPLC final conference to launch the EU policy lab and invited policymakers and researchers attending the conference to join their first meeting (EU Report on setting up the PL, 2024).

"I'm confident that we have found the topic that both researchers and ILVO-Eurosite can work on. [...] There is a willingness to work on this, which is already fantastic, which seems a little bit low as a result, but is actually very high as a benefit." (EU interview, 2024)

2.2 Common Core Focus

To foster evidence-informed policy innovation, a policy lab must operate within a window of opportunity—a concept from policy studies referring to critical moments when problems, policy solutions, and political will converge, creating favourable conditions for change (Hinrichs-Krapels et al., 2020; Wellstead et al., 2021).

This building block, referred to as the *Common Core Focus*, extends the traditional policy-centric interpretation of the window of opportunity by incorporating a research perspective. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing research gaps as integral components of this window, reframing it as the intersection of policy needs, societal challenges, and emerging research opportunities.

Moreover, this building block draws on insights regarding the importance of developing a common language to support transdisciplinary collaboration (Von Der Lippe et al., 2020). However, the need for a common language extends beyond terminology; it involves shared understanding of concepts, goals, processes, and relationships (Janich and Zakharova, 2014). In practice, achieving a fixed and homogeneous language is often unfeasible. Therefore, transdisciplinary research must navigate semantic pluralism, embracing multiple perspectives and meanings as part of effective science-society collaboration (Herberg et al., 2021). Against this backdrop, the *Common Core Focus* is presented in this guideline as a distinct and essential building block in the establishment of a policy lab. Its relevance was consistently confirmed throughout the MOSAIC project—via semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and informal exchanges.

Establishing a *Common Core Focus* requires ongoing, in-depth dialogue among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders within the policy lab. This process facilitates a shared understanding of the key issues and challenges to be addressed within each case study. Notably, the core focus may evolve over time as the policy lab progresses.

A shared understanding, developed through co-creation of a common language, is critical for two key reasons:

- It enhances engagement and collaboration among all relevant stakeholders involved in the policy lab.
- It ensures that the knowledge generated is actionable—capable of directly informing policy and practice.

2.2.1 Identifying and Defining a Common Core Focus in Policy Labs

Achieving a clear and shared definition of the *Common Core Focus* requires an iterative and collaborative process in a policy lab (Lupp et al., 2021). Typically, this process involves several preparatory meetings with the *Core Group* and other key actors in the policy lab (PL), such as researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders (Marvin et al., 2018).

The process of identifying a common core focus can vary across policy labs, shaped by factors such as policy developments, research insights, and societal dynamics. For example:

- **Policy-driven focus**: New or evolving policies may define the policy lab's topic and research questions.
- **Research-driven focus**: Critical issues highlighted by research findings may prompt the need for further exploration.
- **Gap-driven focus**: Gaps in existing policies may necessitate coordinated input from researchers, civil society, and practitioners to bring the issue onto the policy agenda.
- **Society-driven focus**: Societal debates, public concerns, or emerging trends (e.g., economic challenges or climate action) may influence the direction of the policy lab and drive policy change.

As different perspectives are aligned the 'Window of opportunity' is revealed and, priorities can be refined, ensuring that the focus remains actionable and relevant.

However, achieving this *Common Core Focus*, this shared understanding does not happen overnight. **It requires time and continuous dialogue**, allowing stakeholders to explore different interpretations of key terms and concepts. This iterative process strengthens mutual understanding, ultimately fostering better collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

Additionally, the *Common Core Focus* should be refined into specific research questions to effectively engage researchers. Aligning these questions with their work and goals increases their involvement and ensures their expertise contributes meaningfully to the policy lab's objectives.

The variation in approaches towards the definition of a core focus is illustrated through examples from the Swiss and Hungarian policy labs within the MOSAIC project.

Instead of reaching out to each 26 Swiss cantons, the knowledge broker and policy lead participated in specialists' conferences (energy ministers, spatial planning experts) to more effectively involve stakeholders in the Swiss Policy Lab. (Swiss interview, 2024)

"There is a policy opportunity in Switzerland, as cantons are required to create spatial plans for large-scale solar farm installations, providing a critical window for research to actively support and shape sustainable decision making in renewable energy development. Our research in the MOSAIC policy lab therefore aims to facilitate transparent discussions about trade-offs and identify robust areas for renewable energy development that align with both climate mitigation goals and the protection of local ecosystems." (Swiss Report on setting up the PL, 2024)

According to the Hungarian knowledge broker and policy lead, the MOSAIC project is a great research framework for making connections with local stakeholders, and to get closer to the understanding of how land users relate to their land, how they envision to change their land-use techniques under new climatic conditions. (Hungarian PL interview, 2024)

"*One of the core focuses of the policy lab is to raise awareness in agricultural policymaking regarding local issues on water scarcity in the Sand Ridge region, to modify the subsidy system and specific elements of legislation. We developed this focus through interviews and interactive workshops with local stakeholders and dialogues within our policy lab. However, the lack of involvement from policymakers in our policy lab makes it challenging to foster effective interaction between policy and science on this core focus."* (Hungarian Report on setting up the PL, 2024)

2.2.2 Challenges in Defining a Comon Core Focus

- **Ensuring Relevance to Key Stakeholders**: It is essential that the topic chosen for the policy lab is significant and relevant to all involved stakeholders. This relevance motivates and encourages active participation, ensuring that stakeholders are committed to contributing meaningfully to the process.
- **Addressing Misconceptions**: Stakeholders may enter the dialogue with misconceptions or limited knowledge about the policy lab's topic. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for building a shared understanding and alignment on the core focus, helping everyone involved to be on the same page.
- **Managing Power Dynamics**: Existing power dynamics can influence discussions within the policy lab. It's important to recognize and, when necessary, shift these dynamics to ensure that all stakeholders feel equally heard and respected. This creates a more collaborative and inclusive environment for the group.

