



Project acronym: BETTER Life

Title: Bringing Excellence to Transformative Socially Engaged Research in Life Sciences through Integrated Digital Centers

Project number: 101071314

Deliverable 4.3

Report on the Summer School for ECR

Description: Report on the BETTER Life Summer School for Early Career Researchers held in the Czech Republic from 8-14 September 2024.

Lead party for deliverable: CZU

Document type: Report (R)

Due date of deliverable: 30. 09. 2024

Dissemination level: PU

Authors: Michal Lošťák, Patrik Toulá, Irena Benešová, Radek Rinn, Martin Jankovský, Diana Surová



Funded by the
European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Funded by the
European Union



BETTER Life PARTNERS:

ČESKA ZEMĚDELSKÁ UNIVERZITA V PRAZE (CZU)

PIC 999912570, established in KAMYČKA 129 SUCHDOL,
PRAHA 165 00, Czechia



MARTIN-LUTHER-UNIVERSITÄT HALLE-WITTENBERG (MLU)

PIC 999871539, established in UNIVERSITÄTSPLATZ 10,
HALLE 06108, Germany



MARTIN-LUTHER-UNIVERSITÄT
HALLE-WITTENBERG

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI CAMERINO (UNICAM)

PIC 999845737, established in PIAZZA CAVOUR 19F,
CAMERINO 62032, Italy



ACEEU GMBH (ACEEU)

PIC 896865008, established in WILHELM-SCHICKARD-STR 14,
48149, MÜNSTER, Germany



EESTI MAAILIKOOL (EMU)

PIC 999857280, established in KREUTZWALDI 1,
TARTU 51014, Estonia



DAUGAVPILS UNIVERSITĀTE (DU)

PIC 999830702, established in VIENIBAS STREET 13,
DAUGAVPILS 5401, Latvia



UNIwersytet Przyrodniczy w Poznaniu (PULS)

PIC 999880463, established in ULICA WOJSKA POLSKIEGO 28,
POZNAN 60 637, Poland



HELIXCONNECT EUROPE SRL (HELIXCONNECT)

PIC 893409868, established in 282A CAMERA 1,
BUCOVAT 307352, Romania



UNIVERZITET EDUCONS U SREMSKOJ KAMENICI PRIVATNE USTANOVE (EDUCONS)

PIC 973147263, established in VOJVODE PUTNIKA 87,
SREMSKA KAMENICA 21208, Serbia





Deliverable Information	
Title	Report on the Summer School for ECR
Deliverable number	4.3
WP number	4
Lead beneficiary	CZU
Author(s)	Michal Lošťák, Patrik Toula, Irena Benešová, Radek Rinn, Martin Jankovský, Diana Surová
Type	R (Report)
Dissemination Level	PU
Delivery date	30. 09. 2024

Project information	
Title	Bringing Excellence to Transformative Socially Engaged Research in Life Sciences through Integrated Digital Centers
Acronym	BETTER Life
Project no.	101071314
Type of Action	HORIZON Coordination and Support Actions
Website	www.betterlifehorizon.eu
Digital Centre of Excellence	www.better-life-digital.eu

History of Changes			
Version	Date	Comment	Revised by
Version 0.1	16. 09. 2024	First draft	Patrik Toula, Michal Lošťák,
Version 0.2	25. 09. 2024	Second draft	Irena Benešová, Radek Rinn, Martin Jankovský, Diana Surová
Version 1.0	30. 09. 2024	Final Version	Patrik Toula, Irena Benešová



TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
List of Abbreviations	5
List of Figures	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
1. INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Reasoning, Objective and Goals of the Summer School	8
1.2 Organisation and Call for Participation	9
1.3 Agenda.....	13
1.4 Pre-Summer School Activities	14
2. Prague	17
2.1 Day 1	17
2.2 Day 2	20
3. National Parks	22
3.1 Krkonoše National Park (KRNAP).....	22
3.2 Bohemian Switzerland National Park (BOSNAP)	24
4. Kostelec nad Černými Lesy	27
4.1 Recap and Outlook	27
4.2 Wrap-Up and Closing Remarks.....	28
5. Conclusion and Evaluation	29
ANNEXES	31
Annex I. – Programme	31
Annex II. – Poster I.....	34
Annex III. – Poster II. (Landscape)	35
Annex IV. – Photo Documentation.....	36



List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
DCoE	Digital Center of Excellence
ECRs	Early Career Researchers
HEI	Higher Education Institution
KRNAP	Krkonoše National Park
BOSNAP	Bohemian Switzerland National Park
LS	Life Sciences
SER	Socially Engaged Research



List of Figures

Figure 1: Beneficiaries Participation

Figure 2: Nationalities

Figure 3: Level of Studies

Figure 4: Gender Balance

Figure 5: Projekty CZU I.

