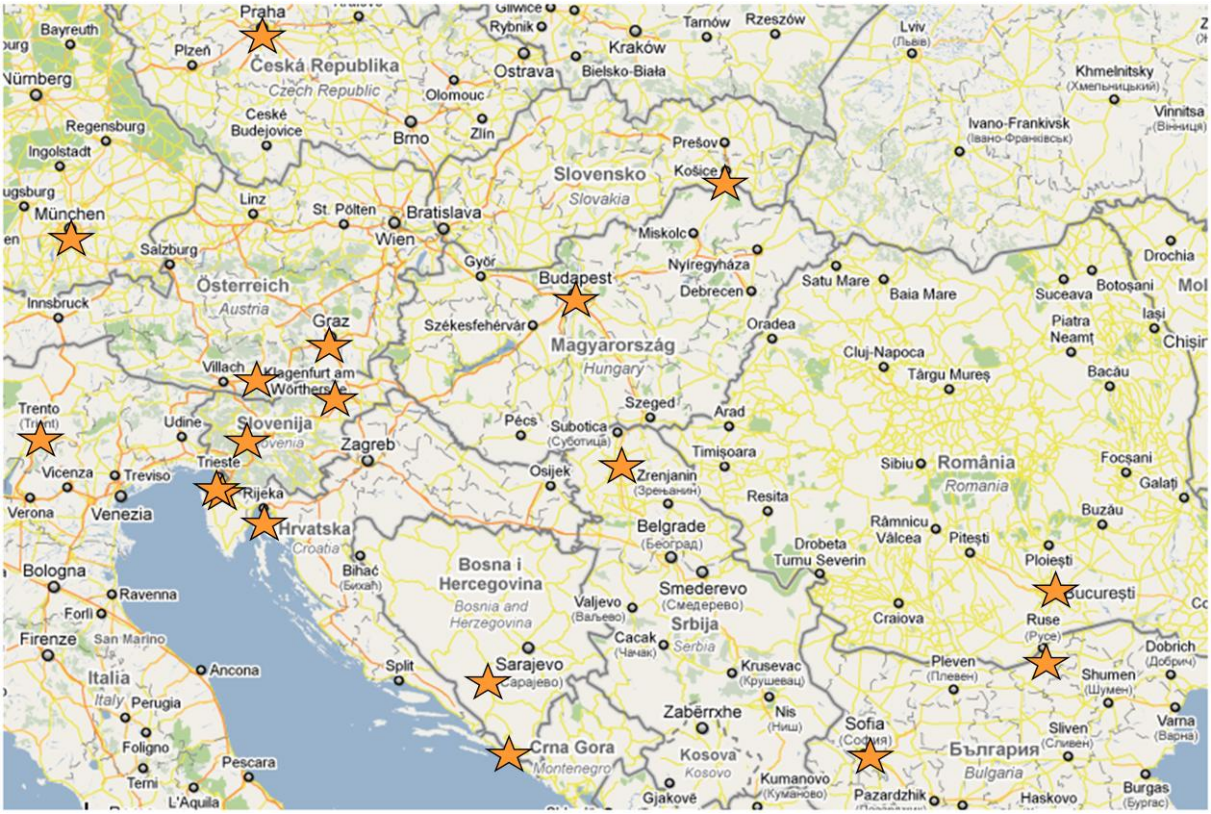
EU Strategy for the Danube Region



Position Paper of the Alpe Adria Danube universities INitiative - ALADIN

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The "ALADIN - ALpe Adria Danube universities INitiative" [1] founded in 2002 represents a longstanding and closely collaborating group of universities and associated centers of excellence and Living Labs located in Austria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia. Its members welcome the European Parliament's resolution of 21 January 2010 on a European Strategy for the Danube Region, which also stresses the need to involve the relevant regional and local stakeholders in the Danube region. A message of ALADIN members declaring interest in actively contributing to the strategy formation process was sent to the Members of the European Parliament representing the respective countries.[2]

With respect to the Scoping Paper[3] issued by the European Commission on 2 February 2010 and based on the groups' expertise in the field of eBusiness and enabling eTechnologies in a cross-border context, the undersigned members of the ALADIN Network express the following positions:

Regarding the main pillars of the Danube Region Strategy, namely

- to improve connectivity and communication systems (covering in particular transport, energy issues and the information society);
- to preserve the environment and prevent against natural risks;
- and to reinforce the potential for socio-economical development,

we suggest to include education, training, RTD, ICT & innovation areas as enablers.

