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Bridging the gap between Open and User Innovation? : exploring the value of Living Labs as a means to structure user contribution and manage distributed innovation

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Abstract

In nowadays society, organizations are struggling with the practical implementation of 'distributed innovation', or the fact that organizations need to reach outside their boundaries to tap into distributed sources of knowledge to enhance their innovation processes. Within this PhD, we will look at a specific approach, promoted and supported by the European Commission, that tries to facilitate and manage distributed innovation processes through a Public-Private-People partnership with a central role for the end-user: Living Labs. Following Almirall & Wareham (2011) and Leminen et al. (2014), we define Living Labs as an organized approach (as opposed to an ad hoc approach) to innovation consisting of real-life experimentation and active user involvement by means of different methods involving multiple stakeholders, as is implied in the Public-Private-People character of Living Labs. However, there are two main problems associated with these Living Labs. First problem, in terms of Living Lab practice and activity, is that there seem to be too many initiatives, without enough noticeable results or impact. This is linked to the second problem, dealing with Living Labs theory. To this date, there have been a lot of Living Lab publications, but there is no consistency in terms of connection to larger research paradigms and frameworks, and there is a lack of papers with a significant academic impact as well as research clearly illustrating their value. Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, we have investigated both the Open and User Innovation paradigms and demonstrated that Living Labs are an embodiment of both, although there are only few references to these literature streams in the current Living Labs literature. From a practice perspective, we have illustrated that Living Labs are rooted within various European predecessors such as cooperative design, social experiments and 'digital cities', but that out of the 345 affiliated members to the

European Network of Living Labs, at least 40% is currently inactive. In order to further evolve Living Labs as a concept and to allow a better conceptualization, we developed a three layered model, consisting of a macro level (the Living Lab constellation), the meso level (consisting of a Living Lab innovation project) and the micro level (consisting of the different methodological research steps). Moreover, within a multiple case study analysis of 4 Living Lab constellation, 21 Living Lab innovation projects and 107 methodological research steps, we have been able to demonstrate that the concepts gathered from the Open Innovation literature could be used to analyze the macro level, whereas the concepts from the User Innovation literature could be used on the micro level. Through co-creation, both levels merge on the meso level, resulting in useful contributions to the innovation in development. Therefore, we concluded that Living Labs are able to govern innovation networks and to structure user participation in concrete innovation projects.

Keywords

User Innovation, Innovation Management, Living Labs, Open Innovation

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