Figure 6: Projekty CZU II.

Figure 7: Word Cloud - Socially Engaged Research

Figure 8: Word Cloud – Study Fields of Summer School Participants

Figure 9: Participants Expectations



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The BETTER Life Summer School was designed to equip participants with both theoretical knowledge and practical experience in socially engaged research (SER), emphasizing its critical role in fostering the development of local communities and local businesses through the involvement of science and various stakeholders. The event aimed to demonstrate how research can act as a catalyst for positive societal impact, highlighting the importance of engaging with social issues.

The primary participants consisted of young scientists, including master's and doctoral students, as well as early-career researchers. To immerse them in real-world social challenges, the program included (apart from interactive classes) fieldwork in two natural-protected areas—national parks in Czechia. Participants were divided into two groups, each visiting one of the national parks. This structure facilitated the exchange of insights and collaborative problem-solving related to social, economic, and environmental issues specific to each area.

Throughout the week, participants engaged in presentations, workshops, and discussions with stakeholders, enhancing their understanding of SER and its practical applications. Prior to the summer school week, the participants used developed supportive materials to understand the context of the cases in natural parks. The program fostered teamwork among diverse participants, encouraging knowledge-sharing and networking opportunities.



1. INTRODUCTION

The main idea of the Summer School was to show the participants of the event, in addition to theoretical (knowledge crating) information about techniques and the approach of socially engaged research, the practical process of working with society (supporting skills and competencies of the participants in such work). The aim was to highlight the pivotal role of research in driving the growth of local communities and local businesses, emphasizing that research should primarily serve as a catalyst for positive societal impact.

The main cohort of participants were primarily young scientists – master's and doctoral students and early career researchers. In order to familiarize the participants with various social problems in Czechia, two protected areas (national parks) were selected for the practical part (case study) of the event. The group of participants split into two, each of which visited one protected area. At the end of the summer school, students exchanged mutual knowledge about solving social, economic and environmental problems in both areas. They also developed suggestions for both national parks on how to proceed in the future. The participants also utilised materials prepared before the visit to national parks to familiarize themselves with the context of their study areas and problems.

1.1 Reasoning, Objective and Goals of the Summer School

The summer school was scheduled to start at the end of August with a preparatory stage (August 28 - September 8). This stage followed the format of blended intensive programmes (before the physical meeting, the participants were supposed to complete online tasks and start some activities using supportive materials on the online learning management platform). The physical meeting (September 8 - September 14) began with two days of interactive teaching activities in Prague at CZU. These activities demonstrated various dimensions of socially engaged research (as developed by the BETTER Life project). The participants also took part in a roundtable discussion where various senior researchers shared their experiences with socially engaged research and presented some projects (mostly EU-funded projects using transdisciplinary research) addressing SER. The participants discussed real cases in research with the senior researchers.



The project proposal did not specify the goals of the summer school. However, tacitly, the goals of the summer school were:

- To familiarize the participants with the concept of socially engaged research (SER) in life sciences (acquiring knowledge about SER)
- To familiarize the participants with the tools developed within the BETTER Life project for socially engaged research and to enable the participants to use the tools for their research (acquiring knowledge and skills about SER)
- To expose the participants to real-life complex problems and provide suggestions (scenarios) on how to deal with these problems. The problems were implemented as case studies (acquired knowledge and skills were recast into competencies).
- To present and defend the created scenarios and proposed solution procedure in front of other participants.
- To receive feedback on the activities and results developed under the BETTER Life project from early career researchers (acquiring feedback).

1.2 Organisation and Call for Participation

The initial draft of the organization and topics for the summer school were mentioned (besides the project proposal) in the D4.1 Capacity Building Plan published in October 2023. Then, the planning and workaround continuously started from the beginning of 2024. A more detailed proposal was presented at the consortium meeting in Halle on May 14 and 15, 2024.

We thoroughly explored the proposed topics and fine-tuned the objectives to align with the overarching goals of the BETTER Life project. Consortium members were actively involved in reviewing the structure, with a particular focus on ensuring the event would be beneficial for all participants. One key topic of discussion was the composition of the participant groups. It was initially agreed that postdoctoral researchers and PhD students would be the primary target audience, as they stood to gain the most from the advanced nature of the topics and the collaborative, research-focused environment. Nevertheless, it became clear that achieving a balance of participants would be necessary. Master's students were not only considered eligible but also significantly represented, as it proved challenging to find 50 PhDs or postdocs. The consortium recognized that master's students could greatly benefit from the experience and incorporate the knowledge, skills, and competencies related to SER into their research activities and actively contribute to the discussions and group work. See the final reallocation of the participants below. During the participants'



selection process, the master students heading towards PhD studies and/or already dealing with research, were prioritised.

Each of the participating institutions took a different approach in this regard. Some institutions targeted outreach to selected students, while others focused on broad promotion of the summer school followed by a selection process from the applicants.

