

# ECIU POSITION PAPER ON LIVING LABS AND EXPERIMENTATION SPACES

**Barcelona, 2024**

Recommendations and insights  
about the potential of Living  
Labs as innovation and learning  
platforms in the ECIU University



Co-funded by  
the European Union

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The European Consortium of European Universities (ECIU) is an alliance of 14 universities united by a joint goal to make an impact. Here, learners, teachers, and researchers work with cities, communities, and businesses to solve real-life challenges and foster change.

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# ECIU POSITION PAPER

## on Living Labs

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To accelerate transformations towards just and sustainable future cities across Europe, local and regional projects need to scale up and share sustainability pathways and planning efforts. In this context, Living Labs, and innovation and experimentation spaces in general, have demonstrated great potential in serving as platforms for connecting universities with societal stakeholder, facilitating transdisciplinary collaboration in the innovation process but also as tools for cross-case learning and upscaling innovative solutions. At the same time there is an ever increasing emergence and diversification of these spaces, even within ECIU, that can often create a certain confusion and at the same time reluctance to engage and make use of them or explore their full potential.

The ECIU-UTC seed project's objective was to expand existing research and innovation initiatives of the ECIU by linking established living labs and citizen science projects run by partners and their regional ecosystems. This resulted in an initial Roadmap for the distributed network of a "Living Lab and experimentation and innovation spaces" within ECIU, an effort that will continue in the ULALABS project during the next three years where we will open up the process to the extended ECIU ecosystem. The SMART-ER Conference in Barcelona gave us an initial opportunity to share and reflect the Seed project results together with the broader community but also the objectives and scope of the new project.

We envision that the ULALABS project will produce tools, methodologies and experiences that will help the community learn and understand how to make use of these innovative infrastructures to enhance their activity and its impact. At the same time aid with the effort towards the realization of the ECIU 2030 Vision<sup>1</sup> by articulating a platform and mechanisms for integrating multi-disciplinary challenge-based research, innovation and learnings; and a distributed network of ECIU physical and virtual collaboration spaces operational and interconnected between the ECIU member universities.

In this context, the ECIU consortium in its vision to establish an open, inclusive and collaborative ecosystem should seek to make the existence of the labs visible and promote their active use in teaching, research and innovation activities in future activities.

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1. ECIU UNIVERISTY Vision 2030: <https://www.eciu.eu/news/eciu-university-2030-connects-u-for-life>

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# Introduction

# INTRODUCTION

## The ECIU-UTC seed project

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ECIU University Research Institute for Smart European Regions (SMART-ER) aimed to implement for capacity building strategies among the 12 ECIU University member institutions. The SMART-er Research Institute through the launching of the seed projects call provided support for the development of inter-institutional and intersectorial collaborative research and innovation projects aimed at resolving the SDG11 challenges focusing on four research areas of particular importance: Resilient communities, Mobility and transportation, Circular economy and Energy and sustainability, following the ECIU aims for a joint long-term research strategy on smart regions. In this sense, our team composed of researchers from LiU, UiS, UAB & UT presented a proposal that was eventually selected for funding and implementation.

### **ECIU Urban Transformation Collaboratory (ECIU-UTC)**

The Seed project brought together diverse academic and societal partners from 4 ECIU HEIs and regions, building on established collaboration focusing on societal transformation, citizen engagement and viable smart cities. ECIU-UTC was drawing on a palette of local and regional challenges jointly defined with societal partners in Norrköping/Linköping, Stavanger, Enschede, and Barcelona, focused on SDG11: Sustainable cities and communities. It also aligned with the ECIU SMART-er thematic lines: Resilient communities, Transport and mobility, Energy and sustainability. The one-year long project consisted of four visits / workshops in each partners' region to get familiarized with the local ecosystems and learn from the local experiences. This collaborative effort was concluded with a final workshop during the ECIU Research Conference in Barcelona in October 2023.

But the collaboration does not end here, since the same team prepared and presented a proposal to the ERASMUS+ HEI Call that eventually got selected for funding and execution for the next three years (starting on Dec 23), the **ULALABS project: a University Lab of Labs for Transformative Societal Innovation**. This will permit the team to transform the initial learnings into useful knowledge and apply and test the concept of the Distributed Lab, a lab of Labs for the ECIU University taking full advantage of the community, capacities, resources and opportunities within this diverse ecosystem.

SEED PROJECT  
Start date: June 2023



Cross-case Learning

Linköping University  
17 & 18 October, 2022



Sustainable Pathways

Urban Challenges

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona  
1 & 2 December, 2022



Learning Communities

Challenge Based Methodologies

University of Twente  
6 & 7 March, 2023



Tools & Governance

Innovation Labs & Arenas

Stavanger University  
11 & 12 May, 2023



Lab of Labs structure



ECIU SMART-er Conference  
Barcelona,  
3 & 4 October, 2023

# ECIU SMART-ER Research Conference

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The ECIU University Research Conference took place on the 3rd and 4th of October 2023 and aimed to move beyond traditional conference structures and embody a challenge-based approach by providing an interactive forum for discussing common challenges, forging partnerships of societal stakeholders, and contributing to the implementation of shared policies to enhance the resilience of cities and society. The conference also brought together societal stakeholders to showcase challenge-based research outcomes, share best practices of innovative research approaches, and explore/initiate potential collaborations for common solutions to societal issues.

During the two days of the SMART-er Research conference a series of thematic sessions around selected challenges were organized to engage the participants with ongoing projects and initiatives through different workshops and activities. These were scheduled in parallel sessions and the ECIU-UTC team presented and got the opportunity to organize a session during the second day of the Conference. Our respective workshop that took place on 4/10/2023 from 11:30 to 13:00 was titled:

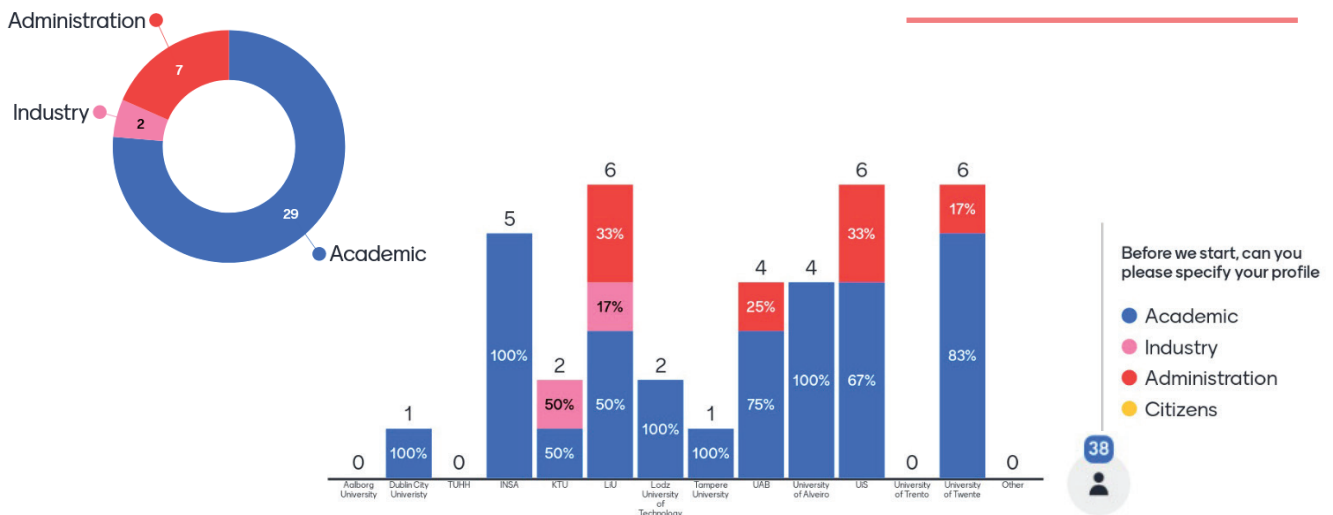
**“A distributed ECIU Living Lab: An approach to tackle urban sustainability transformations”**



