

>>> NEWSLETTER <<<



SUSTAINABILITY NEWS



TOP NEWS OF THE INVEST4EXCELLENCE PROJECT

PIVOTAL PROJECT DELIVERABLES AVAILABLE



READ MORE

We are excited to announce that two pivotal deliverables from the INVEST4EXCELLENCE project are now publicly available.

We invite you to explore these resources and leverage their insights to drive innovation and excellence in your respective domains.

READ MORE



The University of Thessaly is proud to organize the 7th Conference on Sustainable Mobility – CSuM2024, set at the picturesque backdrop of Lake Plastira, Karditsa, Greece, from September 4 to 6, 2024.

As part of this event, the I4E project will be contributing with two special sessions on “Decision Support Systems for Urban Sustainability” and “Sustainable and Resilient Regional Ecosystems”.

7TH CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY – CSUM2024



SUA
Slovak University
of Agriculture
in Nitra



**van hall
larenstein**
university of applied sciences

A REVIEW OF I4E ACTIVITIES

WORKSHOP ON LIVING LABS

October 4-5 2023, Velp, The Netherlands

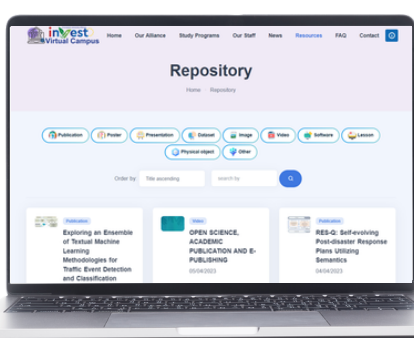
We are happy to report on the successful INVEST4EXCELLENCE **Workshop on Living Labs**, hosted on October 4th and 5th 2023 at VHL University, which united experts from six alliance universities to explore Living Labs and their role in sustainable development. The workshop commenced with an engaging welcome session at VHL University, where **Prof. Rik Eweg** led a thought-provoking discussion on Transition Pathways. This was complemented by an extensive presentation on Dutch Living Labs from Prof. Loes Witteveen, Peter vd Maas, and Rik Eweg, offering a detailed look at current practices in the Netherlands.

Participants also had the opportunity to **shape I4E Living Lab pathways** during collaborative group sessions and gain hands-on experience through a visit to the Living Lab Nature Inclusive Farming. The second day maintained the momentum with an interactive session by **Prof. Loes Witteveen** and **Jan Fliervoet**, introducing vital tools for effective Living Lab operations. **Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Arabska** initiated the ambitious Deliverable 3.5, aimed at creating an Inter European University to aid sustainable development across European regions, while **Asst. Prof. Omiros Iatrellis** led the dialogue on Deliverable 3.4, which seeks to bolster sustainable development through an interconnected European University system. Contributions from the University of Cordoba, University of Thessaly, University of Agribusiness and Rural Development, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Van Hall Larenstein UAS, and Karelia UAS were integral to the workshop's achievements and its mission to **advance Living Labs and sustainability in academia**.



Recently researchers from our member universities came together to meticulously craft our **Open Science Code**. This collective effort resulted in a document that embodies the ideals of responsible and open research. This final iteration of the Open Science Code serves as a guide to ethical research, embedding principles of transparency and integrity that are fundamental to scholarly excellence and community advancement.

OPEN SCIENCE CODE AND PLATFORM LAUNCH



In line with our dedication to open access, we are excited to announce the launch of our **Open Science Platform**. This digital space is tailored for researchers, students, and interested parties, set to promote the accessibility and sharing of scholarly knowledge.

The platform enables users to effortlessly find and distribute research materials and publications, explore a rich variety of scholarly works across disciplines, forge collaborations that spur innovation, and engage in transparent research methodologies that brighten our collective future. We are integrating with the **European Open**

Science Cloud (EOSC), enhancing our collaborative capacity and connecting us to a vast consortium of European researchers. Additionally, the ZENODO API integration on the platform will streamline the sharing and retrieval of documents, fostering an environment ripe for research breakthroughs and swift knowledge exchange.

