



Identifying and engaging Communities of Practice focused on soil health

Preparing European Mission Soil and establishment of Soil Health Living Labs

Communities of Practice – potential living labs

In the project PREPSOIL, which aims to raise awareness and engagement about soils in Europe and establish 100 Soil Health Living Labs (LLs), we map so called Communities of Practice (CoPs). CoPs are a way of describing groups of practitioners who share a concern for sustainability challenges, and have an interest for developing techniques or approaches. The purpose is both to enable practitioners that share an engagement for soil health to engage within and across countries, but also to document groups that use innovative practices to enhance soil health. Networks and partnerships have been shown to be key enabling factors in the process of establishing LL (Berberi et al., 2023). Identifying already existing networks of practitioners can therefore be an advantage when developing participatory initiatives such as living labs (Hvitsand et al., 2022).



WHAT ARE SOIL HEALTH LIVING LABS AND LIGHTHOUSES?

Living Labs are user-centred, place-based, and transdisciplinary research and innovation ecosystems, which involve land managers, scientists, and other relevant partners, at regional or sub-regional level, in systemic research and codesign, testing, monitoring and evaluation of solutions, in real-life settings, to improve their effectiveness for soil health and accelerate adoption (Soil Mission Implementation Plan). Co-creation with stakeholders is a key parts, in order to test out innovations that can contribute to increased sustainability. Soil Health Living Labs are placebased, often on a regional or sub-regional scale, and focused on soil health, either on agricultural, forest or urban soils.

An agricultural Soil Health Living Labs should for example include farmers, advisors, agri-industry, local policymakers and members of the public, and conduct on-farm experimentation at least at 10-20 sites. Lighthouses are places for demonstration of solutions, training and communication that are exemplary in their performance in terms of soil health improvement. They are local sites (one farm, one forest exploitation, one industrial site, one urban city green area, etc.) that can be included in a living lab area or be situated outside a living lab area.

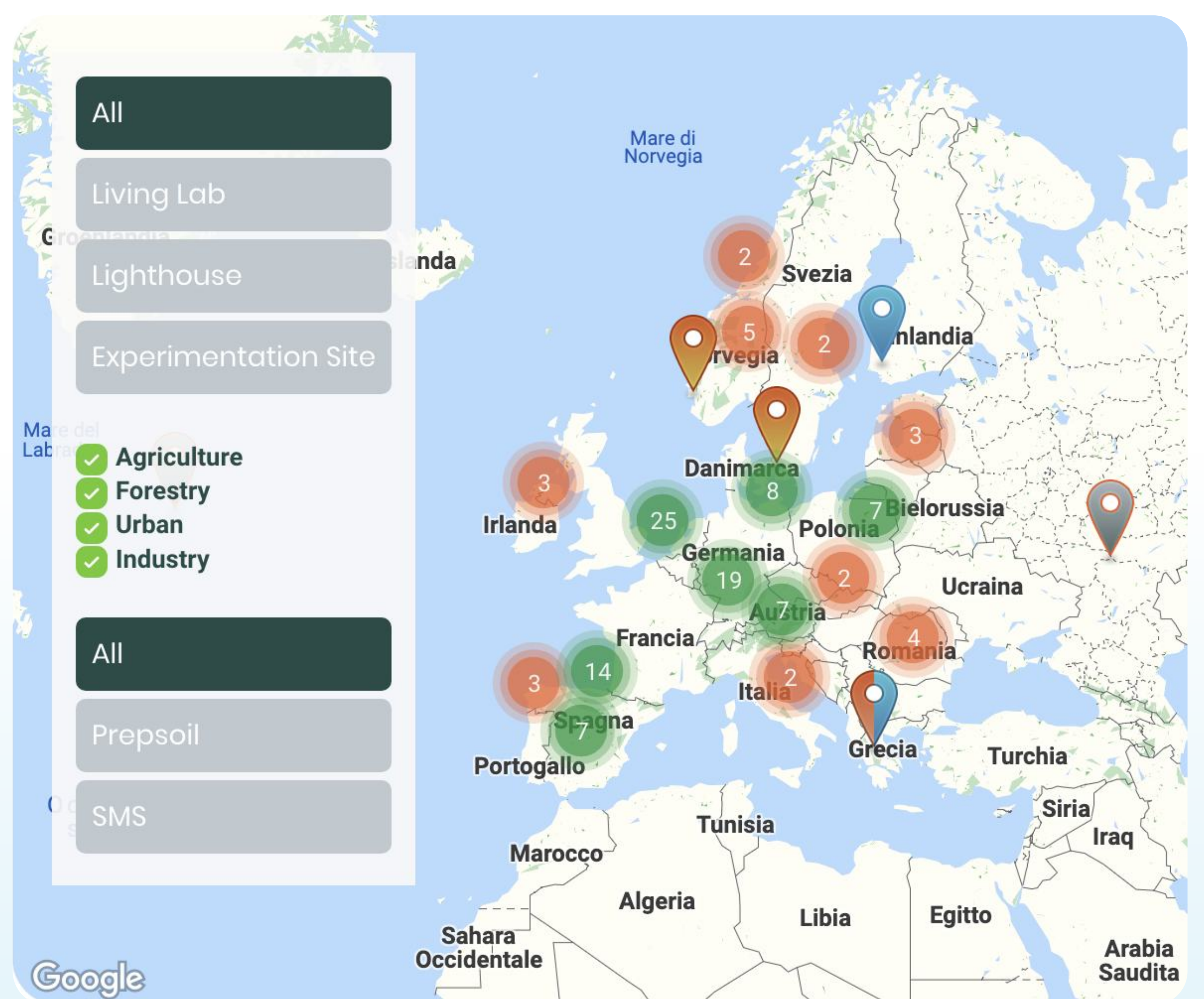
How to identify and engage practitioners?

The PREPSOIL partners have identified CoPs among farmers, urban gardeners and forest managers by using different types of networks, most importantly the national Soil Hubs within the EJP-Soil project (GA 862695). Representatives from the CoPs are interviewed in their own language, and short video interviews (with English subtitles) are published and shared in order to engage practitioners and spread knowledge about their soil health work. The CoPs reached so far are working with cover crops, low-till, composting (both on-farm and in urban setting), agroforestry and many more practices.

PREPSOIL will identify and document more than 80 CoPs across Europe before mid-2025, and the results are showcased at the Prepsoil TV, which can be found at the homepage www.prepsoil.eu or by the Prepsoil app on your Mobile Store.



Already established Living Labs and Lighthouses, together with cases that are under development, are documented on the PREPSOIL interactive atlas



The PREPSOIL app (launched July 2024) also contains a map of existing LLs initiatives, to foster collaboration and serve as inspiration across Europe. PREPSOIL also counts with a knowledge hub with over 200 resources about soil. The app is in itself a tool for practitioners to interact and engage together in so called Soil quests.



Tove Ortman,
Researcher at NIBIO
tove.ortman@nibio.no

References

Berberi, A., Beaudoin, C., McPhee, C., Guay, J., Bronson, K. and Nguyen, V. M. (2023) 'Enablers, barriers, and future considerations for living lab effectiveness in environmental and agricultural sustainability transitions: a review of studies evaluating living labs', Local Environment. Hvitsand, C., Raanaas, R. K., Gjøtterud, S. and Nicolaysen, A. M. (2022) 'Establishing an Agri-food living lab for sustainability transitions: Methodological insight from a case of strengthening the niche of organic vegetables in the Vestfold region in Norway', Agricultural Systems, 199.