2.3 Policy Mapping

A thorough understanding of the existing policy landscape forms the foundation for developing effective and actionable policy innovations. Rather than jumping into solutions, successful policy labs begin with structured preparatory work—mapping relevant policies, plans, resources, and regulations; monitoring policy content, context, actors, and processes; and identifying key barriers and enablers of change (Baungaard et al., 2021; Hinrichs-Krapels et al., 2020).

In the MOSAIC project, policy mapping is considered a critical step during the establishment phase of a policy lab. This process is implemented through two dedicated tools that go beyond general policy analysis by focusing specifically on:

- Systematic policy cycle analysis, and
- Institutional analysis through mapping the governance landscape.

These tools provide a more nuanced and practice-oriented understanding of the policy environment, ensuring that the lab's activities are embedded within real governance dynamics.

2.3.1 Policy Cycle: Insights on How Different Policies Address the Core Focus

The policy cycle offers a structured framework for analysing how policies develop and evolve through a series of stages—typically including agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. Although often considered somewhat idealized, the policy cycle remains a useful analytical tool for examining science-policy interactions and enhancing evidence-informed decision-making (Marsden and Reardon, 2017).

While there are multiple interpretations of the policy cycle, most frameworks share similar core components. For example, McGonigle et al. (2020), building on the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), describe four stages: (i) agenda setting, (ii) policy formulation, (iii) implementation, and (iv) review. Abdrabo et al. (2020) and Howlett & Giest (2015) outline a five-phase cycle consisting of agenda setting, policy formulation, decision making, implementation, and evaluation (Figure 5).

Understanding the policy cycle is crucial for policy labs, as it offers insight into how policy processes unfold and where opportunities exist for research to influence outcomes. Using the policy cycle as an analytical tool enables researchers and practitioners to map existing policies against the core focus of the lab, identify gaps, and understand where their interventions can be most effective.

By aligning research efforts with specific stages of the policy process—whether formulation, implementation, or evaluation—policy labs can ensure their contributions are timely, relevant, and actionable. This perspective also helps researchers better understand policymakers' needs, including the type and format of knowledge that is most useful at each stage of decision-making.

Ultimately, a deeper engagement with the policy cycle equips policy labs to tailor their approaches, strategically position evidence, and **identify key moments for influence or collaboration, thereby increasing their overall impact**.

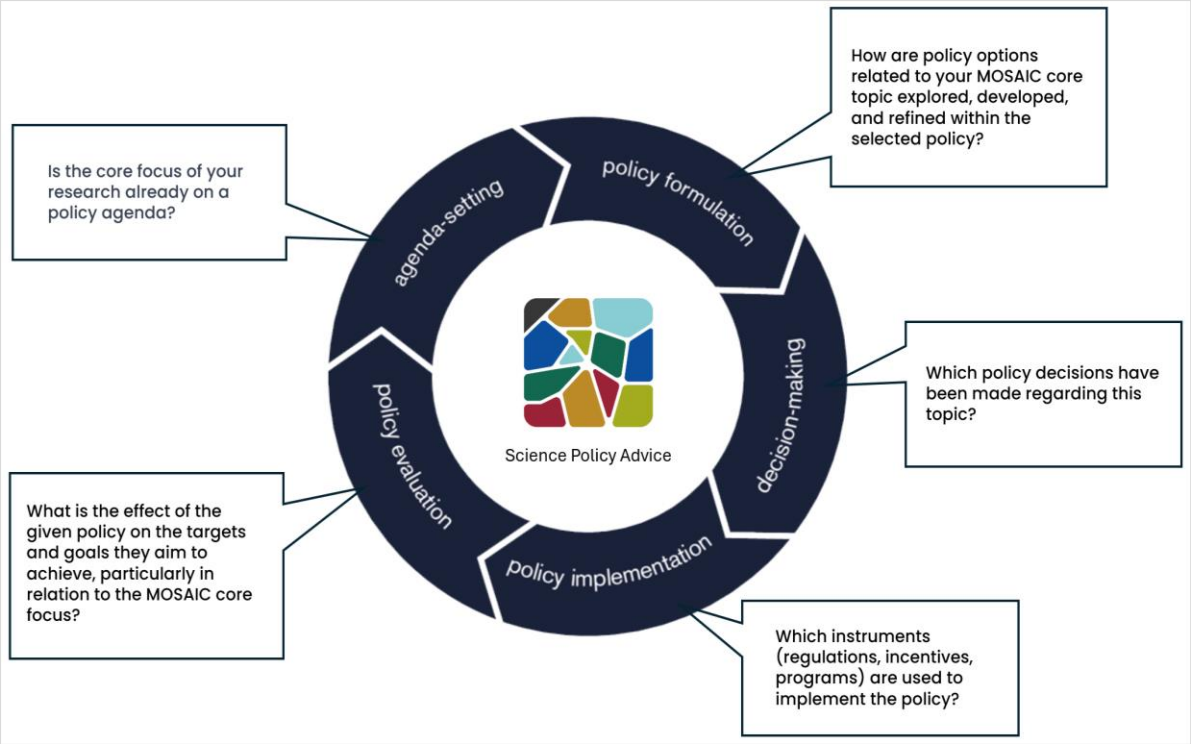

Figure 5. Using the policy cycle as a tool to better understand the policy context of your research (Based on Howlett and Giest (2015)

The policy cycle framework has also been effectively applied to land use governance challenges through scenario-based planning approaches that connect scientific knowledge with policy development (Albert et al., 2016). These applications demonstrate how collaborative processes between scientists, policy makers and stakeholders can enhance decision making about complex land uses issues (Durán-Díaz, 2023).