We are delighted to announce that the **I4E network in Greece** has been expanded by **5 more regional stakeholders**:

- **Region of Thessaly**, the governing authority responsible for overseeing the four Administrative Units of Larissa, Magnesia, Trikala, and Karditsa.
- **STHEV (ASSOCIATION OF THESSALIAN BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRIES)** plays a pivotal role in representing the interests of Thessalian businesses and industries, advocating for their growth and prosperity. The association recognizes the importance of collaboration, knowledge exchange, and collective action in creating a favorable business environment and driving sustainable economic development.
- **POLYTECH S.A.**, a renowned organization dedicated to designing, developing, and implementing cutting-edge teaching solutions and laboratories.
- **Institute of Entrepreneurship Development (IED)**, a prominent Greek organization dedicated to fostering innovation and nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit among youth and various societal groups.
- **JOIST Innovation Park**, a dynamic ecosystem builder for innovation and learning in order to bring together key players from various sectors, including researchers, entrepreneurs, industry leaders, policymakers, and community members.



iED

polytech
Educational Technologies

INNOVATION PARK
JOIST

**SERIES OF
MEETINGS
OF THE
UTH TEAM
WITH
REGIONAL
STAKEHOLDERS**

Engaging stakeholders is pivotal for ensuring relevance, impact, and practical application of the findings. These individuals or groups, who have a vested interest in the project outcome, can offer diverse perspectives, potentially enriching the research with real-world context and nuances. Their involvement facilitates broader dissemination and implementation of results, as stakeholders often hold the keys to networks and resources crucial for effecting change. Moreover, their engagement promotes a sense of ownership and alignment with project goals, enhancing the likelihood of sustained support beyond the life of the project.

A REVIEW OF I4E ACTIVITIES

**VAN HALL
LARENSTEIN
UNIVERSITY OF
APPLIED
SCIENCES
ACTIVELY
PARTICIPATES
IN THE
UN 2023
WATER
CONFERENCE**

March 22-24, 2023
New York, USA

[read more...](#)

A seminar, entitled “**Living Labs for Water Transitions: Sharing Approaches for Sustainable Water Transitions in Times of Climate Change**” was held during the **United Nations 2023 Water Conference** in New York, a historic meeting that was co-hosted by the Republic of Tajikistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

As part of the UN 2023 Water Conference side events, **the seminar, that took place on the 23rd of March, focused on Living Labs, as methodology for real life learning in which governments, entrepreneurs and knowledge institutes, cooperate to enhance water related sustainability transitions.** Organized by the Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences and Water Alliance and Deltares, and, more precisely, by **Peter van der Maas (VHL), Hein Molenkamp (Water Alliance) and Mindert de Vries (VHL).**



Its main objectives were:

- To present the Living Labs as a supportive method to enhance water related sustainability transitions,
- To underline the Living Labs’ potential to act as learning environments for all participating parties including governments, entrepreneurs, knowledge institutes and other stakeholders,
- To elaborate on the Living Lab methodology including the access to tools and results or the involvement of students and citizens and communication professionals in capacity building,
- To emphasize the Living Lab’s holistic approach.

Drawing on the expertise of the speakers, who were affiliated to the organizing partners, the seminar also presented living lab examples related to the crucial **food-water nexus**, focusing on low lying coastal regions and sandy islands, highly productive clay and peat-meadow areas. A major theme that reverberated was the WaterCampus’, a unique innovation ecosystem based in Leewarden, aim to accelerate the introduction of new innovative water technology from first idea to market introduction and adaptation: the so-called chain of innovation. Another key message that emerged from the discussion concerned the WaterCampus potential to create synergy for world class innovation, education and entrepreneurship. **This was an important step towards the implementation of the goals of the Living Lab.**

RECENT ACTIVITIES

We are excited to announce that **two pivotal deliverables, D4.1 RDI Competence Matrix and D4.2 Stakeholder Involvement Tool**, are now publicly available, marking a significant milestone in our collaborative efforts.

D4.1 RDI Competence Matrix offers a comprehensive insight into key competences, skills, and knowledge vital for Research, Development, and Innovation (**RDI**) in the realm of Sustainable Supply Chains (SSC). This deliverable presents findings from a rigorous **three-step research process**, shedding light on capacity building needs and potential within our alliance.

D4.2 Stakeholder Involvement Tool is a practical resource aimed at empowering I4E partners in maximizing the potential of **INVEST Living Labs** through effective stakeholder engagement. This tool facilitates the establishment of the **Quadruple Helix Model**, fostering a research-to-business approach and promoting innovation across all participating entities.

Both deliverables not only significantly contribute to advancing research competences and skills but also hold relevance beyond the I4E project, serving as invaluable resources for other consortiums/entities seeking to enhance stakeholder involvement and RDI sustainability.

