

Chapter 9

“Casa do Conhecimento” (Knowledge House): Open Innovation Case in an Urban Context

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project “Casa do Conhecimento” (Knowledge House), based on a partnership between the Vila Verde Municipality, the University of Minho, and the Computer Graphics Center, is a case of adoption of the open innovation paradigm in a public administration context. The purpose of the Knowledge House is to work as a municipal infrastructure that invests in information technologies, and a set of technological assets and associated services. The aim is to create a space to support creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship as a local implementation of the Living Lab concept. This chapter will present the project Knowledge House in detail. It begins by approaching the theoretical assumptions that make the project highly relevant and actual; afterwards it describes the case with the aim of setting the stage for presenting the socio-economic impact of the project, and proceeds by detailing the project and what is being done to create the Knowledge House in Vila Verde, Portugal. Finally, it describes what will be done in the near future and details the expected socio-economic impacts of the Knowledge House.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Knowledge House project is based on a strong and sustained partnership between the Vila Verde Municipality, the University of Minho

and the Computer Graphics Center, all located in North of Portugal. Its activity will be guided by the joint action of these bodies, taking into account the mission and contexts for action of each one of them. As an evidence of the strong institutional relationship that exists between partners it was constituted, in September 2008,

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the “Associação Casa do Conhecimento” as a private non-profit organization whose mission is to foster the implementation of the Information and Knowledge Society, to give a contribution to the fight against info-exclusion and the digital gap, promoting information technologies skills among population, through diverse information and communication technologies (ICTs) projects and initiatives.

This project is a case of strategic implementation of public innovation on a municipal facility with a set of associated services that consists, in a first phase, in the construction of a building and the setting up of its filling technology allowing the implementation of a set of technological valences, and in a second phase, in the operating efficiency of this infrastructure in order to achieve a set of strategic and operational objectives.

In March 2009 a municipal submission was approved, under the intention of the regeneration of Vila Verde urban centre, to the North Region Coordination and Development Commission with a funding grant of 2,4 million Euro, approved with a 70% rate. The main components of the approval are: (1) the construction of a two floor building, whose architectural design has the signature of the renowned Portuguese architect Eduardo Souto Moura, with an estimated cost of 1,4 million Euro and an area of 1.095 m², and (2) the acquisition of technological equipment that will endow the building and allow the implementation of its technological valences, with an estimated cost of 1 million Euros. In February 2010, a public tender was launched for the construction of the building. After evaluation of the proposals, construction started from November 2010 and it is expected to be completed by May 2012.

The Knowledge House is a local implementation of the concept of Living Lab in the context of University of Minho’s initiative: Living Labs Minho, and will work as a front-office for innovation. This implementation will act as an urban facility that will allow, by its physical infrastructure and technology availability, in-

teractivity, digital and physical connection and interdisciplinary areas of knowledge, in an open innovation environment. In a broader perspective, this project is an example of a good practice of an open innovation initiative, in a joint structured response of a municipality in conjunction with a higher education institution and a research and development one, providing a set of services for and with their users in order to create a creativity and innovation space supporting entrepreneurship where the various players experimentation can be done in an open environment.

The entrepreneurship level can be seen in two approaches: (1) the co-optation of lead users (Von Hippel, 1986; 2005) that, by their high degree of adoption and technology usage, represent a higher level of demand, with their responses seen as a source of innovation; and (2) at the innovation results level, that should be usable and hopefully profitable, this initiative works as a front-office for innovation by its own results that can be integrated in its internal structure, as also by the results that may be directed, with proper monitoring, to entrepreneurship support structures as incubators or other business development support entities.

This initiative, undertaken by the three stakeholders, is a case of applying the paradigm of the Triple Helix. The Triple Helix metaphor has been useful as an analytical framework for understanding innovation processes and to propose and implement public policies, especially in science, technology and innovation with the aim of supporting the interaction between the actors of the three helixes (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Herstad et al., 2008; De Jong et al., 2008). The dynamics of innovation must be located in a changing context, where new relations are established between the three institutional spheres: university, industry and government, whose interaction is clearly essential for development based on knowledge and effective in promoting a regional dynamic of innovation and entrepreneurship in a straightforward and practical manner (Marques, 2006; Open Innovation Network, 2008; Fredberg, Elmquist & Ollila,

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