## Intro Survey

In the beginning and after the completion of the workshop the participants were asked to participate in a short Mentimeter survey to collect additional qualitative and quantitative data

### Before we start, can you please specify your profile



### Which ECIU University / region are you related to / working with?

On the workshop day we had at the end **38 participants** who showed up and participated. As far as the analysis of the profiles of the participants is concerned, the majority of these 38 participants had an academic background (29), which was expected given the nature of the conference. But still there was some partial representation of the quadruple helix with a considerable presence of stakeholders from the administration (7), a minimal representation of industry sector (1) and no representation on the side of society/citizens. There was wide representation of the ECIU community with 10 of the 14 universities and regions represented in different proportions. As expected the Seed project member universities' (LiU, UiS,UAB, UT ) presence was more pronounced but was not limited to those as INSA and UA were equally represented. Other universities such as TUNI, KTU, DCU and LUT had smaller representation and 3 were absent altogether.

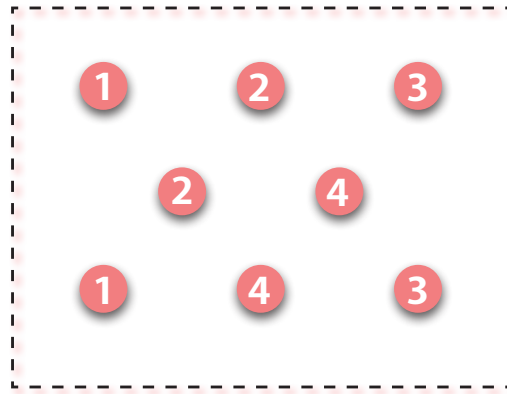
Nevertheless, the overall presence of the community was sufficient to get a first glimpse on the perception that the ECIU community holds on different topics. These were key topics covered by our SEED project but also importantly topics that we will cover in our upcoming ULALABS project, where engaging with the ECIU community is expected to be a key element for the project's success.

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# **Workshop structure & results**

# WORLD-CAFE Dynamic

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## Key Elements

1,5 hour

4 questions (x2)

8 tables

4 rounds

38 Participants

The workshop on the 4th of October was centered on a World Cafe format, where we sought the maximum interaction with the participants and receive as much feedback as possible from them with respect to the questions that we had prepared beforehand. These questions were formulated with a double objective: **a)** to have the opportunity to reflect collectively, with the extended ECIU community, a series of key concepts that had emerged during our one-year Seed project; **b)** to explore and open up the discussion as well as engage interested members of the community in anticipation of our upcoming ULALABS project.

Four questions were addressed to the participants during the four rounds of the workshop. Each question was duplicated in two tables with a total of 8 tables. The four questions that were discussed with the participants were the following:

1. What are the main Urban sustainability Challenges that the ECIU community is working with and how do they do it?
2. How can we articulate a Learning Community on Urban Sustainability?
3. How can we develop a roadmap to upscale learnings from Urban Living Labs or innovative solutions?
4. How can we envision a distributed Urban Living Lab within ECIU?

The key points, questions and reflections from each table are presented in detail in the following sections.

# TABLE 1

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## URBAN SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

Challenge-based Methodologies are a vital component of the ECIU University and the SMART-er Research Institute and have also been a central element in the ECIU-UTC seed project and the upcoming ULALABS project. In this context, the first table of the workshop set out to jointly explore the concept of urban sustainability challenges, and to identify available tools and methodologies to address them. In the first rounds participants were asked to comment what urban sustainability challenges they work with, and generally speaking - which challenges need to be addressed in the current context and within the ECIU ecosystem. In the following rounds, participants were asked to add to the ongoing list of challenges, and to suggest classifications that could be used to describe these challenges in overarching categories. More specifically:

**Round 1 :** Suggestions from participants covered a broad spectrum of urban sustainability challenges, ranging from specific suggestions to general and broader areas of concerns.

Aspects covered a vast spectrum of urban sustainability, covering topics such as: mobility/sustainable transport, infrastructure, traffic, the built environment, electrification, biodiversity, noise, pollution/land contamination, air & water quality, consumption patterns, food inequality/provision of food in scarce situations, securing critical infrastructure in wartimes, climate related risks, integration, energy supply-and demand, equality, equitable access, and wellbeing.

**Round 2:** Participants were asked to add urban sustainability challenges that they considered to be missing on the table, and suggest classifications for these existing urban sustainability challenges.

In this exercise, a number of overarching topics were outlined, : Quality of life, Construction, Environmental Quality, Transport infrastructure, and multi-level governance.



**Round 3:** Participants added to both challenges and to the classifications. They were subsequently asked to identify suitable tools and methodologies to address these different types of urban sustainability challenges.

In this round, a variety of tools and methods were identified, such as accessibility, retrofitting of the existing infrastructures, digital infrastructure & data collection, green infrastructure, social infrastructure, communication (information, trademarks, involvement), systemic changes, valuation, financing, the need to implement holistic approaches through different scales (macro-meso-micro). It was also pointed out that the parallel to tools and methodologies the different aspects needed to be weighed against one another; urgency vs. importance and emergency vs. opportunity.

**Round 4:** We asked the participants to add to the above outlined tools and methods, and jointly outline the best practical way forward in using these tools for approaching the challenges.

These practical tools covered: climate change adaptation, awareness and communication between different groups with different cultural backgrounds, the need for “champions”, and distinct entry point to a living lab/testbed, civic engagement/participation, but also more specific practical interventions such as waste management (e.g. food waste), and community gardens, sustainable farming, labs/experiments,

citizen based initiatives focused on recycling, companies and administration, upscaling and moving forward with citizen centered social endeavors, Inspire and foster collective dreams, tool (initiatives) connect circularity initiatives with social impact, Re-assessing “viability” and “value”, creation and assessment of social and environmental capital, Innovative acquisition, co-creation with marginalized communities, identifying investors and business partners, developing visions and setting clear priorities.

Summarizing, our experiences from the four rounds of the first table, in which the participants were expected to address sustainability challenges, classify them, and subsequently identify possible tools and methodologies, are that the participants enter the dialogue with a very different understanding of - and approaches to - what an urban challenge is and what it entails. Some of the participants addressed the questions on a more overarching level, while others outlined very concrete and specific urban sustainability challenges. For example, one of the participants suggested that the SDGs summed up the needs and challenges, and did not see the need for further specification. However, especially in the second round, many participants made additions, and specified the more overarching challenges in different elements.