The complete information about the summer school was published on the BETTER Life website ([Summer Schools – Better Life EU Digital Centre \(better-life-digital.eu\)](https://better-life-digital.eu)). A registration form was created for participants ([BETTER Life Summer School Registration \(office.com\)](https://office.com)), where each applicant had to register. This link was also publicly available on the BETTER Life website.

The final version of the call for the summer school was published on May 21, 2024. The application deadline was extended several times. The last participants were registered at the beginning of August 2024.

In total, 54 participants registered. From this, 45 were selected according to the agreements and arrangements set up in the project proposal and the Capacity Building Plan (DEL 4.1). The lowest participation came from Germany even though the local team spread the opportunity by many means. The final participation counted 41 participants, as four participants resigned just before the start, and it was not possible to replace them in such a short manner. The number of participants according to the institutions is the following. The first number is the plan (vs. actual participation).

- 1) **Czech University of Life Sciences Prague**, CZU – 10 (12)
- 2) **Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg**, MLU – 9 (1)
- 3) **University of Camerino**, UNICAM – 8 (5)
- 4) **Estonian University of Life Sciences**, EMU – 6 (6)
- 5) **Daugavpils University**, DU – 6 (6)
- 6) **Poznan University of Life Sciences**, PULS – 8 (8)
- 7) **Educons University**, EDUCONS – 3 (3)

Teaching/mentoring (mentoring for the research in national parks) staff participants were from (altogether 17):

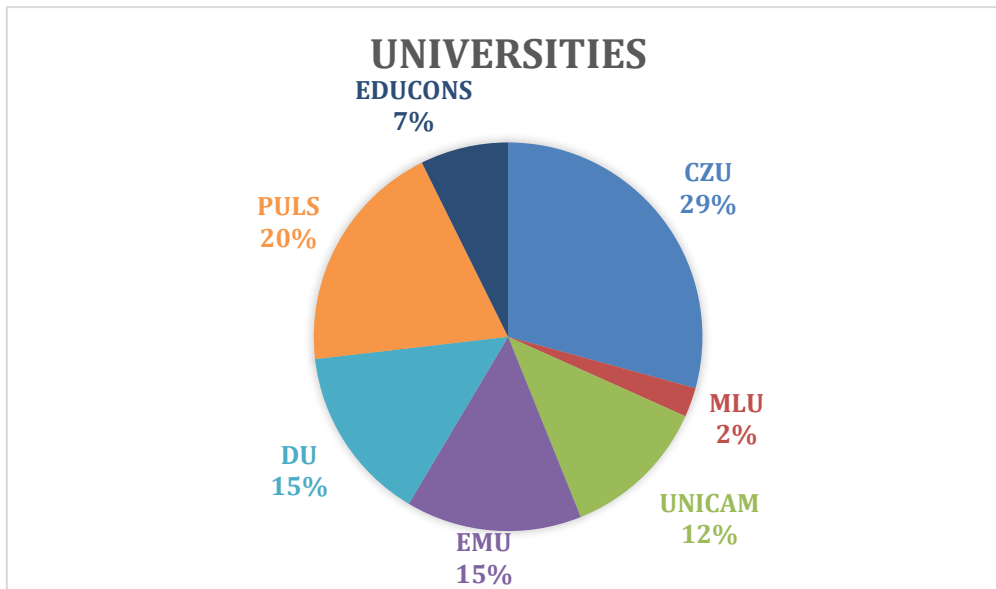
- 1) **Czech University of Life Sciences Prague**, CZU – 12
- 2) **University of Camerino**, UNICAM – 1
- 3) **Estonian University of Life Sciences**, EMU – 1
- 4) **Daugavpils University**, DU – 1



