

# A Living Lab approach to user involvement in REVEAL

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Innovation is challenging. For an innovative application to be successful, it needs to match the needs of its (intended) users. If not, it may end up on the scrap yard of application history even before it has been commercialized. To improve the odds for success, the intended users of the applications to be developed need to be involved in the innovation process.

In REVEAL we have set out to develop innovative applications for use by journalists and members of enterprise communities. These applications are intended to support new and emerging work practices: for example, by making it easier for users to find relevant answers in an online enterprise community, or by helping journalists in their use of social media as part of the content production process. REVEAL solutions are to support them in revealing hidden concepts in social media. Verification of content residing in social networks is a key aspect. However, in order to build new applications and support respective work practices we need in-depth knowledge about how work is carried out - now and in the near future. Often, such in-depth knowledge is hard to come by. In particular, this is the case with work practices that do not follow detailed procedures, such as those of journalist or members of online enterprise communities. It may even be argued that to fully understand their work practices one needs to either be a journalist or the user of the particular online enterprise community.

Application developers typically do not possess the required knowledge of the work domain for which they are supposed to innovate. Hence, it is all the more important to involve those in the innovation process who have such knowledge. In REVEAL, we aim to involve current and future users of our applications in the innovation process. Such user involvement is an acclaimed but challenging means to access the needed work domain knowledge; acclaimed because prospective users are typically those who hold the richest and most detailed knowledge of their work. Challenging because users need to be involved throughout the innovation process; from the initial research and requirements phase, through ideation, concept formation, prototyping and development all the way to a commercially available and successful product. User involvement is particularly challenging if user groups are characterized by being heterogeneous in their work practices and geographically distributed.

In REVEAL we aim to meet the challenge of user involvement with a Living Lab approach. A Living Lab is an environment for involving users and other stakeholders in innovation processes in which users are involved as part of their everyday context. Rather than bringing users to the innovations, as it is done by creating focus groups for market research purposes or the usability tests of software engineers, the Living Lab innovation process aims to bring innovations to users. The aim of this approach is for users themselves to make sense of the innovations in their own environment.

During the last decade, several hundred Living Labs have been set up all over Europe (see <http://openlivinglabs.eu>). Although the European Living Lab approach is still emerging, it has a number of interesting characteristics. Firstly, the Living Lab is seen as an arena for co-creation, meaning that users and other stakeholders are involved in the innovation process not only as knowledge resources, but also for their creative potential. In addition to knowing their own work, it is expected that users may see opportunities or solutions to challenges that often are not visible to the innovator. Secondly, the Living Labs are seen as an arena for opening up the innovation process. Rather than protecting the innovation process behind the walls of the innovating company, the Living Lab offers an environment for involving resources outside the company ranks. Given that no company has access to all needed knowledge or creative resources for successful innovations, the benefits of involving resources outside the company is seen as outweighing the potential loss of secrecy implied in opening up the innovation process. Thirdly, the Living Lab is seen as a way to facilitate a co-creative relationship between innovator and user. Rather than seeing the user as the recipient of a ready-made application, the Living Lab process supports a perspective of innovators and users as collaborators towards the goal of improving the users' work practices.

Most Living Labs depend on user involvement in the physical world. In REVEAL we aim to use, among others, an online Living Lab approach to mitigate the logistic challenge of physically involving geographically distributed groups of users. In the online Living Lab users are presented the REVEAL applications at various stages of the innovation process by means of an online environment. Such involvement is particularly useful in the early phases of ideation and concept development, as the design choices made at these points in time have great impact on the final applications. As participants in an online Living Lab, users are presented to application ideas, concepts, or prototypes in a social online environment, much like an online discussion forum. They are then asked to provide feedback and suggest changes. The social character of the online Living Lab allows users to build on the feedback provided by other users. It furthermore allows innovation team representatives to follow up users' comments directly.

Using such an approach as part of the REVEAL work, the online Living Lab will allow us to involve future users of the REVEAL applications in the innovation process. In particular, we may involve journalists and students of journalism (the journalists of tomorrow) for the applications oriented towards journalism, and enterprise community members for the applications oriented towards the enterprise community context.

The Living Lab user participants will be identified within the first six months of the REVEAL project. They are to serve as a small community of dedicated users as part of the project's innovation team. Living Lab user participants will be involved for giving feedback on ideas, suggesting features in the application concepts, and for identifying opportunities related to the prototypes to be developed. In addition, we aim to employ a subset of these participants by means of traditional user involvement methods, such as usability testing, in order to identify possible usability problems.

The Living Lab approach is expected to help us meet the ambitious user-centred innovation goals of the REVEAL project aims.

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Would you like to find out more? If so, have a look at the webpage of SINTEF's online Living Lab for more details, which includes information about the online Living Lab approach: <http://livinglab.info.no>.

For more details on Living Labs in Europe see the webpage of the European network of Living Labs on <http://openlivinglabs.eu>.