Another critical point to be considered is the contextual dimension of the participants. This often neglected aspect that plays a key role in how the questions are interpreted or what a challenge is and can sometimes create confusion. For example, a researcher from Ukraine brought up the challenge of securing necessary industrial infrastructure in times of war, which no one else had thought of, departing from completely different contexts. Overall, the feedback from the participants and the outcomes of the first table provide a starting point for the identification and definition of urban sustainability challenges that will be a central point of the ULALABS project. But also importantly it helped identify possible methodologies, tools and practices, to work with challenge-based methodologies while pointing toward the need for a more structured and contextual assessment.

# TABLE 2

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## LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The Learning Community is a central element of the upcoming ULALABS projects and has been also explored in the ECIU context in different ways (thematic communities, seed projects among others). So the four rounds of the session were prepared to progressively explore the Learning communities concept with the participants departing from their own experiences; and considering all those factors and elements that enhance or prohibit the learning process and experience.

**Round 1:** During the first round participants were asked to define a Learning community and specify its elements, characteristics, principles.

Initially there was some confusion about the meaning of a learning community as a concept, but nevertheless the following reflections were collected. A learning community is a networked space conformed by citizens, practitioners, and academics through which people share, exchange, and transfer knowledge about theory and practice in different contexts and, thereby, learn together. A learning community allows for participatory, thus, practical and relational experiences that are trust-based and provide a win-win relation. In order to enable inclusive and respectful learning processes, these experiences need to engage and be attentive to differences and they need to enhance multiple perspectives regarding ethics and public values. While being context-determined, learning communities need to remain open to multiple goals aside from gaining knowledge in order to have a transformative impact even in terms of scalability.

**Round 2:** In the next round participants were asked to reflect on why they would prioritize relational, collective, and reflexive learning processes instead of other practices of knowledge sharing,

Relational, collective and reflexive learning processes enable social justice by minimizing exclusion and increasing the level and quality of participation. They promote cooperation and raise interest and motivation. They allow for learning dynamics using different senses and provide a connection with the real world while, at the same time, making it possible for participants to bring together their own perspectives



and experiences as well as their different backgrounds. They help identify what is important and, therefore, they have a broader applicability by encouraging and materializing pluralism, by including different sources and materials (such as spoken stories). They bring forward higher engaging and more memorable results. It must be clarified that a few participants stated that they would not prioritize that kind of learning process or expressed confusion about how this differed from knowledge exchange and transfer. In the groups we discussed how transfer and exchange do not necessarily lead to learning outcomes. Learning occurs in the process of adapting knowledge to new contexts.

**Round 3:** Next, participants were asked to reflect on how relational, collective, and reflexive learning processes can contribute to addressing today's societal challenges and also share methodologies, tools or relevant experiences.

Relational, collective, and reflexive learning processes contribute to addressing the societal challenges of today because they prove to have the capacity to motivate, and to engage in fruitful exchanges among participants, and, therefore, they help understand and depict common challenges (especially addressing obstacles to climate change technologies early on) and agree on ways to work on them in different contexts yet focusing on the same goal. They have a significant power to raise awareness and, thereby, can have a higher impact in space and time. As to suitable methodologies, the transversal/cross-cutting production, transfer, and application of knowledge is highlighted given that it adapts to different types of discourses and communities, including gender intersectional aspects. One example was shared regarding the organization of activities to engage children in activities involving parents and other adults





**Round 4:** In the last round participants were asked to imagine how we can build and develop collective learning processes across Living Labs; They also shared tools, methodologies or initiatives that they had participated with the ECIU context.

The building and development of collective learning processes across living labs might be enabled by organizing specific Summer/Winter schools within the network in order to envision and to consolidate but at the same time to expand learning platforms developed by and for researchers/teachers. These meetings might also constitute the occasion to extend agreements between partners as well as to build bridges between experts and society by getting inspiration from several and diverse disciplines such as educational sciences. Attention needs to be brought to the fact that such learning processes require social and affective skills and, specifically, they require trusting relations. Drawing from concrete experiences, producing shared materials across living labs (such as micro-modules) shows to be useful initiatives to build and develop collective learning processes. Likewise, exploring collectively on new methodologies such as storytelling might prove to be inspiring tools to “reveal” knowledge.

As an overall reflection, we need to emphasize that knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange do not guarantee learning outcomes. One can observe a need to develop methodological frameworks and toolboxes that enable learning processes across various scales, spaces, institutional contexts and cultures. These methodologies must also be diverse in ways that engage people, must to adapt to multiple learning styles. Learning communities should use methodologies that facilitate transfer of knowledge as well as the adaptation and implementation of that knowledge into new and often different contexts. In this context the learning communities become important as collective, reflexive, relational spaces. Herein lies our challenge.

# TABLE 3

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## ROADMAP TO UPSCALE

Table 3 focused on the process of setting up the distributed living lab around the learning community and what steps need to be taken, defining an initial roadmap. As discussed during the workshop the development of a roadmap to support the upscaling of Urban Living Labs (ULLs) requires actions on different levels, namely **strategic**, **tactical** and **operational**. ULLs tend to be highly contextual, as they are usually developed to address highly specific challenges for the region where they are located. The commitment to engage and co-create solutions must be expressed and undertaken as a strategic direction by the different societal actors (such as universities NGOs, businesses, governments, and citizens). Strategically, the vision to change is positive and hope-oriented and identified challenges are seen as situations that offer opportunities to steer desired change. Innovation and inclusiveness characterize the strategic approach. This **strategic** dimension also ensures the anticipation, or “leading from the future” necessary for setting forth the work across time. Community building (or rather building learning communities) is steered by the awareness that for strategic challenges faced by the different regions (such as the development of smart cities, elaborating an integrated approach to mental health, addressing climate change, or promotion of cultural/occupational interventions) a network approach is needed, where the reciprocal transfer of knowledge between the involved stakeholders is a crucial success factor.

The development and maintenance of vibrant learning communities involved in resolving the strategic challenges require a **tactical** approach to implement the vision. In this sense, creating and maintaining resources (human, financial, knowledge, and time), competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes), as well as structural and open communication are required. The communication of the requirements by the stakeholders involved and ensuring compliance with the measures developed through the co-creation processes need a constant care on behalf of the involved decision makers and of the participants themselves. The stakeholder networks also provide the connections to transfer missing information. Knowledge remains a vital resource available at the regional level.



The university campuses hold great potential for upscaling solutions, especially when thought out as Living Labs (as in the case of some ECIU members) and creating impact in their regions. For this to happen, there needs to be specific operational instruments to connect the universities with the region and the provision of spaces/forums to develop the knowledge creation and exchanges between the stakeholders. Methodologically, design thinking and Citizen Science (CS) approach(es) play a crucial role in facilitating the engagement processes on multiple layers and across the timelines relevant to the stakeholders.

