

Intervention of Jože Gričar

eSilk & eAmber Roads Perspective of the Danube Region Development

From a geographical perspective, a region is a medium-scale area of land or water, smaller than the total area of interest (which could be, for example, the world, a nation, a river basin, a mountain range and so on), and larger than a specific site or location. A region can be seen as either a collection of smaller units or as one part of a larger whole. The borders of a region are not fixed once and for all; they can change.

The emerging network society is challenging the prevailing notions of region, space and time. Of our interest is an information and communication technology (ICT) supported region, known as the eRegion. The eRegion, as a concept, denotes initiatives supported by information technology that transcend traditional borders and boundaries. The notion of places and regions is not based on a “border-oriented” administrative view but on the networks and processes that flow within and through the region of the countries. Therefore, the space of these flows is not without location, although its structural logic is. See Innovative Cross-border eRegion Development: Possible Directions and Impact (<http://organizacija.fov.uni-mb.si/index.php/organizacija/article/viewFile/181/169>).

From an organizational perspective, a cross-border eRegion is a totality of organizations – linked by eTechnologies – from nearby countries within a circle of 200 to 500 kilometers radius surrounding the point of observation, which depends mostly on the logistical capabilities. There are intensive flows of products, services and people in the eRegion, creating numerous business and/or government transactions and producing intensive cross-border data flows. The question is not whether regional development is national or local, but rather what kind of new interrelationships are emerging between the different actors and what the roles may be for different organizations in different contexts. The question is how development processes can be global, national and local at the same time.

Our interest is in the Danube eRegion development as explained in a document “EU Strategy for the Danube Region: Position Paper of the Alpe Adria Danube universities INitiative – ALADIN” of April 2010 (<http://eLivingLab.org/CrossBordereRegion/EUDanubeRegionStrategy/ALADINPositionPaper>) . As in any other region, also in the Danube Region business, government, municipality, university and diplomacy executives will have to engage. For example, in innovative cross-border eRegions development: Baltic, Black See, Caucasus, Central Europe, Mediterranean, Nordic, South East European region as discussed at the executives meetings held in Slovenia from 2002 to 2009, and suggested in the related activities (<http://BledConference.org/eRegionsDevelopment>). For example, two possible directions have been widely discussed at the events in Slovenia; Cross-border eInvoicing (<http://eLivingLab.org/Invoicing/Events&Activities>) and Cross-border Disaster Relief eManagement in the eRegion (<http://eLivingLab.org/safe/DisasterReliefEvents.htm>).

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The Baltic eRegion and the Danube eRegion may be seen as the macro eRegions on the ancient Amber and Silk Roads. Inter-eRegions eCollaboration from the Nordic countries to the Mediterranean, and from Central Europe to Eastern Europe and Central Asia is the suggested development direction of the EU. The re-establishment of business and government relations between the nodes of the Silk and Amber Roads aiming towards the creation of the eSilk & eAmber Roads presents both challenges and opportunities. In 2002 the idea has been initiated by the eSilk & eAmber Roads *Think Tank* Meetings: Business and Government Executives & Professors' Commitment to Making a Difference (<http://BledConference.org/eAmber&eSilkRoad>).

An open innovation and the Living Labs (LLs) are very relevant to the cross-border eRegions development. An establishment of a related European Living Labs network has been suggested during the Finnish Presidency of the European Council by the Helsinki Manifesto "We have to move fast, before it is too late" on November 20, 2006 (http://eLivingLab.org/files/Helsinki_Manifesto_201106.pdf). After the four waves of the network's enlargement, there are 212 LLs in the European Network of Living Labs – ENoLL in Spring of 2010 (<http://www.OpenLivingLabs.eu>). Now the LLs are developing thematic networks as initiated by the EU funded project CO-LLABS - **Community-Based Living Labs** to Enhance SMEs Innovation in Europe. A Thematic Network in the ICT-PSP program (CIP) under theme 4.1 Sharing Experience on ICT Initiatives for SMEs (<http://AMI-Communities.eu/wiki/CO-LLABS>).

In order to bring the cross-border eRegions perspective and the LLs methodology together, the following meeting on March 3, 2008 was very helpful: Open Innovation in the Living Labs for the Cross-border eRegions Development. Meeting with the President of the Committee of the Regions & Members of the Bureau of the Committee of the Regions (<http://eLivingLab.org/EURegionsMeeting>). It has led to an idea of the Nordic – Slovene eCollaboration in February 2009 (<http://SloveniaLivingLab.org/eCollaborationNordic>). In a similar line, there was a "High Level Discussion with the European Commission on Regional Living Lab policy for the benefit of SMEs" in Brussels on January 27th 2010. It was sponsored by the CO-LLABS - Community-Based Living Labs Project, and the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Alpes Méditerranée Euroregion (<http://www.ami-communities.eu/pub/bscw.cgi/d506117/Programme%2027.01.2010%20event.pdf>).

An example of the effort towards the Danube Region development is the meeting with the Ambassador of the Republic of Hungary to the Republic of Slovenia (<http://eLivingLab.org/CrossBordereRegion/HungarySlovenia>) on April 21, 2010. In the meeting, representatives of business and government have worked together with the undergraduate and graduate students presenting the prototypes created in the temporary Living Labs.

We believe that a country as a whole may be considered a Living Lab in which ideas sharing, knowledge creation, and experimenting could flourish. For example, The Slovenia initiative in 2007 *Innovation for Life Quality - Slovenia Living Lab* (<http://SloveniaLivingLab.org>). The concept has been expanded by the ALADIN's Proclamation: Danube Region as a Living Lab for Economic and Social Innovation at

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the Vienna-Bratislava EU sponsored conference on the Strategy for the Danube Region on 19/21 April 2010 (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/conference/vienna_bratoslava_en.htm).

We assume that there are important and timely opportunities for open innovation experience sharing and experimenting in the LLs in order to support and accelerate the eRegions development. We are suggesting to look for the answers to the following questions:

- Which components, solutions, or operations successful in one eRegion could be copied, which could be followed, and which are not applicable at all in another eRegion?
- Can some guidelines for successful copying be defined and generalized for better understanding of the potential of the open innovation as a concept and as a practice in an eRegion?
- How relevant are the outstanding business, national, regional or local government, and academic leaders to the eRegions awareness creation, policy making, or solutions implementation?
- Can the neighboring countries facing tensions or conflicts gain benefits if helped in, or pushed into an eRegion development and innovative experimenting in the LLs?
- What are the good ways of sharing experience and working together in the cross-border (macro) regions development?