5) Poznan University of Life Sciences, PULS – 2

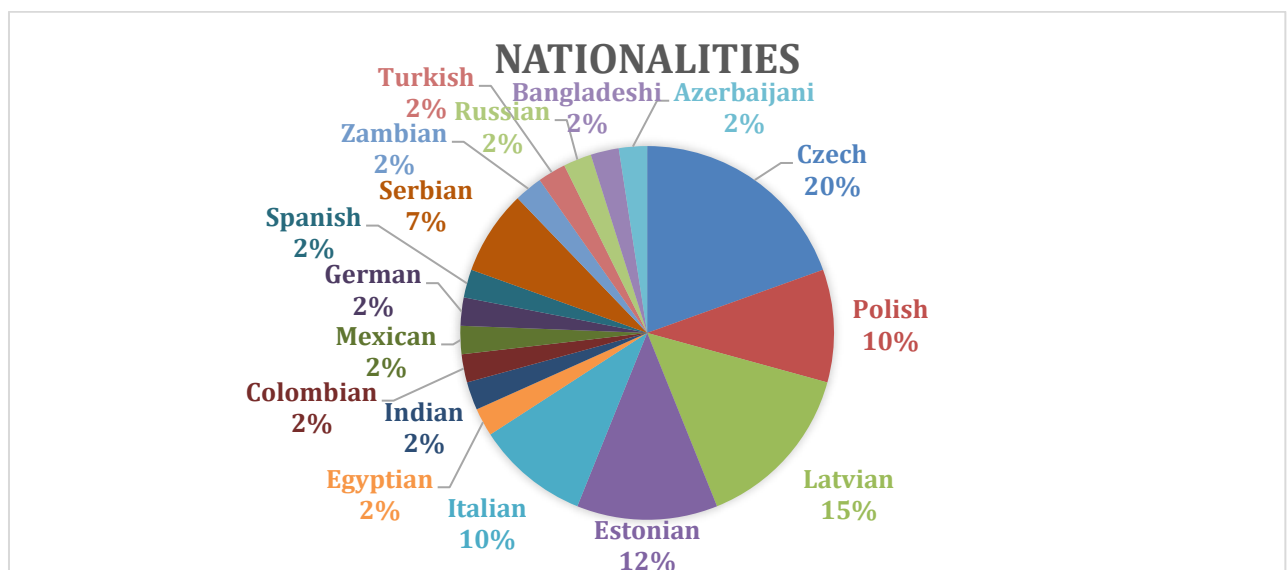
The total number of people participating in summer school (participants in the role of early career researchers and in the role of their teaching staff and mentors) was 58.

Figure 1: Beneficiaries Participation (without teaching/mentoring staff)



A closer look reveals that participants from seven universities represented seventeen different nationalities.

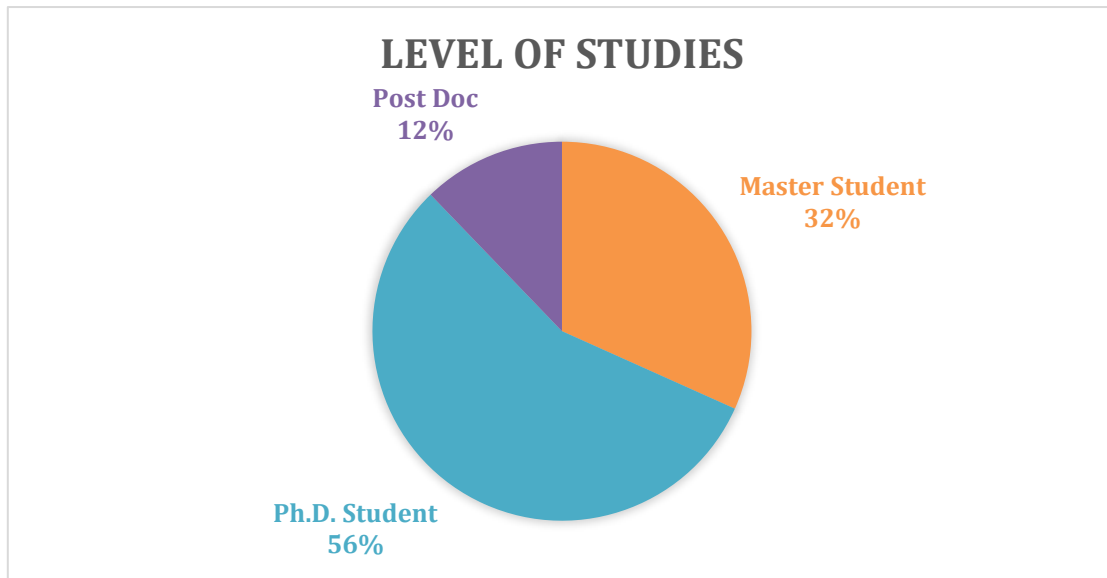
Figure 2: Nationalities (without teaching/mentoring staff)