We invite you to **explore these resources** and leverage their insights to drive innovation and excellence in your respective domains.



D4.1



D4.2



RECENT ACTIVITIES

We proudly announce that our paper titled "**Elevating Academic Advising: Natural Language Processing of Student Reviews**" has been published in the *Special Issue Advanced Technologies and Methodologies in Education 4.0* of the MDPI **Journal of Applied System Innovation** [CiteScore: 4.9, IF: 3.8]

NEW RESEARCH PAPER PUBLISHED

[read more...](#)

This study utilizes **natural language processing** to analyze student reviews of academic advisors, aiming to provide actionable insights for enhancing advising services.

Our study reveals crucial findings regarding the **factors influencing student perceptions of academic advisors**. We discovered that advisor characteristics, such as age and specific traits like empathy, knowledgeability, and approachability, significantly impact student ratings and reviews. This underscores the importance of managing student expectations and continuously improving advisor skills to foster positive interactions and academic achievement. Moreover, our research marks a significant milestone as the first to employ natural language processing to gain insights into how academic advisors are perceived by their students.

Iatrellis, O.; Samaras, N.; Kokkinos, K.; Xenakis, A. Elevating Academic Advising: Natural Language Processing of Student Reviews. *Appl. Syst. Innov.* 2024, 7, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/asi7010012>

By shedding light on the dynamics between advisors and students, our study contributes to the ongoing development of academic advising practices, paving the way for more effective and student-centered educational experiences. These insights will be used to enhance the **EDUC8EU academic advising system**, improving its functionalities and effectiveness in guiding students towards their academic goals.



We are thrilled to unveil the **latest advancements in EDUC8EU**, our **AI-based academic advising system** designed to revolutionize the student learning experience within the I4E project. **Let's explore the exciting new features enhancing EDUC8EU's capabilities.**

Skill Gap Analysis: One of the most significant updates to EDUC8EU is the introduction of our new Skill Gap Analysis component. This feature aims to provide students with invaluable insights into their chosen learning pathways, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary skills for success upon graduation. By leveraging data from ESCO, ILO, and ONET databases, EDUC8EU offers comprehensive reports tailored to each student's profile. These reports not only highlight their current skill set but also identify areas for improvement, accompanied by targeted recommendations. With EDUC8EU's Skill Gap Analysis, students can make informed decisions about their academic journey, paving the way for future success.

INNOVATIONS IN EDUC8EU: EMPOWERING STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS



RECENT ACTIVITIES

>>> CONT'D

Microservices Architecture: EDUC8EU now embraces a Microservices architecture approach, enabling greater flexibility and scalability within the system. This architectural style allows the application to be broken down into smaller, independent parts, each with its own set of responsibilities. By adopting Microservices, we ensure that upgrades and enhancements can be implemented swiftly and cost-effectively without disrupting the entire system. This ensures a seamless user experience while accommodating future growth and expansion.



Enhanced User Experience with DALL-E AI: In our ongoing commitment to enhancing user experience, EDUC8EU now integrates the cutting-edge DALL-E AI system into its profile assessment component. This upgrade enables users to visualize questions more vividly by generating relevant images, thereby facilitating more precise and accurate responses. By leveraging the power of AI, EDUC8EU elevates the user experience, making the process more engaging and intuitive.

These recent enhancements underscore our dedication to empowering students with the tools and insights they need to thrive in today's rapidly evolving educational landscape. **With EDUC8EU, we're not just shaping the future of academic advising; we're paving the way for student success and innovation!**

[LEARN MORE](#)



**I4E
WORKSHOP
AT THE
INTERNATIONAL
AGRICULTURAL
EXHIBITION
"AGRA 2024"**

Plovdiv, Bulgaria

With the kind support of the International Fair-Plovdiv, on February 22, 2024 in the Congress Center of the International Fair - Plovdiv, the University of Agribusiness and Rural Development (**UARD**) **successfully organized the traditional Day of Organic Farming.**

This year the event was celebrated with a **workshop** on the topic "**Family business and family business succession in organic production**" in partnership with the Regional Development Agency with Business support centre for small and medium-sized enterprises – Plovdiv (RDA) and with the special participation of experts **Prof. Rik Eweg** and **Erick Burke** from **Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences (VHL), The Netherlands**. The topic is among the scientific tasks on which the **regional living lab** works in the context of the I4E project.