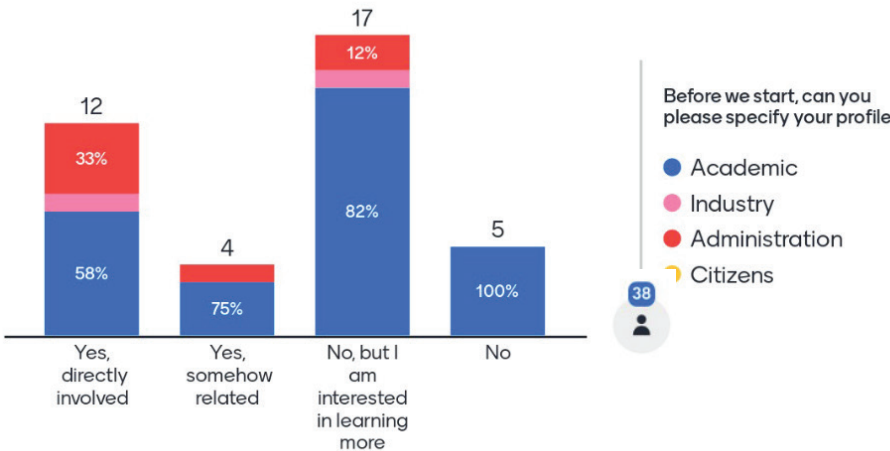
The question of “who is the driver” of the process is another central element, as different stakeholders can assume the role at different moments of the process: Citizens can signal a problematic situation and include it on the policy agenda, universities can provide the expertise needed to develop solutions, businesses and NGOs can partner with governments in implementing the solutions, and so on.

The researchers can play in this sense multiple roles, both as professionals providing scientific rigor, as well as citizen involved in the different learning communities. Ensuring the diversity and plurality of views is crucial to develop support for the LLs and ensure the sustainability of the learning communities. That requires, in turn, the need to ensure the capacity to integrate the feedback provided by the stakeholders and create meaningful paths to incorporate the feedback provided in a straightforward way to the stakeholders. Stakeholders are both providers for the LLs and as users of the products and services. Developing meaningful indicators to monitor performance at the **operational level** is needed both for the incorporation of stakeholder feedback and for the transparency of the process. As such, a multi-level and a multi-path flexible approach is necessary to ensure the LLs develop and grow organically, embedded at the regional level.

# TABLE 4

## LIVING LABS & ECIU

**Are you coordinating or related to/involved in a living lab, open innovation lab or a testbed?**



Ultimately, the fourth table explored the familiarity of the ECIU ecosystem with the concept of living labs and innovation and experimentation labs in general. So for this purpose, during the initial phase of the workshop, as part of the Mentimeter survey, a specific question was launched asking about the connection and familiarity that the participants had with existing labs within ECIU and the potential interest that the members might have in learning more about the concept and related methodologies. As demonstrated initially by the survey's results, most participants (58%) had no connection with any living lab in their ECIU university/region. Still, there was a significant interest among those users to learn more.

In the same context, the workshop presented an optimal opportunity to capture the perception of the ECIU community of what an ECIU Living Lab should look like and co-create with them an initial definition that could later be debated with the extended ECIU innovation ecosystem. So the four rounds of the World Cafe dynamic were prepared in such a way as to progressively explore the concept of living labs with the participants; from the basic definition of a living lab, passing to the urban dimension of an urban living lab and ultimately considering and visualizing how a distributed living lab could be articulated within the ECIU context and structure. The participants' feedback from each round and table was synthesized posteriorly in the following summarized definitions:

**Round 1:** In the first round, the participants were asked to define what a Living Lab is, specifying concrete elements, components and principles.

A living lab is a dynamic and open platform where diverse actors collaborate to tackle real-world challenges and co-create innovative solutions. It serves as an innovation arena for experimentation and problem-solving in real-world settings, combining aspects of research and education through transdisciplinary collaborations. With a human-centric approach, living labs foster interactions, ultimately driving positive societal changes and impact by addressing contemporary challenges and facilitating the development of user-centered innovations.

**Round 2:** In the following round participants were asked to review the feedback from the first group and rethink it in terms of an Urban Living Lab, and add new specific elements and aspects to the previous definition.

An urban living lab is a dynamic, multi-stakeholder, and participative urban platform that re-imagines interactions and democratic processes to address urban challenges in a particular city or urban area/context. It emphasizes the need for a dynamic and multi-level governance, coordination, and societal empowerment, involving diverse stakeholders of the quadruple helix. These labs promote engagement and capacity-building for users but can also extend beyond human actors to include further considerations such as biodiversity and other key elements of the biophysical matrix of the cities. They facilitate experimentation, testing, and piloting of innovative solutions in real urban contexts, fostering collaborative efforts and knowledge sharing among the community in the process and with the objective to improve the city's infrastructure, environment and biodiversity and tackle urban problems like mobility, inequality, environmental quality, and overall access to key urban services

**Round 3:** The participants of the third table had to rethink all the previous results but add the distributed dimension, envisioning a Distributed Urban Living Lab.

A distributed living lab focused on urban transitions is a complex and versatile structure, encompassing physical and virtual elements, and employing traditional and non-traditional knowledge production methods. Its primary aim is to generate innovative, practical knowledge that profoundly impacts cities, fostering healthy, sustainable communities and ultimately accelerate urban transitions towards sustainable pathways. This distributed lab consists of various sub-labs situated in different environments that articulate the structure of the distributed lab, all sharing a common set of vocabulary, philosophy and approaches. A lab that can adapt and

evolve, even as participants like learners and researchers may come and go. Its success relies on applying of a shared and clear methodology and vocabulary that will enable the learning community to generate new knowledge of added value and the continuous monitoring and registry of outcomes and lessons. Effective coordination across these diverse labs is facilitated by individuals or groups working collectively to ensure seamless operation and knowledge exchange.

**Round 4:** In the last round, the participants were asked to incorporate the ECIU and European HEI dimensions and suggest methods or tools to facilitate the articulation of a Distributed Urban Living Lab in the ECIU context.

A distributed living lab, with a focus on sustainable urban transitions within the European HEI context can serve as a versatile, both physical and virtual platform, to encourage a collective pursuit of innovative knowledge production through non-traditional, challenge-based methodologies. It can play a pivotal role in creating interconnections between existing living labs and innovation labs within ECIU regions based on their distinctive focus, challenges, methods, and target groups. This emerging distributed living lab is driven by the desire to engage and benefit academic communities but also all related societal stakeholders. It should thrive on dynamic knowledge exchange, facilitated openly and transparently while exploring experimental and uncommon situations with ethical considerations, placing ECIU's philosophy at its core. This approach will enrich existing tools and methods, emphasize the need for responsible and ethical handling of participants' involvement, and create a citizen-centric living lab network and learning community focused on sustainable urban transitions within ECIU ready to tackle existing and upcoming shared challenges.

As an overall reflection one can observe a stark contrast in the familiarity with the Living Lab concept within the ECIU community, at least as reflected by the results, which is nevertheless compensated by the diversity and excitement of the ECIU community to engage and learn. This is demonstrated by the fact that participants were able to co-create four comprehensive definitions by the end of the workshop. In this sense and to compensate for this gap in knowledge within the ECIU context, it has been identified that one of the parallel objectives of the ULALABS project will be to raise awareness and capacitate the community to use these tools and methodologies to enhance their existing activities or open new pathways, and in the process grow the ULALABS community even more.