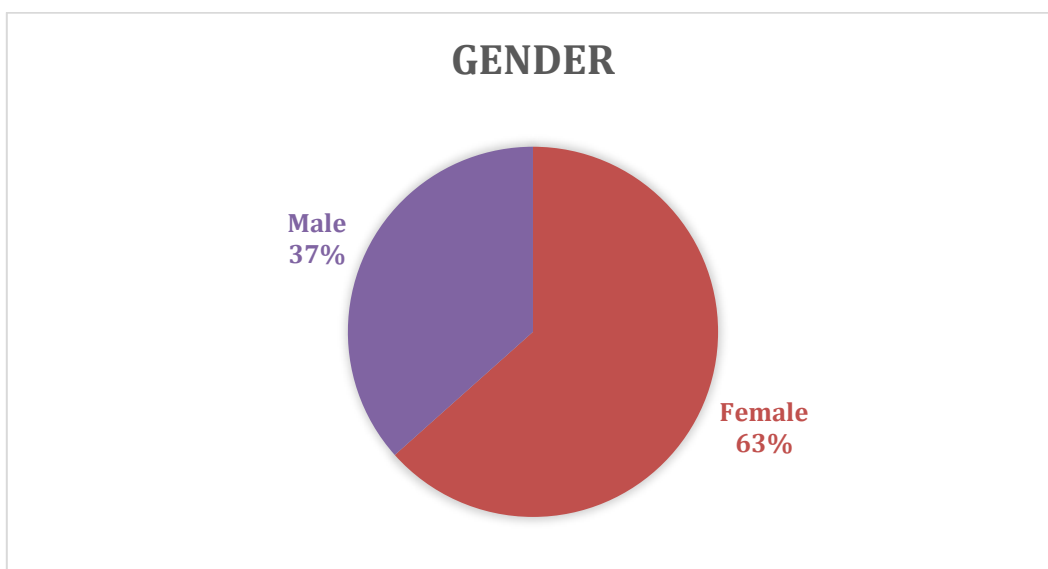
The final selection brought together a diverse group of participants at various stages of their academic careers. The majority were PhD students, making up 56% of the attendees, followed by master’s students, who comprised 32%. The remaining 12% were early-career postdocs.

Figure 3: Level of Studies



The gender balance leaned more toward female participants, with women representing 63% and men making up 37% of the group.

Figure 4: Gender Balance (without teaching/mentoring staff)





From the BETTER Life consortium, two beneficiaries were not represented as they are not higher education institutions (ACEEU, HELIXCONNECT).

1.3 Agenda

The summer school participants met for the first time on Sunday evening (September 8, 2024), and after a brief introduction, they set out together for a twilight tour of Prague.

The following two days were spent in Prague, where the participants attended interactive lectures on socially engaged research. During these sessions, they were introduced to the tools developed within the BETTER Life project, which aimed to support and facilitate socially engaged research (SER). The participants were guided to think about how to use these tools in their research activities and how to implement them into the case studies, which constituted the next part of the summer school. The program emphasized collaboration and practical application of knowledge to address socially relevant challenges in life sciences research.

At the same time, the participants were briefed on the case studies in national parks they would engage with over the next few days. They were divided into six groups, with each group assigned to one of the two national parks under study. To ensure diversity, each group was composed of members of different nationalities and specialisations, along with someone familiar with Czech conditions (usually a Czech speaker).

On Wednesday, the participants moved to their assigned national parks - one group to Bohemian Switzerland and the other to the Krkonoše Mountains. The main objective for both groups was to explore a path leading to a balance between the economic, environmental and social components of the visited protected areas. Both national parks show similarities and, at the same time, significant differences, which subsequently necessarily lead to different approaches in the territory. Generally, they faced a dilemma about tourism development and nature protection framed by local conditions of both national parks. Namely, in one national park the dilemma: Biodiversity protection or tourism development (new ski lifts); and in the second the dilemma: Revitalization of nature after huge fire or opening the park for tourists.

Throughout their time in the protected areas, participants engaged in moderated discussions with representatives of the local government (representing the social component), representatives of the protected areas (representing the environmental component) and representatives of local entrepreneurs (representing economic interest).



These discussions highlighted the conflicts and contradictions between economic, environmental, and social interests in the regions.

The participants spent the last evening and the following morning together again, and individual groups presented preliminary proposals for the given protected areas to each other.

The full detailed program is attached as Annexe I.

1.4 Pre-Summer School Activities

Work Environment

To ensure efficient collaboration and access to key resources, we established an online shared working space on Projekty CZU (projekty.czu.cz). This platform allowed all participants to register and gain secure access to a centralized repository. In the early stages of the Summer School, we uploaded a range of essential materials, including documents related to the case studies, such as articles, scientific publications, and informative brochures. The platform also hosted a detailed program for the event, as well as other valuable references to support participants in their research and group activities.

Figure 5: Projekty CZU I.

▼ Krkonoše National Park - Národní park Krkonoše

[Krkonoše National Park - facts - open the file for more information](#)

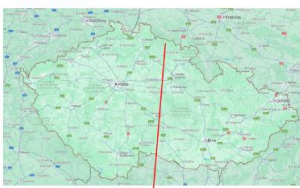
Krkonoše National Park was declared by government decree on May 17, 1963. However, the protection of the unique Krkonoše nature dates back much further into the past. The nature of Krkonoše carries treasures of global significance.

"The mission of the national park is to preserve and improve its natural environment, particularly the protection or restoration of the self-regulating functions of natural systems; the strict protection of wild animals and plants; the preservation of the typical appearance of the landscape; the fulfillment of scientific and educational goals; as well as the use of the national park area for ecologically sustainable tourism and recreation that does not deteriorate the environment."