The Portuguese Policy Lab invited different stakeholders to work together, who showed interest in co-creating policy, as there is a general knowledge gap on land use policy in the region. (Portuguese PL interview, 2024)

"We selected policies related to different institutional levels, intervention domains and policy cycle stages. In February, a first meeting with the regional decision maker to present the MOSAIC project is planned. This creates an opportunity for the project interaction." (Portuguese Report on setting up the PL, 2024)

In setting up the Belgian Policy Lab, the knowledge broker noted that stakeholders had a personal connection to the landscape and that their interactive engagement would help the policy-making process.

"The policy objectives concerning grasslands are fragmented in several policies. Legal definitions of grasslands vary in different policy domains, which shows how complex the topic is from a policy perspective." (Belgian PL interview, 2024)

2.3.2 Institutional analysis: Mapping the Governance Landscape

Policymaking is deeply embedded in the institutional context—a complex web of relationships, power dynamics, and organizational structures across policy departments and governance levels. This context significantly shapes policy outcomes, as competing interests, bureaucratic procedures, and institutional mandates interact in ways that influence decisions (Auzins et al., 2022). For policy labs aiming to design coherent and effective interventions, a nuanced understanding of this institutional landscape is essential. In the field of land governance, institutions are defined as "relatively enduring collections of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources," which persist even as individual actors and external circumstances change (Krawchenko and Tomaney, 2023; March and Olsen, 2009). Institutional analysis seeks to understand how these structures –rules, norms, laws, and practices –are created, maintained, and evolve over time (Miller et al., 2017).

A widely used approach for such analysis is the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework developed by Elinor Ostrom. Since its introduction in Governing the Commons (1990), the framework has evolved to place greater emphasis on adaptive governance and institutional change, particularly in Understanding Institutional Diversity (Romero-Muñoz et al., 2023; Torfing et al., 2024). In the specific context of land use innovation, tailored frameworks have emerged—such as Skog's (2018) IAD-inspired model that incorporates national, regional, and local governance levels to analyse farmland conversion decisions.

To support the practical application of institutional analysis, **visual representation tools** have proven highly valuable. These tools map the relationships between actors, rules, and institutional layers, offering a clearer view of governance dynamics across sectors and scales. By translating institutional complexity into accessible formats—such as diagrams or layered maps—visual tools help policymakers and stakeholders to better understand decision-making processes and identify both opportunities and constraints (Grybko, 2025; Pettit et al., 2006). Rather than prescribing institutional change, they inform and strengthen context-sensitive policy innovation by making hidden structures and dynamics more transparent (Romero-Muñoz et al., 2023).

Such **graphical summary** can serve multiple purposes:

- **Unravelling policy complexity**: By mapping out the institutional context, one can identify the institutions involved in the policy process and understand the formal and informal rules that govern it. This helps clarify the roles, functions, and decision-making procedures of these institutions, providing a comprehensive view of how policies are shaped.
- **Mapping stakeholders**: The graphical summary also aids in identifying key stakeholders, uncovering potential conflicts, and examining power relations between them. This information is vital for stakeholder mapping in the policy lab, ensuring that all relevant actors are included and their influence on the policy process is understood.
- **Facilitating interregional learning:** Especially the case of cross-comparison between different contexts, such as in a Horizon Europe projects, a graphical summary fosters a common language and frame of reference for all participants involved in the policy lab. This approach is particularly valuable for partners who may have less background in the local policy context, as it enables collaborative reflection on policy opportunities and challenges.

Based on the literature, discussions with researchers and local policy partners within the MOSAIC project, a template for institutional analysis has been developed[1] (Figure 6). The analysis captures various levels of government and the public-private interface concerning land use and land-use changes—the focal point of the MOSAIC policy lab. Below are two example reactions on the relevance of an institutional analysis in the Danish and Portuguese policy labs demonstrate.

