

***European Initiative Danube Region on the eSilk & eAmber Roads
Meeting in the European Parliament on Tuesday, June 1, 2010***

Intervention of Christian Kittl

ALADIN – ALpe Adria Danube universities INitiative Perspectives

Living Labs are open innovation environments in real-life settings, in which user-driven innovation is fully integrated within the co-creation process of new services, products and societal infrastructures. User-driven open innovation methodologies can significantly improve the efficiency of the innovation process and contribute to better take-up of R&D results, thereby improving the competitiveness of industry in Europe, in particular for SMEs, including micro-entrepreneurs.¹

The European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL) was first launched by the Finnish Presidency in 2006. The network had initially 19 members, was widened by the second wave launch during the Portuguese Presidency in 2007 and the third wave launch by the Slovenian and French Presidencies. In 2008, the European Network of Living Labs ENoLL surpassed the mark of 100 European living labs. As the following figure reveals though, only few these are located in the Danube Region.

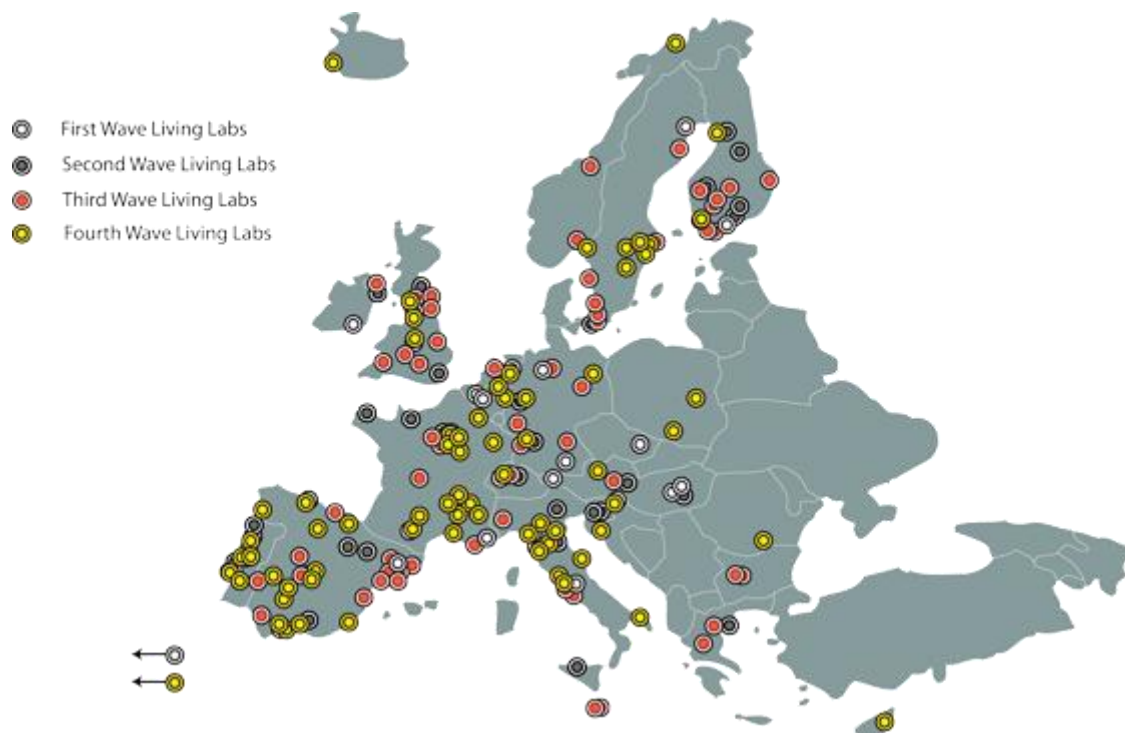


Figure 1: Evolution of the European Network of Living Labs (Source: www.enoll.org)

¹ Directorate-General for the Information Society and Media (2009): Living Labs for user-driven open innovation. An Overview of the Living Labs Methodology, Activities and Achievements, http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/livinglabs/docs/brochure_jan09_en.pdf

And also during the 4th wave launch by the Spanish Presidency in April 2010, raising the number of benchmarked European living labs from 129 to 212 (out of which 25 are outside of Europe), only 4 new members (each one in Austria, Croatia, Slovenia and Romania) located in the Danube Region joined ENoLL.

Thus just about 10% of the overall number of living labs can now be found in this region, most of them situated in the western part, and this percentage even tends to fall as the 4th wave with only 4 out of 83 new members coming from the Danube Region shows.

This clearly underlines the demand for a fifth wave of ENoLL enlargement, this time with a special focus on initiating new living labs in the member countries of the Danube Region, which will lead to increased economic and social innovation capacity in the respective region.

But there is also another important dimension – the European one, which is just starting to be explored: Small groups of Living Labs in different regions join forces by sharing knowledge, services and even developments based on win-win strategies to pave the way for co-selling developments and services on the European or global market rather than just on their local regional market. This “networked Living Labs” approach is of particular interest for SMEs and micro-entrepreneurs, which do not have the expertise and resources to expand their activities to other regions or across Europe due to different structural characteristics, regulations, or societal and economic structures in the respective regions and countries.

This approach is especially important for those living labs which recently joined ENoLL or will join during a forthcoming wave. They can greatly benefit from the know-how and methodological expertise existing living labs have already gained, while at the same time adding their own valuable expertise about local markets, trends, industries etc.

As already outlined in a presentation² at the 3rd Conference on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region on Transport, Energy and Environmental Issues in Vienna (Austria) and Bratislava (Slovakia), 19/21 April 2010, the ALADIN group thus proposes to apply the living lab concept and methodology on a regional level in the Danube Region: **“The Danube Region as the Living Lab for economic and social innovation.”**

²http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/documents/vienna_bratislava/workshops/digital/kittl.ppt