In a world of growing complexity and need for cooperation, the competitive positions of both organizations in the region's countries and the region as a whole are increasingly determined by their competencies and skills at learning and developing in a continuous process. More flexible innovation approaches are needed than the traditional closed innovation models, where a company generates, develops and commercialises its own ideas in a fully-integrated model.

In order to increase the competitiveness of the Danube Region, cooperation and collaboration capacity especially of SMEs has to be improved. From a regional strategy point of view, cross-border collaboration is a must, hence cross-border innovation is a significant enabler. A transformation to open innovation, characterised by the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation, and expand the markets for external use of innovation, respectively, is needed.[4]

While in the traditional model large corporations were able to invest more heavily in internal R&D, take on the best and the brightest people and build up market-entry barriers based on innovation-leader strategies to capture high profit rates, the open innovation paradigm offers more equality of opportunity to SMEs – but at the same time creates new challenges for them. One of the most important implications of an open innovation system is that the detection of interesting technological and latent market trends are at least as important as performing the R&D itself. And generating bright ideas is still not enough for economic success, as the value of an innovation depends greatly upon the business model used to bring it to market.

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[1] http://www.aladin.units.it/
[2] http://elivinglab.org/ALADIN/LetterEuropeanParliament.pdf
[3] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/danube/doc/scoping_danube_strategy.pdf
[4] Chesbrough, H.: Open Innovation: A New Paradigm for Understanding Industrial Innovation, In: Chesbrough, H., Vanhaverbeke, W. & West, J. (eds): Open Innovation. Researching a New Paradigm. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006

Universities can play a pivotal role in this process, but need to fully embrace the open innovation approach as well:

While the European Commission considers the universities as motors of the new, knowledge-based paradigm it also clearly states that they are not in a position to deliver their full potential contribution to the re-launched Lisbon Strategy yet. The main conclusion is that "Europe must strengthen the three poles of its knowledge triangle: education, research and innovation. Universities are essential in all three. Investing more and better in the modernisation and quality of universities is a direct investment in the future of Europe and Europeans." [5]

Last, but not least, policy makers should engage in new business-administration-academia partnerships. Special focus is needed with respect to cross-border partnerships in the region and the changing roles of central/local government, business, universities, and other research organizations. Properly constructed, operated, and evaluated partnerships can provide effective means for accelerating the progress of technology and knowledge sharing. Building trust among all stakeholders, especially in the context of cross-border cooperation, is a central prerequisite to this end.

In order to master these challenges and be able to fully realise the potential of open innovation, a Living Labs approach[6], as proposed by the European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL) [7], is suggested from a methodology perspective. Living Labs form an ideal instrument for spotting new market trends and forming innovations out of them by utilizing the co-creativity of citizens and customers in co-creation processes. Both user acceptance and business relevance of an innovation can be evaluated quickly through the development of prototypes and early application in the field involving end users, while at the same time trust is built among all actors through close collaboration.

The key role of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in Europe's ability to move forward into the future is also underlined in the Digital Europe Strategy Report in the form of recommendations of the European ICT Industry to the Spanish Presidency of the European Union.[8]

Especially in the extremely dynamic field of eBusiness and enabling eTechnologies, rapid business model innovation and prototyping as applied in the Living Labs approach play a crucial role. The Living Lab approach for innovation in the field of ICT should thus be stressed by the EU Danube Region Strategy. Focus should be put on the creation of innovative eServices for SMEs and inter-organisational eServices in a cross-border context, which will help to substantially reduce administrative burdens for SMEs and micro-enterprises as demanded in the European Economic Recovery Plan.[9]

To sum up, ALADIN can - and members are fully committed to - play a crucial role in accelerating the cross-border, regional knowledge transfer, collaboration in the industry – administration – academia triangle, especially through the enforcement of open innovation.

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[5] Commission of the European Communities: Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy, COM(2005) 152 final, 20.04.2005, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/comuniv2005_en.pdf

[6] See eJOV – Volume 10, "Special Issue on Living Labs", August 2008, http://www.ejov.org/apps/pub.asp?Q=2993&T=eJOV%20Issues

[7] http://www.OpenLivingLabs.eu

[8] Industry Partnership Contribution to the Spanish Presidency, Digital Europe Strategy, http://www.mityc.es/telecomunicaciones/Presidencia/actos/18enero/Documents/Final%20Report.pdf

[9] Commission of the European Communities: A European Economic Recovery Plan, COM(2008) 800 final, 26.11.2008, http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/Comm_20081126.pdf

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