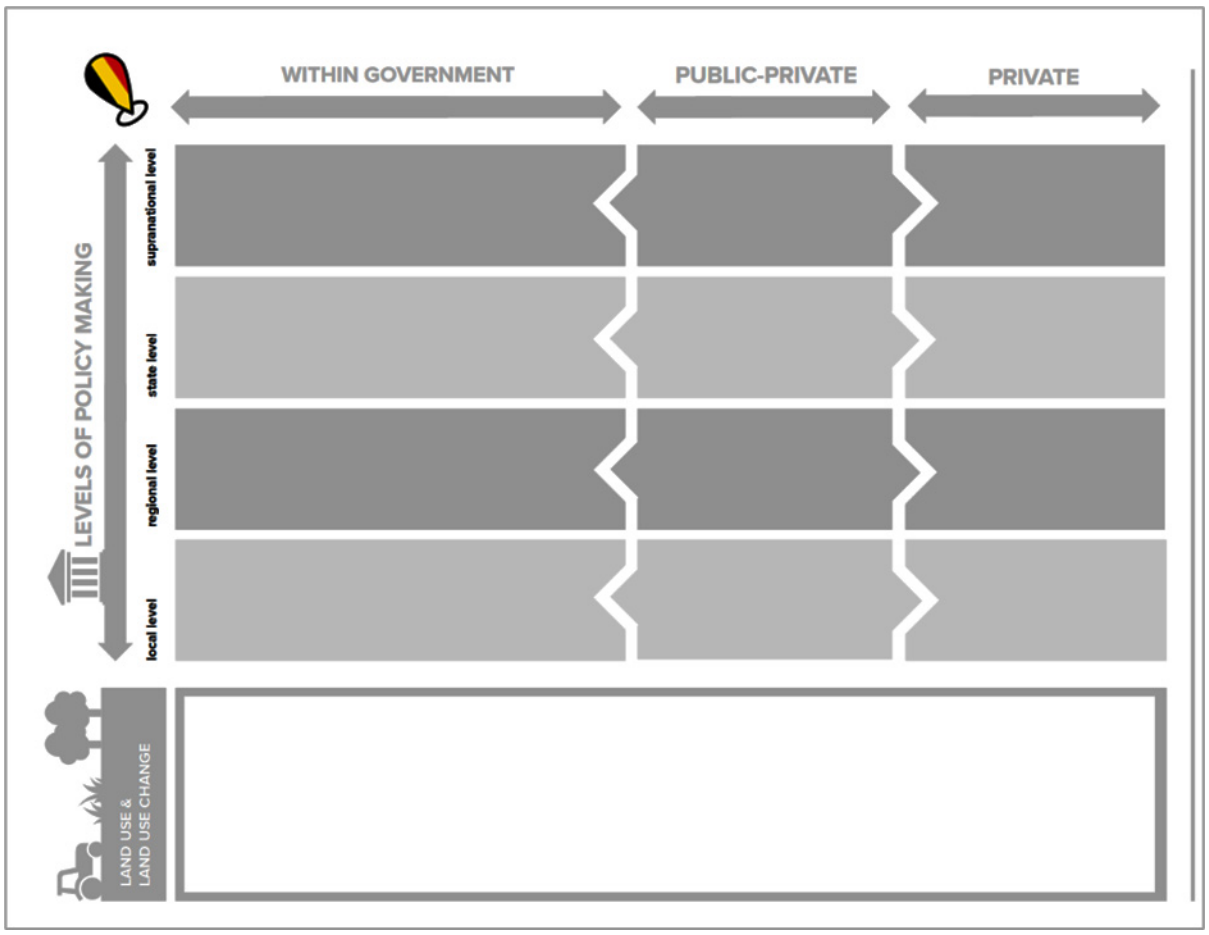

Figure 6 - Mapping the Governance Landscape

Afforestation and the taking out peatland of production in the Danish Policy Lab are seen as two main tools in the aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Policy ambitions are large – almost all peatland out of production, and afforestation of 250.000 ha. Hence a variety of measures are likely to be implemented in order to reach these targets. MOSAIC provides a unique opportunity to analyse these largescale changes and understand better the barriers and options for land-use change and analyse the experience of up taking policies.

Further, there is a large focus on biodiversity conservation, recently emphasized by the approval of the EU Nature restoration Law, and on water quality through the framework directive's aim of reaching good water quality – which is a goal with challenges in Denmark. Several research and advisory bodies in Denmark are pointing at the potential synergies between biodiversity conservation,

[1] A template for an A1 poster will be available on the MOSAIC digital learning environment.

nature restoration, water quality and climate policy. Hence, this is to be considered as well." (Danish Report on the setting up of the PL)

The institutional analysis conducted before setting up the Portuguese Policy Lab found that the National Energy Plan And Climate is an example that permits disclosing the "ecosystem" of the different public and private institutions involved in policymaking at different spatial level. The institutional analysis shows how these institutions effect land use and also the trade-offs between renewables and land. (Portuguese Report on the setting up of the PL)

2.3.3 Challenges in Policy Mapping

Influencing or developing policies that align with broader EU development goals is a complex process, and its success largely depends on **the position of the core focus within the policy cycle**. If the core focus is situated at the agenda-setting phase, there is often more opportunity for influence, as new policies are being shaped and designed. In contrast, when the focus moves beyond agenda setting—such as during policy evaluation or assessment of existing policies—the process becomes more challenging. At this stage, the policy lab's role may shift towards scrutinizing current policies, learning from their impacts, and proposing adjustments or improvements. Navigating these different stages requires strategic planning and adaptability, as influencing policy in later stages often involves engaging with established processes, existing institutional structures, and entrenched interests, all of which can create additional hurdles in aligning policy with the EU's broader climate and biodiversity goals.

2.4 Stakeholder Management

Achieving systemic change requires a comprehensive understanding of diverse societal perspectives and the meaningful integration of these viewpoints into decision-making processes. This fourth building block, *Stakeholder Management*, presents a detailed and structured approach to stakeholder mapping, analysis, and engagement designed to support and enable such inclusive transformation.