[Pec pod Sněžkou](#)

Pec pod Sněžkou is a small town located in the Czech Republic, nestled at the base of Sněžka, the highest mountain in the country. Known for its picturesque scenery and popular ski resorts, Pec pod Sněžkou serves as a major hub for tourists seeking both winter sports and summer hiking adventures. The town provides access to numerous trails leading up to Sněžka and other parts of the Krkonoše mountain range, making it a favorite destination for outdoor enthusiasts. Its charming atmosphere, combined with its natural beauty, makes Pec pod Sněžkou a noteworthy spot for both relaxation and exploration.

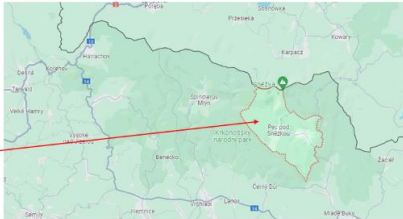
Czech Republic



Krkonoše National Park



Pec pod Sněžkou



Short videos about Pec pod Sněžkou illustrating the case

General information about Krkonoše Document PDF

Information (book) about fauna in Krkonoše (Giant Mountains) Document PDF

As the Summer School progressed, this shared environment also served as a repository for presentations and participants' reports, enabling seamless access to results and ongoing collaboration throughout the event. By serving as a digital archive, it continues to be a valuable resource for participants even after the conclusion of the Summer School, supporting long-term cooperation and knowledge exchange. It is in line with the idea of the Digital Centre of Excellence.

Figure 6: Projekty CZU II.

Bohemian Switzerland National Park - Národní park České Švýcarsko

Location

Czech Republic

Bohemian Switzerland National Park

Jetřichovice

Česká Kamenice

Chrbská

Krásná Lipa

Balancing Conservation and Tourism in Bohemian Switzerland: Challenges and Opportunities in Czech National Parks (Zkraje TV Show - July 20, 2024, 61 minutes)
Balancing Conservation and Tourism in Bohemian Switzerland: Challenges and Opportunities in Czech National Parks
Zkraje TV Show, ČT24, July 20, 2024, 61 minutes video
Source: <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/clanek/domaci/zkraje-narodni-park-haji-prirodu-chranme-take-turismus-mini-starostka-hrenska-351271>

Bohemian Switzerland Two Years After the Catastrophe: Life Flourishes on the Burnt Land, Many Current Species Will Disappear and Be Replaced by Others

Introductory Meeting

On August 28, 2024, a preparatory online meeting for summer school participants took place via Teams. A total of 48 participants attended the meeting. The participants were introduced to the detailed summer school program and materials available on the website <https://projekty.czu.cz/>. Prof. Michal Lošťák presented the main objectives of the summer school and emphasized the issue of socially engaged research in connection with Czech



Funded by the
European Union



national parks. He also reminded participants that, due to the tight schedule of the summer school, it is essential to familiarize themselves with the materials that his team had prepared in advance. Subsequently, the summer school participants asked questions related to the theme and organization of the event.



2. Prague

The BETTER Life Summer School unofficially kicked off with an informal city walk through the historic centre of Prague on Sunday evening, offering participants a chance to connect and explore the cultural heart of the city and to meet each other before educational activities started. Over the course of the first two days, participants delved into complex topics such as the tension between economic and environmental interests, stakeholder mapping, and the practical use of toolkits developed by the BETTER Life project. Interactive sessions and group work helped foster collaboration, laying a strong foundation for the week ahead.

2.1 Day 1

Monday began with a welcome from Irena Benesova, who introduced the BETTER Life project. This was followed by a presentation from Diana Surová on the characteristics of socially engaged research (SER) in the life sciences. Students were prompted with several questions to assess their understanding of the Summer School's theme and their expectations for the event.

The first task was designed to assess participants' perceptions and understanding of socially engaged research. To facilitate this, a Mentimeter survey was conducted, where participants were prompted with the question: "What comes to your mind when thinking of Socially Engaged Research?"

The responses were gathered in real-time and visualized in a dynamic word cloud, which helped to highlight the collective thoughts and interpretations of SER among the diverse group of participants. This exercise not only provided a starting point for the discussions that followed but also helped participants reflect on their own expectations and how they could align with the goals of the Summer School.



Figure 7: Word Cloud - Socially Engaged Research



The resulting word cloud featured several key terms that encapsulated the essence of SER, including prominent words like "community; stakeholders; collaboration; sustainability; and participation," along with references to "real-life situations." These terms reflected the participants' recognition of SER's central focus on community involvement and real-world impact.

The second Word cloud focused on the study fields of the participants. The fields differed from more life sciences oriented (ecology, forestry, animal, environment, biochemistry, molecular, food, hydro ecology, parasitology and many others) towards more socially oriented ones (humanities, socioeconomics, architecture, urban, economics). This diversity in academic specializations illustrated the interdisciplinary nature of SER and how it bridges scientific research with societal needs, setting the stage for a rich exchange of ideas throughout the program.