**NEXT  
STEPS**

# THE ULALABS PROJECT

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The ECIU-UTC team decided to present a joint proposal to continue working together, past the duration of the Seed project. The Erasmus+ KA220-HED call was selected and specifically the Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education, 2023 (Round 1) sub-call. A proposal was prepared that built upon and continued with the work of the ECIU-UTC project, which was eventually selected for funding for 3 years. The ULALABS project, short for, **“University Lab of Labs for Transformative Societal Innovation: Articulating Collaborative and Inclusive Learning Communities through shared R+D+i agendas among European regions”** will seek to explore further: **i)** the dynamic development of the seed project output that opened up new opportunities and synergies, and the **ii)** the potential that new proposed Lab has for the ECIU university and its compatibility with its existing infrastructure and vision.

The ULALABS project aims to define a theoretical and practical framework for the implementation and operationalization of a European distributed Living Lab focused on urban sustainability challenges and climate change; a “Lab of Labs” perceived as a shared and interconnected R+D+i infrastructure among HEI partners to promote transformative innovation policies within and among European regions through the articulation of open and collaborative Learning Communities and shared Agendas. The ULALABS will center its activities around the development of the Learning Communities, consolidating and expanding the existing ECIU-UTC community, as key elements of the distributed Living Lab model while offering support and learning opportunities during the project. The pilot programme will be the focus point of the activities that will allow the testing and demonstration of **i)** the potential for cross-case learning between partners, communities and regions adding to the shared knowledge between the learning community, as well as **ii)** for distributed learning, where shared knowledge is generated ad-hoc among partners.





SEED Project  
Sept. 2022 - Sept. 2023

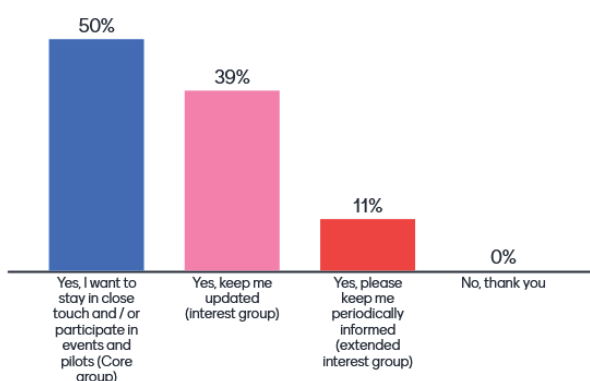


**University Lab of Labs for Transformative Societal Innovation**

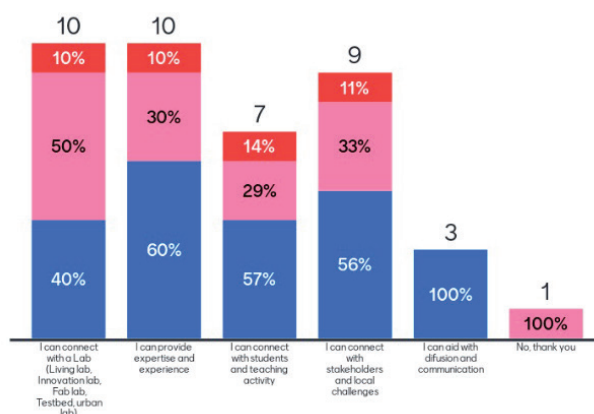
Articulating collaborative and inclusive learning communities through shared R+D+i agendas among European regions

Erasmus+ Project  
Dec. 2023 - Dec. 2026

Are you interested in staying in touch and make part of the ULALABS learning community?



How can you contribute within the ULALABS learning community?



Are you interested in staying in touch and make part of the ULALABS learning community?

- Yes, I want to stay in close touch and / or participate in events and pilots (Core group)
- Yes, keep me updated (interest group)
- Yes, please keep me periodically informed (extended interest group)
- No, thank you

## Wrap-up Survey

After the completion of the workshop the participants were invited to participate in a second Mentimeter survey to give feedback on the workshop experience and importantly to express interest on the upcoming ULALABS project and the different ways and levels of engagement desired. Participants interested in staying in touch were encouraged to provide their contact info to be included in the ULALABS learning community and be contacted later.

# THE 4 REGIONS & COLLABORATORS



## Barcelona

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

UAB OPEN LABS  
Vallés Labs Network  
Municipality of Cerdanyola  
HUBB30

[I]



## Linköping

Linköping University

Linköping Science Park  
Testbed Ebbepark  
Linköping Viable Cities

[II]

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**LAURA PALOU**  
[Coordinator CORE on  
Education & Employability]

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Dpt. of Thematic Studies & Director of the Centre for  
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Municipality of Stavanger  
Nordic Edge

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**JAVIER MARTINEZ**

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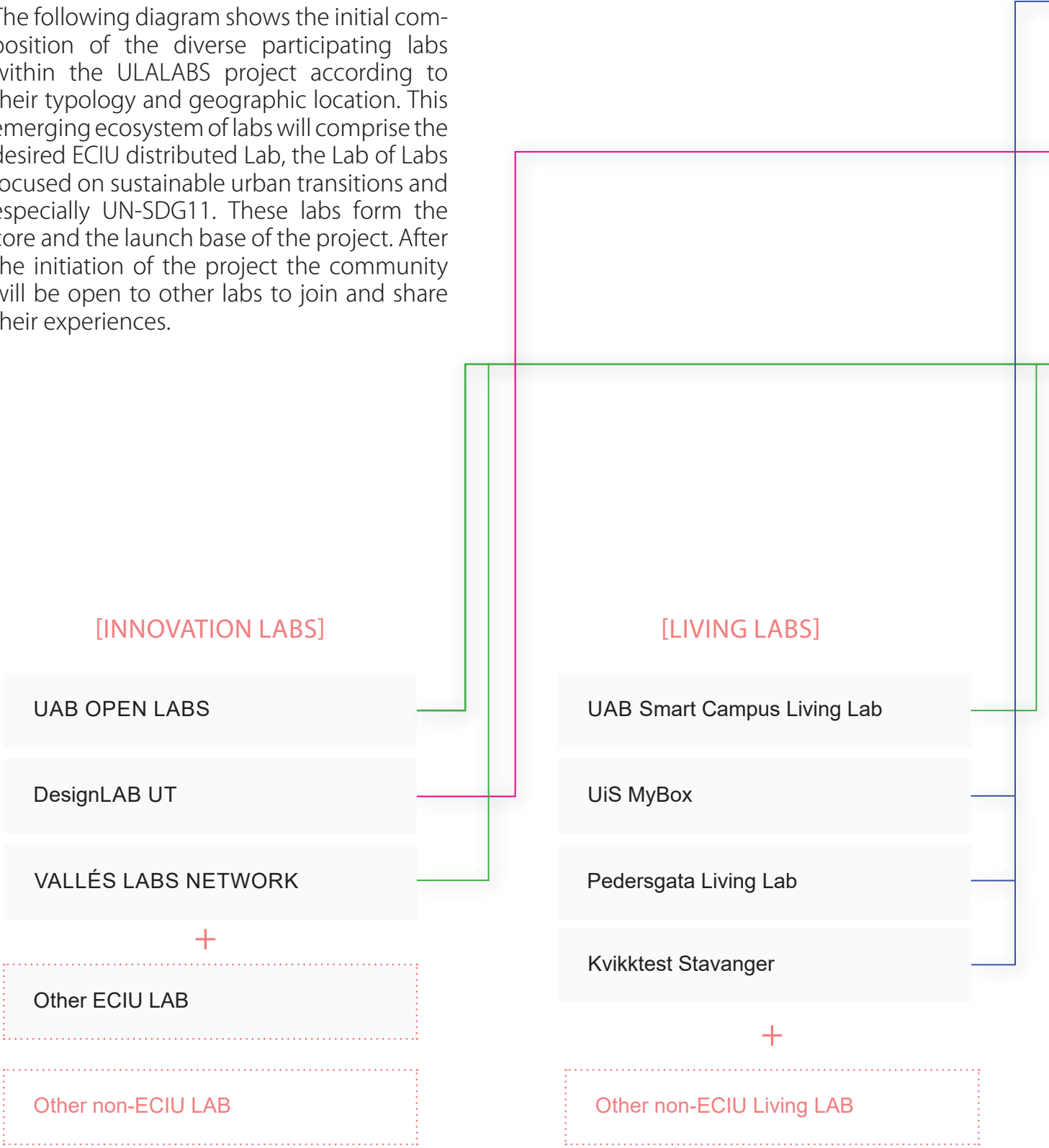
[Program Manager, DesignLab.]

