

Promoting and educating on citizen science in the context of a small Central European country: The case of Slovakia.

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Topic: Best practices dealing with Open Science education and science communication to the broad public

Keywords: citizen science, education, Slovakia, open science

Citizen Science (CS) engages the public in scientific projects, bringing benefits to both research and society. Scientists gain the opportunity to collect or process larger amounts of data with the help of volunteers (and also cooperate with citizens in various other ways), to open a social debate on their topic, to learn about the issues that concern citizens the most and to increase their organisational skills. CS bridges the gap between science and public, increases scientific literacy and society's trust in science.

The growth of CS is not uniform, even within Europe – while CS concept is thriving in Western Europe, it is only starting to get recognized in post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. These countries face similar challenges, they can collaborate and share experience on international platforms, but simultaneously they must build the foundations in their specific circumstances.

In Slovakia, only a few scientific projects have used participatory methods so far. We surveyed them and contacted their representatives. Most of the projects deal with biology and environment; we found just one project in social sciences. Only some of the participatory projects refer to the term citizen science (mostly those belonging to international cooperation). There is little awareness on CS in the local academic environment and in broader public. It has no representation in university curricula and rarely appears in the media. This may be caused by a shorter existence of civil society, low support for science in general, lack of openness and the language barrier.

To raise awareness on CS in our country, we created short introductory open course (titled *Začnime si s občianskou vedou – Let's start with the citizen science*) on EU-Citizen.Science platform.

Our course is in Slovak language, because there is a lot of material on CS in dominant European languages, but a minimum in Slovak. Use of English as a universal language of science brings many advantages, however, the academic community is now re-learning to appreciate the importance of communication in locally relevant languages (see e.g. the Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication). In CS, communication and creation of open educational materials in local language is essential, since the success of participatory research requires involvement of several partners with different level of scientific and language skills.

Our course covers brief history, definition and benefits of CS, design of the project, finding partners, questions of data and ethics and impact of the project. The course is supplemented with video-interviews of representatives of particular projects from Slovakia, to increase the visibility of good practice, demonstrate to the audience that CS is also useful in conditions of a small country and encourage other researchers to use participatory methods. We will promote the course among potential stakeholders, ask for feedback and measure participation.

As a next step, we propose to create a national CS platform as a venue for education and networking, where all potential CS stakeholders will be able to find general information and discover the projects that are most relevant for them to join.