

DISMANTLING LIVING LABS: CITIZEN SCIENCE LABS TO CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS

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In recent years, the term Living Lab (LL) has gained prominence in the design of policies and actions that respond to social needs in different areas. However, the definition and capacities of a LL are, to this day, distant concepts for many people.

The European Commission defines them as "Public-Private-People Partnerships (PPP) for user-driven open innovation". More broadly, **an LL can be defined as a real testbed within an experimentation environment where participants have the tools to co-create and co-design innovative solutions**. These innovation ecosystems are developed on real problems using an iterative feedback process between agents that generates a significant and sustained impact over time.

In order to create new products, services and infrastructures that meet society's needs, **an LL must include representatives of the four legs of the "Helix Quadruplex"**. In other words, it must have agents from the public, private, academic and social sectors, who collaborate in the process of co-creating, prototyping, testing and scaling solutions, contributing knowledge from different points of view.

The different activities carried out by an LL are classified into three main levels, Macro, Meso and Micro. Framework level activities are those that focus on the organisation of the LL as an entity and on defining the ways in which the agents that make it up are related. Meso activities focus on defining the projects in which the LL participates and the methodologies it applies. Finally, the specific activities related to co-creation or co-design within the projects in which it participates are the Micro level activities.

When implementing these open innovation ecosystems, and from the experience acquired through projects where these types of entities are created, there are a series of barriers and threats experienced by the vast majority of LL.

- **Identification of relevant agents.** On many occasions, in order for the LL to develop properly, it is necessary for the promoting agent to carry out a broad analysis to identify the most relevant agents in its environment on which to rely for each of its projects. Within this analysis, the agents must be classified within the "Helix Quadruplex" by category and subsequently define the degree and format of collaboration with each of them.
- **Lack of collaborative culture.** Sometimes, if the LL promoter agent does not have established relationships with relevant or interested agents, the LL may see its legitimacy as an agent in question. This may reduce the interest of other actors to participate, thus limiting the capacity to incorporate projects and their ability to generate impact.
- **Lack of long-term vision.** Many of the LL that are currently being formed are born as a result of projects that aim to co-create solutions through the participation of actors from different fields. In these cases, it is common that these LL are not able to visualise a future where the project, through which they have been created, comes to an end and they have to look for new projects with which to maintain their activity.

In short, despite the innovative aspect and the different functionalities provided by this type of open innovation laboratories, there is still a long way to go in the development of strategies that

guarantee their sustainability over time and maximise their capacity for impact.

Article available in the [autumn issue by Naider](#)