The Day of Organic Farming was opened by the **president of UARD Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetla Dimitrova** who presented the prestigious Laureate Biofactor award to the "Wild Farm" (Divata ferma).

Greetings were extended to the event by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivan Sokolov, Chief Director; Tanya Georgieva, **Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food**; Albena Simeonova, **Chairman of the Bulgarian Association of Organic Products**; and Dr. Stoilko Apostolov, Chairman of the Foundation for Organic Agriculture "Bioselena." The **Minister of Agriculture and Food**, Kiril Vatev, also attended the event, personally congratulating Blagovesta Vasilieva on her recognition and addressing the attendees.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

»»» CONT'D

In the first panel, good practices in succession in organic production were presented. The second panel started with the presentation of **Eng. Velizar Petrov**, executive director of the Agency for Regional Development with Business center for the support of small and medium-size enterprises - Plovdiv on the topic "*Inheritance and transfer of family business*".



Prof. Dr. Rick Eveg from VHL talked about "**Our sustainable future - the example of INVEST regional living lab and how they work on issues of sustainable regional development**". The presentation "**Addressing sustainability challenges in European regions: Working on wicked problems in a Living Lab - an example from the Netherlands**" also put the attention on the transition pathways in **INVEST Living Labs**.

Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Arabska presented the approach to the so-called "open" innovations in the regional living lab and issued an invitation for future collaborations. She emphasized; "**In Living Labs we can all work together on problems for which there is no solution and we will find a solution together**".

The **Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra**, in partnership with the **Slovak Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development**, annually hosts the "*Agriculture as an Actor of Social Inclusion – AGASI*" discussion panels, starting in 2021 with support from the OECD and the Active Citizens Fund Slovakia.

This initiative focuses on policy recommendation formulation concerning social farming's role in social inclusion and economic sharing of best practices, emphasizing agriculture's key role in innovation and added value creation.

In October 2023, a panel dedicated to the **BE-FOOD Living Lab** initiated a discussion among stakeholders, involving around eighty participants including students, representatives from the SUA, private sector, social enterprises, NGOs, and other territorial development actors.

AGRICULTURE AS AN ACTOR OF SOCIAL INCLUSION "AGASI"
Nitra, Slovakia

RECENT ACTIVITIES

>>> CONT'D

The BE-FOOD LL, located in the Nitra Self-Governing Region, engages stakeholders from academia, industry, government, and civil society to formulate a transition pathway, discuss municipal challenges, and envision solutions for food security, local supply chains, circular economy, and social-ecological integrity, aiming for a resilient and sustainable region.

Visits to Bátovce and Kalná municipalities, Tajna winery, and AgroBioTech demonstrated the active participation of local governments and the importance of external perspectives in addressing complex challenges via Living Labs.



University engagement, through teachers, researchers, students, and facilities like AgroBioTech, plays a crucial role in fostering innovation in agriculture and biotechnology, and in transferring research results into practice.



The vision for territorial transition centers around four key themes:

- Ensuring food security and safety,
- Supporting relocalization and strengthening local food supply chains,
- Advancing a circular economy and enhancing waste management,
- Preserving the integrity of social-ecological systems.

By focusing on these pillars, stakeholders aim to create a region marked by economic prosperity, ecological balance, and social wellbeing. Their dedication to innovation, collaboration, and sustainability is intended to foster a resilient and thriving community for future generations.

An **upcoming co-design event in April 2024** will involve 30 students in regional and rural development studies, collaborating with Bánov municipality residents and officials to co-design innovative solutions addressing local needs and challenges, highlighting the university's commitment to practical learning and community engagement.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[INVEST](#)
[Living Labs](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS/ACTIVITIES

Karelia University of Applied Sciences organizes the first **Karelia Entrepreneurship Expo** on **23rd of April 2024**. We welcome all our INVEST4EXCELLENCE colleagues, students, and regional representatives to join us in promoting entrepreneurship and cooperation in sustainable regional development.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Local best practices

Uncover the innovative best practices of our local organizations as they share their insights into supporting and nurturing entrepreneurship.

Live company interviews

Witness captivating interviews with industry leaders on the main stage, providing firsthand perspectives on the dynamic world of entrepreneurship.

INVEST alliance international showcase

Explore the variety of international opportunities for students, staff members, and partners, presented by the INVEST University Alliance members.

Investors and Mentors panel

Gain invaluable insights from investors and mentors as they share their experiences in navigating the entrepreneurial landscape.