Policy labs create networks of researchers from various scientific disciplines and a wide range of policy-making stakeholders (Carney et al., 2009), intentionally including "unusual suspects" who might not typically participate in policy discussions. This approach offers both significant potential and substantial challenges. The co-design process for defining a policy lab—outlined in this guideline—aims to include all relevant stakeholders to contribute to a sustainable and equitable world (Bryson, 2004; Bryson et al., 2002; Whicher, 2021). Ensuring that no perspectives are excluded in the development of actionable knowledge demands deliberate, inclusive, and systematic strategies. This involves recognizing diverse viewpoints, valuing all voices, and actively seeking input from a broad range of stakeholders. **Policy lab initiators and coordinators bear a significant responsibility to foster and maintain inclusivity and equity throughout the process.** By doing so, policy labs can develop just and equitable strategies that reflect a wide range of societal needs and interests. At the same time, it

is essential to place strong emphasis on protecting participants' data rights before they engage in the policy lab (see Section 2.4.3), recognizing that these rights are deeply embedded within a social context shaped by complex networks, power dynamics, and systems of interest.

This building block involves stakeholder analysis and stakeholder engagement presenting various methods for stakeholder mapping, for analysing the diverse interests of the stakeholders, their different power relations and based on these results offering a detailed strategy for engaging them in land use related decision making (Bryson, 2004; Norström et al., 2020). See section 2.4.1) and 2.4.2.)

Establishing policy labs using an intersectional approach requires attentiveness to contextual diversity while ensuring inclusivity across various dimensions, such as socio-economic background, gender, age, ethnicity, and religion. Engaging a diverse group of stakeholders is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of the core focus and avoiding biases—particularly gender and age biases—in research findings. In practice, women are often underrepresented in workshops, making it crucial to prioritize gender balance (Beaudoin et al., 2022; Brons et al., 2022; Shah, 1998).

2.4.1 Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis

A case-study-based approach (Yin, 1994) is presented to reach the above declared aims, combined with a detailed analysis of the state of the art. To ensure the involvement, stakeholder mapping and analysis is necessary **to identify and prioritize key individuals or groups** (Blanc et al., 2018; Raum, 2018; Reed et al., 2009; White et al., 2017)**.** The stakeholder engagement and the institutional analysis are closely linked to each other.

Using a systematic method, one can identify individuals and institutions that have a stake in the case study area by mapping the relationships among them and analysing the impacts on their activities. **Stakeholder mapping and analysis require collaborative methods, data collection and analysis that integrate multiple perspectives.** It is essential to grasp the political motives, power dynamics, including influential figures within the policy landscape (Ascione et al., 2021). This includes identifying both advocates and opponents of the core focus, along with uncovering their interests and networks.

There are **different methods** available to conduct a stakeholder mapping and the state-of-the-art analysis:

- Semi-structured interviews
- Short surveys, screening surveys
- Focus groups
- Net-map (social network analysis)
- Visual tools: onion diagram, stakeholder matrix
- Workshops: brainstorming, visioning, scenario, prioritization workshops
- Citizen science tools

The following dimensions support the understanding of the roles of different stakeholders:

- **Influence**: The level of power or influence the stakeholder holds in shaping the policy process.
- **Interest:** The degree to which the topic is relevant and engaging for the stakeholder, motivating their participation in the policy lab.
- **Openness to Cooperation**: The willingness and readiness of the stakeholder to engage in discussions and cooperate on the policy lab's topics.
- **Legitimacy:** The acceptance and recognition of the stakeholder's role and perspectives within the policy context.
- **Urgency:** The perceived urgency for the stakeholder in addressing the specific challenge or issue at hand.
- **Knowledge**: The relevance and depth of the stakeholder's expertise or knowledge related to the policy lab's focus.

Building on the key dimensions outlined above, the next crucial step in stakeholder analysis is the **classification of stakeholders** and the development of **a stakeholder typology**. This typology provides a structured framework for understanding the diversity of stakeholders involved and their varying levels of engagement with the policy lab's core focus. By categorizing stakeholders based on their influence, interest, openness to cooperation, legitimacy, urgency, and knowledge, one can better assess how to prioritize them within the context of the policy lab.

Once the typology is established, prioritization follows based on the identified core topic of the policy lab. This allows for targeted engagement, ensuring that the most relevant stakeholders are brought into discussions and decision-making processes. A simple interest-influence matrix can further enhance this approach, offering a visual representation of stakeholder groups and their relative power and interest in the policy issue at hand. Such tools help ensure a focused and effective stakeholder engagement strategy, leading to more informed and collaborative policy development.

Practical examples of the stakeholder analysis method & outcome of the Hungarian & Portuguese MOSAIC policy lab are given below.

In the Hungarian policy lab, knowledge brokers introduced interactive methods and a mix of facilitated discussions and presentations. Participants and other stakeholders are informed about the results and summaries of the policy lab meeting. Showing practical results helps to gain the trust of stakeholders, which is necessary for long-term cooperation. (Hungarian PL interview, 2024)

"In the Hungarian policy lab, interviews were conducted to identify key stakeholders. Based on these interviews, an overview of stakeholder groups, their position, and power over land-use change was developed." (Hungarian Report on setting up the PL, 2024)

"In the Portuguese Policy Lab, first, we conducted a stakeholder mapping focused on place-based engagement at the regional level. We identified four distinct groups, with selection criteria defined according to the core focus on land use intensification."