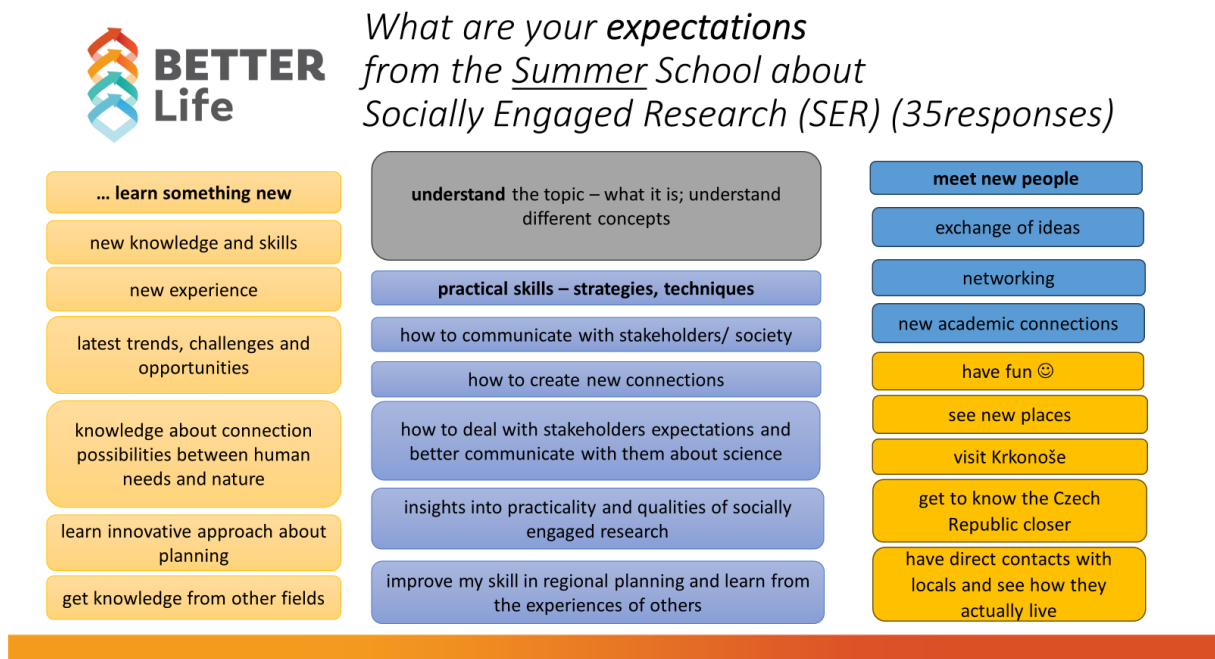
Figure 8: Word Cloud – Study Fields of Summer School Participants



The main intentions of the participants for coming to spend a full week in the Czech Republic were to learn something new, deepen their understanding of socially engaged research, gain practical skills and techniques, and broaden their network within the academic community. Many participants expressed a keen interest in acquiring hands-on experience and insights that could enhance their research practices and methodologies. See an overview of participants' responses about their expectations from Summer School below.



Figure 9: Participants Expectations



The first day continued with Anton Sharuba addressing the problems and challenges of socially oriented research in life sciences. This was followed by a session led by Miroslav Hájek, focusing on the conflicts between economic and environmental interests in national parks. In the afternoon, Milan Školník and Michael Haman introduce one of the toolkits developed by the BETTER Life Project: The Academic Bridge. They gave overall hints about the Digital Centre of Excellence. Following this, Irena Benešová organizes participants into groups related to each national park they were going to, concluding the day with group work where participants identify key stakeholders such as municipalities, national parks, and other interest groups relevant to their national park.

2.2 Day 2

Tuesday began with presentations showcasing various socially engaged research (SER) projects, including "MOVING," "Framework," "Fem2forests," and "SMART-U-GREEN." These projects illustrated the diversity of SER efforts and provided participants with real-world examples of how SER is being applied in different contexts. Following the presentations, Milan Školník moderated a round table discussion that tackled key challenges in SER, such as effectively gathering information from communities, formulating questions that lead to



deeper understanding, and identifying the tangible benefits SER brings to local stakeholders.

Next, Raimonds Ernšteins led a session on stakeholder mapping, emphasizing the importance of understanding and engaging with various interest groups involved in SER. This was followed by a hands-on workshop on biodiversity and SER methodologies, facilitated by Viktoria Takacs and Paweł Sienkiewicz. The workshop provided participants with practical tools to approach complex ecological and social issues in their research.

