

Citizen engagement

Citizens are a specific group of living lab end users. About one-fourth of the living labs analyzed engage citizens in their activities. Either though it was also found that this engagement is often solely taking place at the stages of validation and evaluation. Surveys among the citizens within the respective areas, as well as test panels, are the favorite means of exchange. It is felt that this often leads to limited citizen involvement. Early adopters and engaged citizens do not often form a representative sample that allows for a wider uptake by citizens after successful testing.

Actual citizens empowerment, as to say to provide citizens with the final responsibility and decision-making capacity, is rarely happening. Providing this empowerment might help living labs to improve the wider acceptance of their innovations and solutions. As an example, this could be done through the creation and/or facilitation of end users/citizens engagement platforms, available to all urban mobility living lab stakeholders.

Description

“Citizens do not just join automatically just because we want them to or ask them to do so. This always has been the case, but in voluntary use situations it becomes even more noticeable.” (1)

One of the key elements of a living lab is citizen engagement. This is particularly relevant in the case of the so-called transformative living labs led by public authorities. It does not mean that within all living lab product/service developments and experimentations one should strive for the highest level of citizen engagement. However, our study shows that if the owner of a living lab experiment aims to increase its changes for a wider uptake by citizens (as end users of its products/ services) after a successful experimentation, it is best to involve the most representative sample of citizens from the early beginning. The following levels of engagement can be identified (2):

- No engagement: the citizen is not invited or not willing to participate.
- Symbolic engagement: citizen engagement is presented, yet not actually used.
- Engagement by advice: based on a predefined method (e.g., interviews, questionnaires) specific advice is asked.
- Engagement by weak control: the citizen participates to some extent in the development phases, yet not necessarily involved throughout the whole living lab experiment.
- Engagement by doing: the citizens are part and active actors in all stages of development and experimentation.
- Engagement by strong control: the citizens have the power from decision making to development, and the outcomes are based on citizens' ideas, needs and expectations.

“We decided not to recruit citizens from the Living Lab community since these people have a bias toward technology-interested people, early adopters, and a willingness to influence situations.” (1)

If the aim of a specific living lab experiment is to significantly contribute to a fundamental change of the current urban mobility (3/ 4), a high level of citizen engagement with a representative sample of

citizens is advised. A heterogeneous group of citizens does not only generate the different perspectives, but might also allow changing the status quo observed in the mobility behavior of the majority of citizens.

Providing good practice examples of actual collaboration with end users, as well as citizen empowerment with assistance of the EIT Urban Mobility, could help living labs to improve the uptake of their innovations and solutions (5).

References

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(5) EIT City Club Citizen Engagement <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ2OjK5HAjo>