

Accepted Manuscript

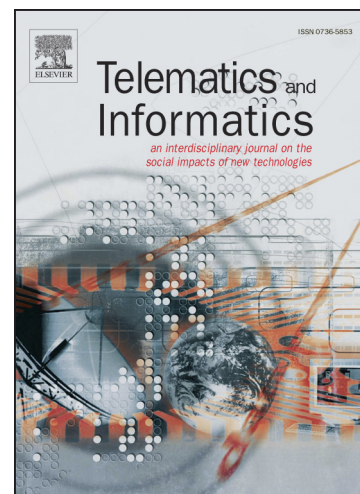
The effectiveness of involving users in digital innovation: Measuring the impact of living labs

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PII: S0736-5853(17)30682-2
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.02.003>
Reference: TELE 1075

To appear in: *Telematics and Informatics*

Received Date: 16 October 2017
Revised Date: 29 December 2017
Accepted Date: 6 February 2018



Please cite this article as: Ballon, P., Van Hoed, M., Schuurman, D., The effectiveness of involving users in digital innovation: Measuring the impact of living labs, *Telematics and Informatics* (2018), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.02.003>

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The effectiveness of involving users in digital innovation: Measuring the impact of living labs

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1. Introduction

Innovation in digital products and services is often dependent on leveraging knowledge on a global scale, fostering an ecosystem of complementary artefacts and accounting for yet unknown uses and practices. For such reasons, it has become widely accepted that the inclusion of external stakeholders early on in the innovation process is an important source of competitive advantage for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) firms. Many successful ICT companies are said to have adopted open R&D and open innovation strategies. The idea that users should also be included in this has been stressed by various scholars and practitioners, even though the degree to which this is feasible and effective, is still intensely debated. So-called 'living labs' are one of the most prominent tools to have been developed for such user-centric innovation of ICTs (von Hippel, 1988; Berker et al, 2005; Frissen & Van Lieshout, 2006; Gassman, 2006; Ståhlbröst, 2008; García-Guzmán et al, 2013).

Over the last two decades, a few thousands of organisations and initiatives that label themselves as 'living labs' have sprung up across the world. In parallel, several national and regional governments, as well as international bodies such as the European Union, have gradually introduced the moniker of 'living labs' into their innovation instrumentarium (Eriksson et al, 2005; Almirall et al, 2012; World Bank & ENoLL, 2014; Schuurman, 2015; Leminen et al, 2017). The concept of a living lab refers to the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including users, in the exploration, co-creation and evaluation of (usually ICT-related) innovations within a realistic setting (Dutilleul et al, 2010; Leminen et al., 2012; Ballon, 2015).

The aims of such labs are manifold: bring digital innovation processes and outcomes more in line with user preferences and practices, discover unexpected uses, identify potentially sound business and revenue models, stimulate cooperation between stakeholders, enable specific stakeholder groups to influence design features, increase acceptance, understand and tackle inhibiting factors, minimise failures, or study effects of introduction. As living lab initiatives proliferate, the question whether these aims are being reached, becomes indispensable (Følstad, 2008; Ståhlbröst, 2012).

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