"To contact the stakeholders, we used the database of the organization of our policy lead and added relevant contacts from other complementary research projects, reaching a list of 45 relevant stakeholders to be involved in the policy lab. These stakeholders were invited to the policy lab launch; 24 proceeded to the online launching and 13 joined the policy lab. Accordingly, we summarized the stakeholders' perceived influence, interest, legitimacy, topic knowledge, openness to cooperation, and urgency based on their backgrounds and input at the launch event." (Portuguese Report on setting up the PL, 2024)

The **match-finding approach**[2] employed during the establishment of policy labs often led to the initiation of activities with a limited number of pre-selected stakeholders. This pre-selection process is conducted before the formal inception of the policy labs, to engage specific stakeholder groups on targeted research questions, to gather their insights, and perspectives and to co-create a common understanding, a common language. However, maintaining complete neutrality in this stakeholder engagement process has proven to be challenging. **Policy labs, therefore, serve as platforms for negotiation, fostering dialogue and promoting alignment among diverse stakeholder perspectives.**

2.4.2 Stakeholder Engagement

Even after a detailed stakeholder mapping and analysis, during a stakeholder engagement process, **gaps in stakeholder representation can be identified** (Reed et al., 2018). These gaps should lead to recommendations for including new stakeholders in subsequent invitation lists by knowledge brokers and policy leads. Despite joint efforts to manage stakeholder participation, uncertainties remain. **Knowledge brokers and policy leads frequently encounter challenges in determining the list of participants,** even after an online pre-registration process. These uncertainties complicate logistical decisions, such as the selection of appropriate locations and catering arrangements.

Underlying tensions within stakeholder groups

It is crucial to recognize that stakeholder groups are not homogeneous; internal disagreement and tensions often exist, which can pose significant challenges to consensus-building efforts. Beyond the core members of the policy labs, knowledge brokers and policy leads actively engage with sceptical and interested stakeholder groups. Engagement involves providing information about the policy labs' objectives and frameworks, with the aim of fostering future collaborations and enhancing overall stakeholder participation.

[2] Match-finding is an approach to establishing a policy lab considering both stakeholders and the core topic at the same time. A match had to be found between stakeholders and the core topic.

Gender and age balance within stakeholder groups

In the policy lab, a thematic representativity should be achieved, in other words, it means engagement of different types of stakeholders in terms of knowledge and experience related to the topic (Beaudoin et al., 2022; Brons et al., 2022).

To promote inclusiveness, consider the following actions:

- **Commit to gender equity**: Set clear goals, actions, and measures to achieve balanced participation.
- **Acknowledge contributions**: Proactively recognize and highlight women's roles in research and decision making.
- **Expand outreach**: Collaborate with women's associations to encourage female participation.
- **Ensure accessibility**: If necessary, organize dedicated 'women-only' workshops at suitable times to foster engagement.
- **Invite both easy and challenging groups**: Include not only supportive stakeholders but also sceptical or hesitant ones, as their perspectives can provide valuable insights. If a crucial stakeholder is missing from the policy lab, send an invitation again later. Consider categorizing invitees into four groups:
  - Must be invited
  - Should be invited
  - Supporters of the policy lab
  - Prefer not to invite

By applying these strategies, policy labs can foster more inclusive and well-rounded discussions, ensuring that diverse perspectives contribute to shaping policy innovations.

Levels of stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder engagement is closely tied to stakeholder analysis, as it ensures the involvement of key stakeholders who are relevant to the core topic of the policy lab. The process of stakeholder mapping, analysis, and prioritization is followed by the development of an **engagement cycle**, execution of the actions, and, finally, monitoring and evaluation. We defined **five levels of stakeholder involvement, based** on Mathur (2008) and Reed et al. (2018) (Table 1):

- **Inform**: Informing stakeholders helps raise awareness about the main issues and shows the progress of the project. This level is typically applied to stakeholders with lower interest and influence in the policy lab, as identified in the interest-influence matrix.
- **Consult**: Consultation ensures that stakeholder opinions and insights are considered in project development. This step also helps build trust among diverse actors.
- **Involve**: Involving stakeholders allows for the implementation of project goals and the translation of findings into practice.
- **Collaborate**: Collaboration fosters co-learning, promotes partnerships, and generates alternative solutions to existing and emerging issues. Active involvement and collaboration also ensure sustained learning throughout the project.

- **Empower**: Empowerment expands the scope of participation for stakeholders who are often marginalized, such as women, youth, people of colour, minorities, and other underrepresented groups. Empowerment provides a voice to these actors during research, decision making, and project implementation. It can also enhance innovation within the project, as it brings diverse perspectives into the process.

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Newsletter	Interviews	Interactive workshop	Joint data gathering & sharing	Training
Social media posts	Focus group	Photovoice	Joint planning	Education program
Handbook	Public Consultation	Joint research	Joint outputs	Capacity building
Podcasts	Exhibitions	Excursion	Participatory actions	Resource & Data sharing
e-mail	Webinars	Interactive webinars	Tasting events	Co-facilitation
Online communications, social media Blogs	Expert round tables	Stakeholder round table discussion	Co-created excursion	Joint representation
Workshops, conference				
Website				
Best practices				

Table 1. The most widespread tools applied to the five levels of stakeholder involvement.

2.4.3 Informed consent for onboarding stakeholders

As part of the recruiting process for the policy lab, a common understanding, rules of meetings, and data protection rights need to be addressed in one document prior to joining the policy lab. This document, often referred to as a consent form, ensures that all participants are fully informed about their roles, responsibilities, and rights within the lab. It typically outlines expectations for collaboration, confidentiality agreements, and how personal or shared data will be handled, stored, and protected. By signing the consent form, participants acknowledge their agreement to these terms, fostering a transparent and trustworthy environment for collaboration.

