Upscaling living lab activities

Most of the living labs analyzed with the EIT Urban Mobility study act within the frame of a public private partnership. Other living labs were set up a (European) research project. We specifically look in how to scale up the living lab activities at the living labs with a formal public private partnership involving industry and research, and are supported or led by a public authority.

The interviewed living labs indicated that at least 1 full-time person is required for the daily management and operation of such a living lab, with most of them having 2 full-time persons employed. Some employ even up to 5 persons. Several experts are engaged to support the living lab activities on an on-demand basis.

Description

The number of projects supported depends much on the living lab characteristics. Fixed location living labs and research driven living labs have a larger number of projects per year (on average 10). The public authority led living labs have on average less projects. Nevertheless, the projects that they do have are often experimented on a larger scale.

Within the living lab there is often a designated group of people that discuss which projects could fit the living lab priorities and goals. They head the selection procedure of the experiments proposed. There is usually a set of criteria for the admission of projects within the living labs. Possible criteria that we came across are:

- Proposals should fit the themes and vision of the living lab.
- TRL level: some accept innovations higher than a certain TRL level.
- Responding to the conditions expressed within a giving call of interest.
- Size of the companies (start-ups, SMEs, no size requirement).
- Value in terms of scientific/business/market opportunities.
- The application potential on the market.
- The relevance to local policy priorities.
- Relevance to what the local site can offer.
- Feasibility in terms of costs and competences.

Depending on the living lab nature, some are open for external parties, offering fixed-term collaboration agreements; while others only allow experimentation by partner organizations.

Project admission criteria can be changed with the evolution of the living lab. In the setting up and establishment phase, more projects might be accepted to raise awareness about the living lab’s added value and efficiency. Once a certain maturity level and critical mass of partners/projects is achieved, more selection criteria come into play.

The majority of the interviewed living labs have experience with one-time participation projects and cases with iterative innovation development (i.e., when innovation is tested, user feedback is

collected; then, innovation is improved and tested again). Those projects are often based on a single financing in time. It is then case to continuously find new projects that complete a (small) fixed subsidy for the functioning of the living lab.

Going through the product/service innovation cycles for one product/service or having returning projects can be also a key living lab feature. Specifically, the usage of collaboration agreements in respect of such activity seem to contribute to the sustainability of the living lab business model. Living lab partners agree on a contract to perform the experiments at the living lab location: a permit to operate/experiment over time against a certain fee. Based on the interviewed living labs this seems to be an indicator of a growing maturity of a living lab and a possible path to upscaling of activities.

Zooming into the business models of the living labs analyzed about 40% use single stream of financing (i.e., EU, nationally, university- or industry-funded). Of those living labs using multiple streams, the most frequent combinations are industry and EU funding (37%); national and industry funding (41%); local and EU funding (52%).

Only 4 of the living labs analyzed asked for membership fees to be less dependent on the number of activities carried out. Next to public subsidies, it appears that the implementation of commercial living lab projects, co-funding via participation in open calls for expression of interest, and donor contributions seem to help the living labs to maintain and scale up their activities.

References

(1) EIT Urban Mobility Knowledge base of innovative solutions in urban mobility and living labs, Final Report, Deliverable 4, Authors: Nesterova, N., Uzunova, E. (BUas); Egmond, P. van, (LuxMobility), December 2020.