

LAUNCHING OF A EUROPEAN NETWORK OF LIVING LABS: A STEP TOWARDS A EUROPEAN INNOVATION SYSTEM 20 NOVEMBER 2006

The European Network of Living Labs is launched on 20 November 2006 as a step towards a European Innovation System.

Background

The deployment of concrete Europe-wide and visible measures to support the European policy for competitiveness and innovation is necessary to show progress towards the Lisbon objectives. The European Network of Living Labs is such a concrete and specific proposal. One of its core values is to improve and add momentum to the transfer of R&D insights and new technologies into real world applications and solutions. It will also provide opportunities to address societal issues by mobilizing the "collective intelligence and creativity" by means of new tools and methods using advanced information and communication technologies.

What is the European Network of Living Labs?

The European Network of Living Labs establishes a European platform for open, collaborative and co-creative innovation, where users are involved in the innovation process and contributing to the creation of innovations. Living Labs will provide innovation services to SMEs, large corporations, public sector agencies, NGOs and individual citizens. A systemic and coordinated approach will ensure that common methodologies and tools are being developed. With the dimension of a network across Europe, "interoperability" of the living labs will be achieved and Europe-wide reach of the innovation process ensured. The Network will enable sharing and exchange between Living Labs and provide a basis for Europe-wide cooperation, scale and efficiency. Regional clusters will provide the basis for specialisation areas of living labs on top of the common European dimension. Their scope will encompass generation of ideas, development of new network-based services and products, piloting of new business models and societal innovation with strong public sector and citizen involvement. In addition, the Living Labs will be centres for innovation and co-creation and conduct research projects in these fields across Europe. Living Labs will leverage ongoing research in user-centric innovation and lead user concepts and develop new research areas for idea generation and co-creation.

The aim is to create a network that attracts global companies to participate in promoting European R&D and innovation, especially in cases where rapid market entry and scalability of new services, businesses and technologies over different markets is crucial.

However, the network aims also at inspiring people to co-create with firms and public agencies. The European Network of Living Labs also provides opportunities for public agencies to enter into R&D and innovation activities with citizens and local and international firms.

The first wave of deployment comprises approximately 15 Living Labs candidates in 11 member states to become included in a European Network. Such candidates include Helsinki Virtual Village, Turku Archipelago, Mobile City Bremen, CeTIM Munich and Testbed Botnia.

The second and third waves are expected to bring the core of the emerging network up to 50-100 Living Labs.

The goal of the event

The event builds upon a paradigm shift that is currently occurring in innovation. Living labs are exemplifying this changing paradigm – with active user roles, open innovation processes, a widening scope ranging from product and services innovation to business model and societal innovation, we enter the age where innovation is being “democratized” (Eric Von Hippel). Information and communication technology (ICT) is a key enabler for mobilizing and aggregating the “collective intelligence and creativity”.

The goal of the event is to bring together representatives of the key stakeholders involved in open, collaborative and co-creative innovation – from the public sector, the business world, academia and NGOs. It will create the basis for an ongoing dialogue between these stakeholders, who embark on a multi-years journey.

The launch of the Network of Living Labs will demonstrate the commitment of the European Commission and national governments to make Living Labs a major element in the national, regional and European innovation system.

Under the Framework Program 6 the European Commission has started to support prototypes and pilots of Living Labs. Also first steps to share best practices and to develop a tool set and methodologies that should be used across Europe are incorporated in research projects funded by the European Commission.

A first roadmap for the further development and deployment of Living Labs will be presented and discussed.

The European Network of Living Labs promotes the European policy for competitiveness and innovation and consequently the goals of i2010 policy. The development of the European Network of Living Labs is a strong and concrete process already in action to revitalize the Lisbon goals. Currently, the piloting for the European Network of Living Labs has a funding of EUR 5 million (FP6) and the related EU research funding of around EUR 40 million (FP6). The European Network of Living Labs is a step towards a European Innovation System for jobs, growth and global competitiveness.

The structure and content of the event

The event has the following themes:

- Demonstrating the paradigm shift in innovation towards an open collaborative and co-creative process, moving outside the traditional R&D lab.
- Positioning the European Network of Living Labs within the framework of European research and innovation policy, also from the viewpoint of (i) participation of public services in R&D and innovation activities and (ii) the attractiveness of European R&D and innovation opportunities from the viewpoint of global firms
- The concept of European Network of Living Labs and practical examples of them. The purpose is to show the diversity of European Living Labs in terms of how they attract and inspire people, SMEs and international firms to participate in services, business and technology development. The Living Labs differ also in terms of technology, business and service orientation.

- The European Network of Living Labs has a global view; European firms have a global interest in their service, business and technological development. The event has examples of US and Chinese Living Labs. We will discuss about European unique profile that gives a global competitive edge giving a human-centric approach to new services, businesses and technological development. Finland, together with some other European countries, has a good opportunity to promote this approach.
- The European Innovation System; issues for discussion include: Europe as an open innovation environment, public sector participation in financing innovation processes (changes in public procurement for the pre-commercialization stage in favour for public R&D and innovation), need for stronger European venture capital financing for new innovations, open source innovations and intellectual property rights (IPRs) and the nature of and need for cross-regional and cross-national structural and institutional arrangements, including governance.
- The continuity over EU Presidencies; after Finland, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia should carry on the responsibility for promoting the European Network of Living Labs within the framework of the European research and innovation policy and consequent financial, structural and institutional instrumentation.

The morning sessions are chaired by Mr. Ulf Dahlsten, Director, EU Commission, DG: Information Society Technology and Media. The afternoon sessions are chaired by Mr. Esko Aho (SITRA), the Former Prime Minister of Finland and the chair of the Independent Expert Group for Hampton Court Report about European Innovativeness.

Conclusion

The European Network of Living Labs is implemented fully in the spirit of the Aho Group report 'Creating an Innovative Europe'¹ and the Experience and Application Research² approach encouraged by the Information Society Technologies Advisory Group (ISTAG). Consequently, the European Network of Living Labs is a concrete action that puts the Lisbon strategy into real life and stimulates not only new innovations but also the construction of a European-wide innovation system. This new open and dynamic structure for innovation mobilizes people to participate in co-creation with local and international firms and public agencies. However, this calls for new human-centric ways to conduct research for innovations and consequent methodologies plus governance, leadership and institutional frames.

This new way to innovate is now possible because of the development of ICT. Later on, the aim is also to experiment also other technologies than ICT. The applicable domains for systemic innovation may be among others in the fields of life sciences, energy and environmental technology.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/action/2006_ahogroup_en.htm

² ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/ist/docs/2004_ear_web_en.pdf