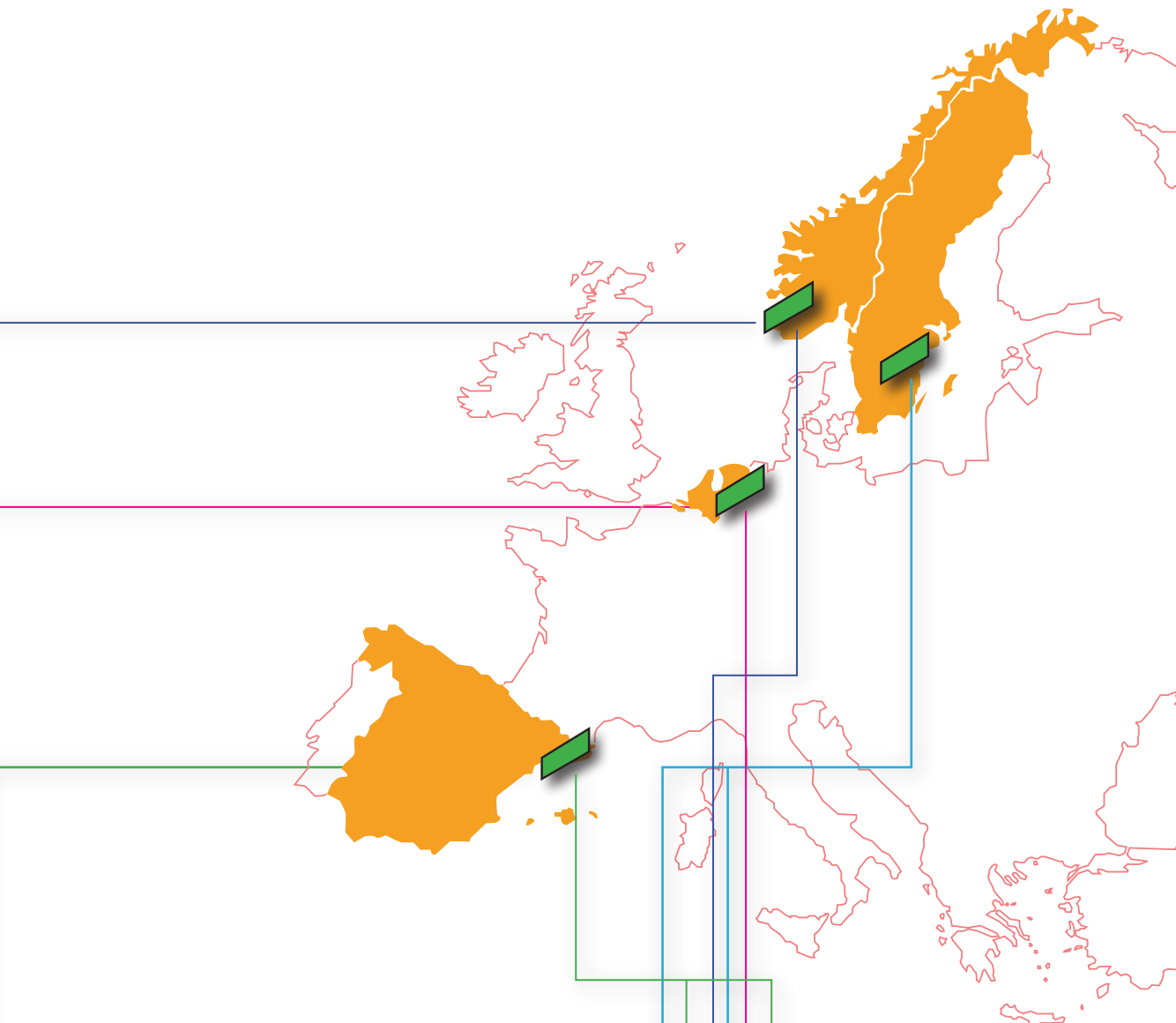
**WIRO KUIPERS**

[Community Manager, Design Lab]

# THE LABS OF LABS @ ULALABS

The following diagram shows the initial composition of the diverse participating labs within the ULALABS project according to their typology and geographic location. This emerging ecosystem of labs will comprise the desired ECIU distributed Lab, the Lab of Labs focused on sustainable urban transitions and especially UN-SDG11. These labs form the core and the launch base of the project. After the initiation of the project the community will be open to other labs to join and share their experiences.





[URBAN TEST-BEDS]

Test-bed Ebbepark

Test-bed Kungsgatan

UAB Smart Campus Testbed

+

Other ECIU Testbed

Other non-ECIU Testbed

HUBS / ALLIANCES

HUBB30

EnschedeLAB

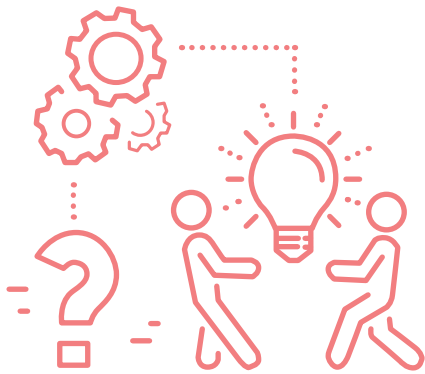
Nordic Edge

Linköping Viable Cities

+

Other ECIU or non-ECIU HUB

# ULALABS METHODOLOGIES



## CHALLENGE BASED METHODOLOGIES

There are multiple ways in which Universities can use knowledge within a challenge-based approach, whether challenge-based research (CBR), learning (CBL) and innovation (CBI). In practice, the distinctions between CBR, CBL and CBI are vague since newly produced knowledge may subsequently or simultaneously be used for innovative or educational purposes, and these activities may in turn initiate or support the production of new knowledge.