**KARELIA
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
EXPO
2024**

April 23, 2024 - Joensuu, Finland

 **REGISTER NOW**

Participation in the Karelia Entrepreneurship Expo is **complimentary**. Kindly **secure your spot** by registering for the event [here](#)

➤➤➤ RDI ONLINE DEVELOPMENT TOOL

Invest4Excellence is **developing** a Research, Development and Innovation (**RDI**) **online development tool**, and we are happy to hear **your ideas** on the topic.



Please
**Click on or
Scan the QR
code and tell us
what would you
like to Learn**

For more information on the matter, please contact Kristiina Väänänen, Karelia University of Applied Sciences, at kristiina.vaananen@karelia.fi

UPCOMING EVENTS/ACTIVITIES

**1ST
INTERNATIONAL
SYMPOSIUM**
**Inter-
university
networks and
technologies
for circular
economy and
green
transition**
Plovdiv, Bulgaria

➤➤➤ INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM, MAY '24

The 1st International Symposium "Inter-university networks and technologies for circular economy and green transition" will take place in **Plovdiv, Bulgaria in May, 2024**. This symposium will serve as a dynamic platform for interdisciplinary dialogue among experts from diverse scientific and industrial sectors.

Our goal is to explore the potential for establishing a global recycling industry and fostering networks dedicated to the exchange of high-quality information and technologies to support the circular economy and green transition

The event is initiated by **University of Agribusiness and Rural Development (UARD)** and the **Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry**. The I4E team will participate in the presentations and discussions sessions on "Good national and global practices for the formation and implementation of circular economy technologies and green transition" and we cordially invite scientists, business leaders, and institutional representatives to share their insights and proposals on enhancing the dissemination of information and technologies aimed at advancing the circular economy and green transition.

For information about these activities please send email at:
uard@uard.bg

The **INVEST Alliance** aims to make a significant contribution into the regional development addressing environmental, economic and social issues in education and research, promoting digital and technological development, and creating more systematic cross-sectoral networks and connections with the key stakeholders; students, academics, researchers, businesses, local entrepreneurs, citizens, local government and administrative institutions and NGOs.

Towards these goals and fostering educational, scientific and cultural cooperation and exchanges among the European Universities Alliances, INVEST is now working on the establishment of a network of European Universities called "Science for regional sustainability" (**SCIENCE4REGIONS**).

INVEST invites European University Alliances to join the SCIENCE4REGIONS network, aimed at enriching the European higher education and research landscape by tackling contemporary sustainability challenges. By pooling resources and expertise, SCIENCE4REGIONS is dedicated to devising innovative solutions for sustainability in European regions, promoting academic collaboration and exchange. Members will focus their collective efforts on pioneering sustainable regional development, leveraging their international cooperation and knowledge-sharing experience to foster synergies in research and future skill development for excellence. Please note that **there are no participation fees**.



UPCOMING ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

7TH CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY CSUM2024

Karditsa, Greece

[read more...](#)

[Paper submission until 24/04/2024](#)

The Sessions' objectives are:

Strategies for preserving regional biodiversity, Adapting to climate change impacts, Sustainable Land Use Planning, Ecosystem Restoration Methodologies, Ecosystem Restoration Methodologies, Incorporating traditional knowledge, MCDM Decision Support Systems, Role of policies and governance.

>>> CSUM 2024, 4-6/09/2024

The **University of Thessaly (UTH)** is proud to organize the **7th Conference on Sustainable Mobility – CSuM2024**, set against the picturesque backdrop of Lake Plastira, Karditsa, Greece, from September 4 to 6, 2024.

As part of this event, the **I4E** project will be contributing with two **special sessions**, moderated by **Professors Kokkinos Konstantinos and Samaras Nicholaos** of the **Dept. of Digital Systems, UTH**.

Decision Support Systems for Urban Sustainability

With cities facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of rapid urbanization, this session will explore innovative approaches to support decision-making processes aimed at fostering sustainable development and resilience in urban environments. From smart infrastructure to data-driven policies, experts will convene to share insights and strategies to build cities that thrive while minimizing their environmental footprint.

Sustainable and Resilient Regional Ecosystems

Recognizing the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the vital role they play in supporting life on Earth, this session will focus on strategies to promote the sustainability and resilience of regional ecosystems. From preserving biodiversity to mitigating the impacts of climate change, attendees will engage in discussions on how to safeguard our natural heritage for future generations.





This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101035815

