

It's no place really, but it's real.

Hamburg – Mediterranean Matchmaking Summit, January 16.

The prolific writer William Gibson has stated that we live in an age that is dominated by a post-geographical feeling. The development of the internet and the mobile generation has revolutionized the way that we view the world, and the newest incarnation of almost universal WI-FI in combination with the arrival of the 3G phone has made things move even faster. With this in mind, it was striking that Sascha Haselmayer opened the summit by stating that we haven't even seen the beginning of the new market, and he stressed that, even though the need for services is evident, we are not seeing all the mobile services that one would expect.

Why are we not seeing the new services yet? There are many reasons for this, but one important factor might be that the post-geographical feeling still has certain limitations when it comes to how we interact in the physical world. Even though a vast Gibsonesque prosthetic nervous system has spread around the globe over the last 25 years, we are still living in a physical reality defined by national borders, cultural differences, and spatial divides. There is no doubt that people all over the globe share some of the same needs and face some of the same challenges, but when Europe, the smallest continent, is unable to develop common solutions and standards, how can we expect to see better results on a global scale?

Living Labs Global is aware of this divide, and in Hamburg the network and its members showed that they are ready and well equipped to tackle the work at hand. By focusing on the collaboration between companies, investors, and research centers in Barcelona and Hamburg, Living Labs Global showed how fruitful such a summit can be when the organizers are conscious of the real barriers that exist in the market. It was the first time that Living Labs Global tried to use this specific angle on matchmaking, and it proved to be something that people have needed for a very long time.

With nearly 100 participants at the Empire Riverside Hotel, the summit was fully booked. Many had asked themselves if a proper spirit of openness and readiness to speak up could be achieved in only one day, but these worries quickly turned out to be completely groundless. It has to be said that most of the participants took a head start the evening before the event by attending a very nice cocktail party arranged by the 'Cavas Codorniu' from Barcelona and the City Council. They served drinks in the hotel lounge, and in no time the whole place was alive with large groups of people engaging in lively discussions. As the arranged get-together ended most of us found our way to restaurants and bars in the vicinity, and I myself went to a nice informal dinner with a fine dozen of people from Sweden, Spain, Germany, and Denmark. Many of the participants later met up in the magnificent sky-bar of the Empire Riverside Hotel and it was a great to end the night in good company and with the view of Hamburg below.

The summit itself began the day after with Sascha Haselmayer's welcome, and it set the tone of the event: A real value network has to be built around the mobility market and we have to make some kind of coherence in the sea of service and market islands. Introducing North and South, he rightly identified Hamburg as a gate for trade and handed the podium to Judit Romera from Barcelona City Counsel, and she described Barcelona as a dense and creative city – a place in which to be inspired. Barcelona is also a cultural capital and it has become the central reference in the creation of dialogue between the Northern and the Southern rim of the Mediterranean. With 3.000 companies that have a productive presence in the city, Barcelona is also the most consolidated base of foreign companies in Spain. Jordi Sacristan from 22@Barcelona confirmed that the city is able to attract talent, and the innovative new area specializing in media, ICT, energy, and biomedical research is ready to welcome even more foreign companies and students.

As is always the case at these events it was hard to choose which panel discussion not to attend. There were panels on Media & ICT - which was very fitting considering Hamburg's long tradition in this field – Concept & Design, and Healthcare Service Innovation. There were experts at all three sessions, and there were also presentations from some of the companies attending, and several of them had showcases as well. As proceedings drew to a close, people wished for more time and in the healthcare session discussions were just starting to take off after Lekshmy Parameswaran's enlightening virtual tour of the company Fuelfor's services. Luckily, the following lunch arrangements set the stage for a series of animated exchanges, and it quickly turned into one of the most valued points of the summit; people agreed that they had rarely experienced such a congenial spirit of matchmaking, and it was also agreed upon that it was partly due to the scarcity of time: Time might have been a bit scarce, but everyone were determined to make the time available of the highest quality.

The time was also well-spent on the part of Living Labs Global, and even though we had high expectations, we were surprised at how positive the outcome was. The participants all found something of value to take home with them, several of the newcomers decided to become members of Living Labs Global, and the association has found a foothold that will make the next year very exciting. William Gibson has also described the ongoing technological revolution as being just as important in human evolution as the original creation of cities. It has always been a part of Living Labs Global's ambition to spearhead this development, and in a way we feel that we are indeed creating new cities. To be able to do this in cooperation with two of the old worlds prime specimens is a pleasure and a privilege. Barcelona will continue to be in our sight, and there is no doubt that the city will be the ideal background when they host the 3GSM there in February. It will also be a good opportunity to get reacquainted with members of Living Labs Global before the next big event in Zurich. Until then we'll keep building cities.