## OPEN KNOWLEDGE & CITIZEN SCIENCE

Universities can play a key role and be at the core of regional knowledge-generation processes especially when those universities have an explicit role in guaranteeing Open Science encompassing unhindered access to scientific knowledge and access to data from public research, so that research outputs are in the hands of as many as possible, and potential benefits are spread as widely as possible.



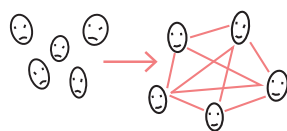
## LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Create a safe space where learning communities can flourish around the existing and newly generated knowledge on shared urgent challenges and relevant societal topics, such as SDG11. Together we will establish a hybrid, a human-centric but digitally-enabled space, which will allow communities to collaborate, grow and innovate across boundaries.



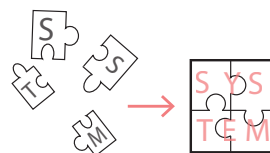
## INCLUSIVITY

Provision for structures, tools and mechanisms that guarantee an inclusive vision and functioning of the LAB for all groups and stakeholders even disadvantaged or groups with minimal representation



## TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

Connect different agents of the quadruple helix according to their interests, motivation, capabilities or challenges they have and articulate the emerging community and ecosystem around the new Lab.



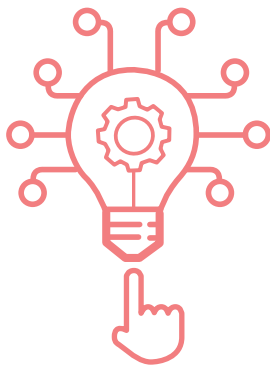
## SYSTEMIC VISION

Seek a systemic vision, integrating the different parts and key elements, with their characteristics and complementarities, creating a new structure and model for ECIU to generate innovation.



## VISIBILITY

Increase LAB visibility and presence as well as related methodologies within the ECIU ecosystem and perceptually within the user community.



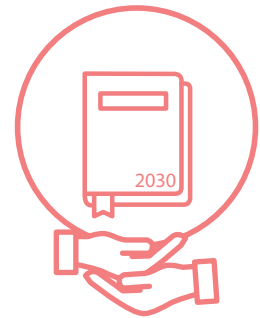
### TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIETAL INNOVATION LABS

The living-lab approach as a methodology for innovation and co-creation, is an effective tool to clarify and further develop new visions regarding social problems and propose innovative solutions. We stand for bold experimentation in research and education by setting up a European innovation arena for all stakeholders. A distributed living lab on a European ECIU level that can enhance these processes and help achieve a greater impact.



### TRANS-NATIONAL/REGIONAL COLLABORATION

This distributed lab includes the external connectedness of regions, the European dimension which guarantees sustained flow of global knowledge to stimulate innovation and growth for European regions. Universities, cities and regions are interconnected to maximise the benefits of the ecosystem, and enterprises find benefits in like-minded stakeholders, researchers and learners.



### SHARED R+D+i AGENDAS

The ECIU research agenda is set based on the needs of society with an integral connection to education. Invest in synergies between education, research and funding, so that various policies can reinforce each other. In this sense seek maximum synergy with local shared agendas and their respective ecosystems and processes.



### RADICAL COLLABORATION

Radical collaboration has been introduced primarily as a principle of design thinking, promoting the idea that if we bring together a group of diverse actors, we'll get more diverse perspectives and hence a broader range of creation ideas.



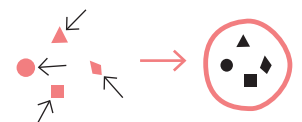
### CONNECT

Serve as a node to connect the diverse labs with their related activities and articulate systemic relationships.



### CATALYZE

Think of the creation of the new LAB as a catalyst for innovation processes and dynamics within the ECIU ecosystem.



### CONSOLIDATE

Gather, integrate and relate all activities related to sustainable urban transitions within ECIU and consolidate them in a common point of reference.

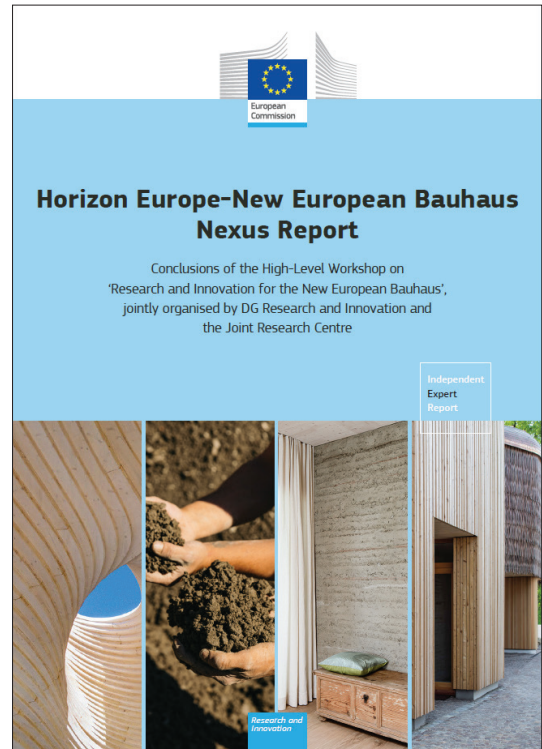
# KEY STRATEGIC REFERENCES

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[ ECIU UNIVERSITY ]

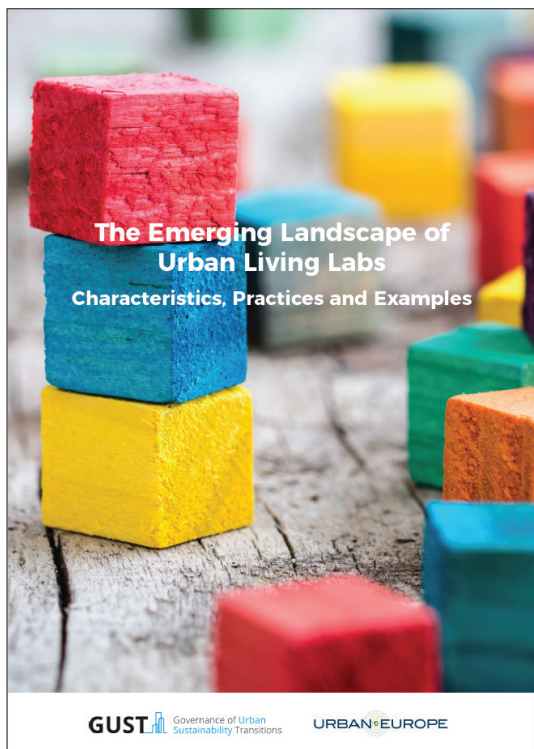
Excellence and impact in CBR require a shift in focus from individual research projects formulated around specific research questions to serial research programmes formulated around challenges. To embark on this endeavour, a clear and shared definition is needed on what Challenge-based Research is according to the ECIU University, accompanied by a strategy and unified plan for enhanced research cooperation across the ECIU University member institutions. This document provides these features and can serve as the groundwork for future documents on the enhanced cooperation in research and innovation between member institutions.



[NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS / EC ]

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) is an environmental, economic and cultural project, combining design, sustainability, accessibility, affordability and investment to help deliver the European Green Deal. The NEB Lab is the “think and do tank” to co-create, prototype, and test the tools, solutions, and policy actions that will facilitate transformation on the ground. The lab will function as an accelerator and connector. By connecting the initiative’s growing community and sharing ideas, it will bring about beautiful, sustainable and inclusive changes on the ground. The lab will pursue its community-building journey to embrace concrete projects inspired by the New European Bauhaus.





[JPI URBAN EUROPE]

Urban experimentation has an vital role to play in systemic urban transformations. Because of their practical and thematic flexibility, urban living labs are considered a flagship initiative among urban research and innovation objectives in JPI Urban Europe. The urban living labs approach is used to explore and tackle a wide variety of issues in everyday settings. It can help test hypotheses and pathways towards regenerative urbanism, as well as, sustainability and liveability transformations. JPI Urban Europe uses this notion to describe methods, approaches and projects that substantially include urban actors in processes of co-creation, co-production, learning-loops, and experimental approaches to improve urban life.



European Network of Living Labs [ENOLL]

Living Labs (LLs) are open innovation ecosystems in real-life environments using iterative feedback processes throughout a life-cycle approach of innovation to create sustainable impact. They focus on co-creation, rapid prototyping & testing and scaling-up innovations & businesses, providing (different types of) joint-value to the involved stakeholders. In this context, Living Labs operate as intermediaries/orchestrators among citizens, research organisations, companies and government agencies/levels.

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# Recommendations

# RECOMMENDATIONS for ECIU University

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The opportunity we had to interact with the wider ECIU community in our workshop during the ECIU SMART-er Research Conference was a very constructive and revealing experience. Timewise, it was organized during a key period, when the team had concluded the Seed Project (ECIU-UTC) and was preparing to kick-off the new project (ULALABS). We had this opportunity to reflect collectively with the community and at the same time project and envision future scenarios and possibilities. So, reflecting upon the results of the four tables and the overall seed experience we can synthesize them into the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Similar to other challenge-based research processes, the workshop results demonstrated that participants often enter the dialogue with different understandings and conceptualizations of the challenge in focus. In particular the **contextual dimensions** and **epistemic structures** need to be considered when setting out on co-creation processes; often neglected aspects that plays a key role in how the questions are interpreted or how the challenge is defined.
2. The outcomes and feedback and from of the workshop provide a starting point, an initial framework for the identifying and defining urban sustainability challenges. It also helped identify of possible tools and practices, to employ while working with challenge-based methodologies but also highlighted **the need for a more structured and contextual assessment**. This task can be done during the initial WPs of the ULALABS projects together with the participating ECIU innovation labs and experimentation spaces to establish common definitions, vocabulary and methodologies to work efficiently together.
3. It is essential to emphasize and realize that knowledge transfer and exchange do not automatically guarantee learning outcomes. In this sense we have observed a need to develop methodological toolboxes that **enable learning processes** across various scales, spaces, institutional contexts and cultures. These methodologies must also be diverse in ways that engage people, and they need to adapt to multiple learning styles. Learning communities should adapt methodologies that fa-

facilitate the transfer of knowledge and the adaptation and implementation of that knowledge into new and often different contexts.

4. Develop a roadmap to support the scaling of our learnings, experiences and results from Urban Living Labs (ULLs) and other experimentation spaces, requires actions on different levels; namely **strategic, tactical** and **operational**. ULLs similar to learning communities tend to be highly contextual, as they are usually developed to address specific challenges for the region where they are located. A multi-level and multi-path flexible approach is necessary to make sure that the LLs develop and grow organically and embedded at regional and broader ECIU levels. Developing meaningful indicators to monitor performance at the **operational level** is needed both for the incorporation of stakeholder's feedback and for the transparency of the process.
5. In our interaction with the ECIU community we observed **a stark contrast in the participants' familiarity with the Living Lab concept** or innovation and experimentation labs in general. In this sense and to compensate for this gap in knowledge within the ECIU context, it has been identified that through the ULALABS project a didactic effort could be made to raise awareness, inform and capacitate the community on how to use these tools and methodologies to enhance their existing activity or open new pathways.
6. The workshop during the SMART-er conference permitted us to present the ULALABS project to the ECIU community and start engaging with it early in the project. The ULALABS is composed by four ECIU Universities with participants who have extensive experience in the diverse ECIU activities/projects and are familiar with the ecosystem. We plan to use of existing ECIU knowledge, tools and ecosystem and help grow it further through the ULALABS learning community. Thus, we are very excited to welcome all interested ECIU members to participate in the future activities that we will soon announce.
7. Lastly, we should keep in mind the definition of the distributed lab that was co-created during the workshop. This definition can serve as a vision/objective both for the ULALABS project but also for the ECIU University in its pursuit of articulating collaborative and innovative infrastructures for its members:

“A distributed living lab, with a focus on sustainable urban transitions within ECIU (European HEI) context can serve as a versatile physical and virtual platform to encourage a collective pursuit of innovative knowledge production through non-traditional, challenge-based methodologies. It can play a pivotal role in creating interconnections between existing living labs, innovation labs and experimentation spaces within ECIU regions based on their distinctive focus, challenges, methods, and communities. This emerging distributed living lab is driven by the desire to engage and benefit academic communities and all related societal stakeholders.

It should thrive on dynamic knowledge exchange, facilitated openly and transparently while exploring experimental and uncommon situations with ethical considerations, placing ECIU’s philosophy at its core. This approach will enrich existing tools and methods, emphasize the need for responsible and ethical handling of participants’ involvement, and create a citizen-centric living lab network focused on sustainable urban transitions within ECIU ready to tackle existing and upcoming shared challenges.”

As an end note, we would like to highlight the SEED project modality of the SMART-er Project as a potentially key and strategic function within ECIU University. In our case, it has served both as a learning experience and as a “platform” to be able to prepare a subsequent proposal (ULALABS) within a reasonable time-frame and under the right conditions (permitting trips between partners to get to know each other and their respective ecosystems in detail and depth / or the possibility to have regular meetings to collectively reflect and produce knowledge). Having benefited from such an experience we are confident that it would be exciting if further researchers and members of the ECIU community could take advantage of such an opportunity to extend their networks and scale their ideas to projects. Thus, we recommend that ECIU University explore possible ways to permanently establish such tools and mechanisms, now that the Smart-er Institute has officially ended. This will aid with the further consolidation of the ECIU community, the generation of new projects and the multiplication of the overall impact of the ECIU University.

**Title:**

**ECIU Position Paper on Living Labs and experimentation spaces.**

Recommendations and insights about the potential of Living Labs as innovation and learning platforms in the ECIU University

**Coordination / Design**

Konstantinos Kourkoutas

This publication is a result of WP2: Status Quo & Best Practices Catalogue of University Lab of Labs for Transformative Societal Innovation (KA220-HED-000157489)

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