In most cases, 2 types of informed consent are required for a policy lab:

1. Consent to **participate in a study**. To give informed consent, participants must be aware of the nature of the procedure, the possible benefits, the potential risks and the right to terminate participation at any moment.
2. Consent to **keep or process personal data**. This is related to GDPR. Whether the data is collected in the context of a study or not does not matter.

Both types of informed consent may be combined in one document, and manually or digitally signed by the participant. The knowledge broker and policy lead are responsible for storing the signed documents in a secure place. The consent stays valid until the participant revokes it, or until the end of the research project.

2.4.4 Challenges in Stakeholder Management

The core group may encounter several critical challenges during stakeholder involvement, including:

- How can administrative burdens (such as consent forms and registrations) be minimized?
- Who qualifies as a policymaker, and which individuals should be included or addressed as policymakers?
- How can expectations be managed effectively throughout the project?
- What strategies can be employed to maintain stakeholder engagement over extended periods?

For the first two questions, the knowledge broker, the policy lead, and the entire core team must make clear, well-informed decisions. It is important to recognize that stakeholders' attitudes towards the core focus may shift over the course of the project. As a result, their level of involvement can change, and this should be reflected in the decision-making process.

The third and fourth question are especially dynamic throughout the project lifecycle. To manage this effectively, **the core team should continuously monitor stakeholder expectations** and adjust engagement strategies as necessary.

The following considerations can help mitigate these challenges:

- **Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis**: Reaching out to potential stakeholders for mapping and analysis (e.g., through questionnaires or interviews) may have constraints. The knowledge broker and policy lead should plan and coordinate this process to ensure that a wide range of stakeholders are included, utilizing their networks effectively.
- **Research Fatigue**: Different stakeholder groups—such as local participants, expert groups, and policymakers—might experience research fatigue. The core team should remain mindful of this and adapt engagement strategies accordingly.
- **Building Trust and Long-Term Engagement**: It is crucial to establish and maintain trust with stakeholders, particularly to keep them engaged over the long duration of the policy lab. This requires consistent communication and relationship building.
- **Bridging the Research-Policy Gap**: One common challenge for policy lab initiators is translating research language into accessible policy language. Differences in vocabulary and the presentation of the core topic can create barriers. Addressing this gap through clear communication strategies is key.

- **Local Conflicts and Stakeholder Dynamics**: Local conflicts may affect stakeholder engagement and influence the dynamics within the policy lab. In such cases, it is important to have a set of clear rules for interaction and a facilitation method in place to ensure productive dialogue (further details on engagement methods and facilitation can be found in the upcoming D.2.2 'Toolbox for knowledge exchange').

2.5 Coherent workplan

As part of our approach to establishing a policy lab, we introduce a less commonly emphasized but essential building block: the *Coherent Work Plan*. While existing literature on policy labs and evidence-informed policymaking consistently highlights the importance of "structured preparatory work" as a key design principle –particularly when engaging with a diverse set of stakeholders in inter- and transdisciplinary settings (Giraldo Nohra et al., 2020; Olejniczak et al., 2020; Rogge et al., 2013; Schleyer et al., 2017) –practical guidance on how to operationalize this principle remains limited.

To address this gap, our approach explicitly positions the development of a *Coherent Work Plan* as a standalone building block within the policy lab framework. We further propose a concrete method—a timeline workshop—designed to support this process. This workshop includes a set of predefined, role-specific guiding questions to help structure the planning process and align actors around common objectives. In complex, multi-actor research environments such as policy labs, this building block is critical for ensuring clarity, coordination, and shared ownership among all participants. A *Coherent Work Plan* serves as a tool to manage complexity, synchronize activities and timelines, and make effective use of available resources. Responsibility for developing the work plan lies with the policy lead and knowledge broker, who must coordinate the process and adapt it to the local context. Making use of existing meetings, policy cycles, or stakeholder events to co-develop the plan can significantly enhance both efficiency and stakeholder engagement.

We introduced the **timeline workshop**[3] as a practical, operational tool that engages both researchers and policy leads through structured, role-tailored questions to build together a *Coherent Work Plan*. This not only enhances the clarity of preparatory processes but also supports alignment and shared expectations early on. Furthermore, our recommendation to leverage existing events and institutional rhythms as entry points for collaboration adds another layer of practical value to the policy lab methodology.

Organizing a timeline workshop is a practical method to develop such a plan. This workshop facilitates collaborative discussions, using guiding questions to shape the process such as:

- *What is the goal of stakeholder interaction?*
- *What data will be collected or presented?*
- *Which stakeholders are involved, and what motivates their participation?*

[3] A template for an A1 poster will be available on the MOSAIC digital learning environment.

- *What are the logistical needs, such as location and timing?*

These prompts help identify priorities, roles, and resources while fostering inclusivity and shared commitment to the research agenda. The timeline workshop shall take place several time during the life span of the project (Figure 7).

