

## Meeting Report: Working Group on Citizen Science and Universities



**Date:** 2 April, 2024. Pre-ECSA2024 event

**Participants:** Maria Aristeidou, Yaela Golumbic, Floor Keersmaekers, Gitte Kragh, Mohammad Gharesifard, Henk Mulder, Sebastian Harnacker, Alessia Smaniotto. *Online-* Maya Fedeli, Jaqui Goldin

**Objective:** The Working Group (WG) on Citizen Science and Universities meeting aimed to explore the unique characteristics of university-based citizen science initiatives. Specifically, the discussion centered around mapping existing citizen science activities within the group and examining how citizen science in university settings differs from other forms of citizen science.

## Key Discussion Points:

### Mapping citizen science Activities

During the meeting, a mapping exercise was conducted to identify the various citizen science activities that members of the WG were currently engaged in (Thank you Floor for facilitating this).

The activities of the WG members were categorized into the following themes (from the most prominent to the least):

#### **Supporting & Facilitating citizen science**

Advancing citizen science initiatives, fostering collaboration, knowledge dissemination, and community involvement across various sectors and disciplines.

Activities include: Raising awareness and promoting citizen science, writing guides for building citizen science projects, developing a digital services to support citizen science, Planning citizen science events, Participating in or establishing citizen science networks and leading science shops.

A sub theme of supporting citizen science is supporting scientists and assisting them in developing and overseeing their citizen science projects. This also includes keeping them informed about citizen science initiatives, projects, and concepts and providing support in grant writing and project conceptualization when citizen science is part of the research.

#### **Research on citizen science**

Conducting research and evaluation activities related to citizen science, from examining participant engagement and learning through evaluating impact and effectiveness and data quality issues.

#### **Teaching with and about citizen science**

Incorporate citizen science education and training across different educational levels, from schools to postgraduate studies, including the supervision of PhD & MSc students working on the topic. Additional activities include: designing and teaching a citizen science course, conducting citizen science training, and engaging school students with citizen science.

#### **Doing citizen science**

Coordinating citizen science projects and pilots, using citizen science monitoring methods to collect data, connecting people to science and nature through citizen science and engaging in co-creation activities.

## Policy

Engaging in activities that connect citizen science (citizen science) initiatives with policy development, and advising national funding bodies.

## Distinct characteristics of university-based citizen science

Participants engaged in a discussion about the unique aspects of citizen science when conducted within university settings. It was noted that while the fundamental nature of citizen science remains consistent across different settings, conducting citizen science within universities presents distinct challenges, for example:

1. Balancing projects management with teaching and other research responsibilities
2. Academic recognition and incentives often do not consider citizen science activities for academic promotion and tenure processes.
3. Leading citizen science projects requires skills, time and funding that many researchers don't have.
4. Researchers in academia don't like to lose control over their research progress.

Albeit these challenges, the opportunities of advancing citizen science in universities are great. This working group can advance thinking on ways to bridge current gaps, building on the activities and experiences of the members (as discussed above). The group has also observed that specific roles, such as citizen science researchers, coordinators or educators, are becoming more prominent within universities. These roles serve for promoting and supporting citizen science initiatives on campus. Examples of dedicated citizen science roles members of this working group hold within universities, are detailed below.

**University of Groningen, Netherlands.** Has an assistant professor position on citizen science which is held by *Mohammad Gharesifard* at the Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) of the Faculty of Science and Engineering. The position is tenure track with an educational profile, allocating 60% for teaching and student supervision tasks and 30% on research. The main focus of Mohammad's research is on the applications and challenges of citizen science projects, and particularly how stakeholder engagement and use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) can translate into changes in existing actor relationships, learning, and decision making across different levels of society and governance.

**The Open University, UK.** Has multiple decentralized projects and initiatives focused on integrating citizen science into research and teaching, ranging from science and technology to the educational

domain. Two well-established citizen science platforms developed at The Open University (OU) include [i-spot](#), a community for identifying and mapping wildlife, and [nQuire](#), a place to contribute to or initiate scientific investigations. **Maria Aristeidou**, an Associate Professor with extensive experience in Citizen Science research, has contributed to and led several of these initiatives. She has integrated citizen science approaches into the MA in Online Learning, researched and authored about learning and participation in citizen science in online, school-based, and higher education settings.

**Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Tel Aviv University, Israel.** Has established the [Israel Center for Citizen Science](#) (ICCS) in early 2022, to support public participation in environmental research and promote participatory biodiversity science and conservation. Within this center, two dedicated citizen science positions have been established to oversee the coordination and development of citizen science projects. One position, led by **Yaëla Golumbic**, is research based, focused on investigating citizen science design, social impact and uptake. The second position is technological, aimed to build citizen science infrastructure and incorporate FAIR data standards. Other positions within the center focus on communication, community building and advancing citizen science practices.

**Leiden University, Netherlands.** Has established the [Citizen Science Lab](#), led by **Margaret Gold**, to connect stakeholders in collaborative research projects. The lab serves as an incubator for new citizen science initiatives that connect society, researchers and policymakers and serves as a knowledge center connecting citizen scientists from different faculties, institutes and organizations. An additional citizen science role within the lab is dedicated to research on the 'Science of Citizen Science', and coordination of the national network for citizen science.

**Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Belgium.** Has established a [Citizen Science Contact Point](#) for supporting and motivating researchers at the university in all things citizen science. Led by **Floor Keersmaekers**, they raise awareness to citizen science, by providing tools, resources, training, networking opportunities, project support (pre- and post-award), info sessions and more.

**Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele in Milan, Italy.** Has a dedicated role for Citizen Science & EU project communication officer, within the Research Policy Office, Research Development Area. The position held by **Maya Fedeli**, supports researchers in their citizen science projects and raising awareness on CS in our research community through lectures for students, a newsletter and other initiatives.

**University of Zurich, ETH Zurich, Switzerland.** These two institutions jointly host the [Citizen Science Zurich](#) initiative with the mission to inspire and support people to engage in different forms of participatory research. The initiative promotes active participation of citizens in research,

provides resources (including Seed Grants), expertise, and technical know-how on citizen science, offers trainings, and help practitioners to maintain high standards of excellence in research. **Olivia Höhener** is the managing director of Citizen Science Zurich and is responsible for the further development of Citizen Science Zurich and its activities, coordinating the awarding of grants, advising researchers and planning courses and trainings along with a team of 8 people.

**Aarhus University, Denmark.** Has an internal [citizen science network](#), in which **Gitte Kragh** is a leading figure. The network was set up to enable knowledge exchange, networking and collaborations in relation to citizen science, across the university.

### Conclusion and next steps

The meeting concluded with the consensus that while citizen science itself may not change drastically across different contexts, the university setting introduces unique considerations and challenges. Balancing project demands with teaching and research responsibilities remains a significant challenge, but specialized roles within universities are evolving to address these challenges more effectively.

Moving forward, the meeting has identified “supporting and facilitating citizen science” as key activities conducted by many members. This is implemented in many ways and with different stakeholders. Next step for the WG is to better define and map these activities focusing on opportunities, challenges, and ways to address these challenges.