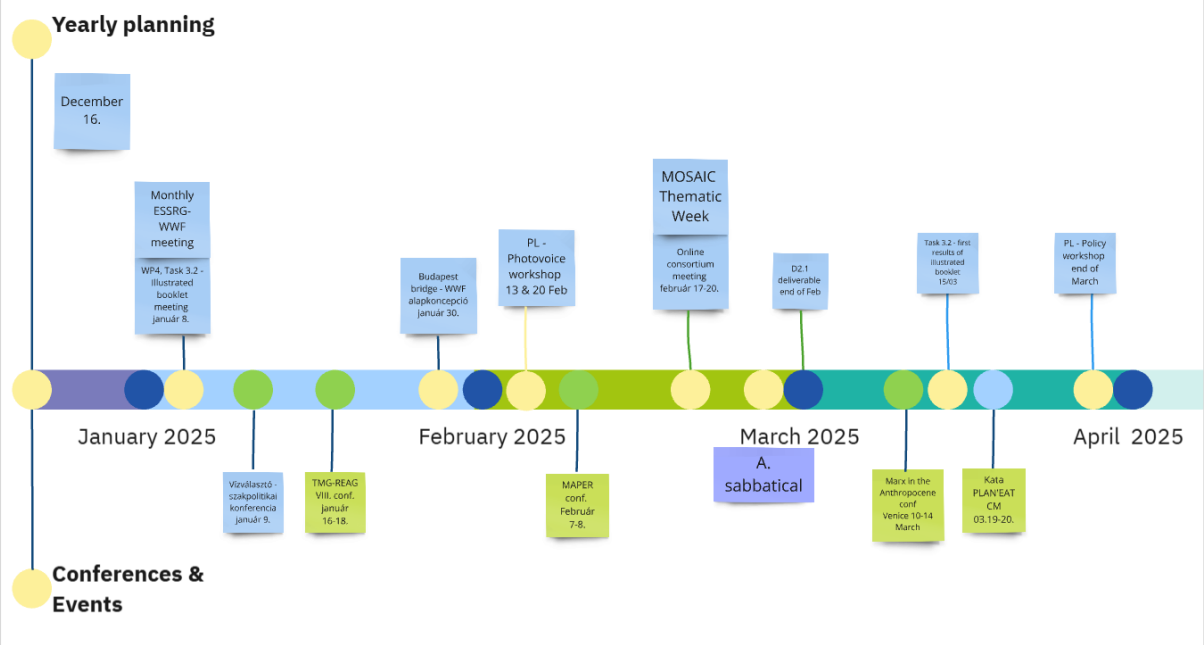

Figure 7. Timeline for 2025; ESSRG-WWF, Hungarian policy lab & research tasks

The timeline workshop should be guided by structured questions tailored to different roles:

- **For researchers**, questions focus on the goals and methods of stakeholder interaction, such as: *What is the goal of the interaction? What land use or land-use change is being addressed? What type of data will be collected or presented, and how?* It is also important to identify relevant stakeholders, their number, their motivation to participate, and their role in successful interactions.
- **For policy leads**, questions center on coordination and opportunities, such as: *Which stakeholders or policymakers need to meet, and when? What policies, land use changes, or drivers will be discussed? Are there existing meetings or events that can accommodate these discussions?* By considering factors like location, timing, and necessary support for interactions, participants can construct a feasible and collaborative plan to achieve the objectives of the policy lab effectively.

2.6 Main message

The sixth building block, *Main Message*, addresses “practical communication approaches” and the “presentation of evidence” (Auzins et al., 2022; Bouma, 2022; Giraldo Nohra et al., 2020; Marselis et al., 2024).

By elevating message definition to the level of a core building block, and by offering concrete recommendations for tailoring messages to diverse target audiences –alongside the practical suggestion to engage communication professionals– our approach represents an actionable contribution to the policy lab methodology.

Developing a clear and tailored message is essential for effectively communicating the purpose and progress of your policy lab to different stakeholders. Each stakeholder group –whether they are researchers, local stakeholders, or policymakers– has unique interests, expectations, and levels of understanding. When crafting the messages knowledge brokers and policy leads shall focus also on the wider audience; outside the policy labs.

A well-crafted message should therefore adapt to the audience while addressing fundamental elements: *Who is your target audience? Who is sending the message? What is the goal of the message? What is its content? And what effect should it achieve?* These considerations help ensure that your message resonates with its audience, facilitates understanding, and fosters meaningful engagement.

Tips & Tricks: Seek support from experts in content creation and visual design to enhance the clarity and appeal of your message. Engaging these experts as part of your policy lab team can amplify your communication efforts and create more impactful materials tailored to the needs of your stakeholders.

You can find some examples from the MOSAIC project here:

- Mosaic website
- Mosaic briefing pack In English
- Mosaic, presentation of the EU PL
- Mosaic, video on the EU PL
- Mosaic LinkedIn page

3 Additional practical information

To better bridge the science-policy-society gap, these further readings are recommended. All the references in this selection have a pragmatic and practical approach.

1. JRC competence frameworks for policymakers and researchers working on the science policy interface (SPI)
2. Guidelines defined in other EU project to enhance support to set up science-policy-society-interactions
    - Handbook to set up a policy lab as defined within the Fit4Food2030 project
    - Accelerator Labs in the Foodshift project
    - Fabulousfarmers project
3. More on how to increase the Policy Relevance of Research can be found in:
    - ERA Learn developed a toolkit on Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) that provides tailored information for the researcher as well as policymakers, among a self-reflection tool to enhance your understanding of your research and innovation practices.
    - In the European Biodiversity Partnership Biodiversa, an interesting Guide on Policy Relevance of Research was developed.

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