The day wrapped up with an interactive session focusing on toolkits and feedback systems, giving participants the opportunity to explore how these resources can enhance SER projects. This was followed by group work, where participants continued collaborating on their assigned projects.

Tuesday also marked the final day in Prague, as the group prepared to split into two smaller teams. Each group was set to depart on Wednesday morning, heading to different national parks where they would apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills in real-world settings.



3. National Parks

The case studies took place in two Czech national parks, where the participants spent about two and a half days. One national park was Krkonoše (Giant Mountains) National Park (KRNAP), and the second was Bohemian Switzerland National Park (BOSNAP).

The main goal of both cases was to provide local stakeholders with possible scenarios/suggestions of how to proceed in dilemmas faced by these national parks. Socially engaged research practices were used to develop these scenarios/suggestions. The scenarios were based on the principle of "what if" (what would happen/what would be the impacts if certain activities were implemented, or if certain factors were in force).

3.1 Krkonoše National Park (KRNAP)

KRNAP is the oldest of the national parks in Czechia, founded in 1963. It covers the territory of the highest Czech mountain range, which has been permanently inhabited since the 16th century. The structure of society changed over time, and a fundamental change took place after World War II (most of the German population was by force of law moved to Germany). KRNAP is a border national park, part of the mountain range is in Poland.

All these aspects influence the determination of the optimum between the provided ecosystem services of the territory.

Venue

Chalet Amor is located in one of the KRNAP centres, Pec Pod Sněžkou. The chalet provided both accommodation and meals for the participants and a conference room. Participants could work on their study in groups and also could discuss with stakeholders (with the exception of KRNAP representatives who provided information outside).

Case Study

KRNAP research questions:

- How might the expansion of ski resorts in the Krkonoše Mountains, which may impact natural wealth preservation and ecosystem services, affect natural habitats and wild animals, given that the new infrastructure will be used year-round?



- How could this, in combination with overtourism, impact the region's ecological balance?

The participants' tasks were to build possible scenarios/suggestions about what might have happened if:

- 1) Activities aimed at tourism development were stopped or minimized (specifically, halting the building of new high-capacity ski lifts meant to attract more tourists). The idea behind this was that tourism development would lead to overtourism, which could damage not only biodiversity but also other tourist infrastructure, making everyone lose out. The area would become unattractive to tourists due to the destruction of the landscape.
- 2) Activities to protect biodiversity were minimized or stopped (specifically, some areas with restricted access were opened and no longer protected). The idea behind this was that by minimizing restrictions and providing better conditions for tourists, tourism would increase, which would generate more income that could be used for nature protection and other community development activities.

Stakeholders

The representative of the municipal district: the secretary of the visiting city of Pec pod Sněžkou introduced the participants to the historical development of the Krkonoše Mountains (including the changing population structure) and at the same time to the municipality's approach to the requirements for new infrastructure construction (including the expansion of ski areas).

Representatives of local entrepreneurs: A total of 4 representatives providing accommodation in local mountain huts presented the participants with their perspectives on the work of KRNAP and the local municipality. During the discussion, they also presented the main problems of business (lack of parking spaces, waste policy of the municipality, etc.).

KRNAP representative: Two KRNAP representatives (a zoologist and a botanist) took the participants on a walk of about 5 km, during which they showed and explained directly on the spot how the construction (and especially the ski slopes) destroys and affects the ecosystem of the national park.



3.2 Bohemian Switzerland National Park (BOSNAP)

The Bohemian Switzerland National Park (Národní park České Švýcarsko), which was established on 1st January 2000 and covers an area of nearly 80 km², is the youngest national park in the Czech Republic. The park on its northern side borders and is linked to the Saxon Switzerland National Park in Germany, which was established in 1990 and covers an area of 93 km². The mission of the National Park is to preserve the local territory in its full beauty and to enable natural processes to prevail in this area. Human interventions are only limited to activities which help restore the natural balance to the greatest extent. The focal point of the area protection is a unique sandstone rock town with the occurrence of rare plant and animal species and islands of well-preserved woods. Natural values of the National Park have also been acknowledged within the European Union by including it in the prestigious list of European conservation areas called Natura 2000.

The national park had to close part of the park to the public after the 2022 fire. The closure of the most important visitor attractions and the even more intervention-free management of the park create different perspectives, often conflicting, on the management and future development of the site. The landscape of the Bohemian Switzerland National Park can be very prone to fires, especially in the summer months. The sandstone area is naturally poor in terms of water resources; rainwater soaks in quickly, and periods of deep drought can last for weeks or even months. Any fire manipulation, from smoking to deliberately starting, can threaten the natural environment, residents, and visitors.

Venue

The participants were accommodated in the Hotel Lípa in Vysoká Lípa, one of the nine villages directly connected to the Czech Switzerland National Park. The hotel provided accommodation and meals and a shared room for the students' group work and meetings, lectures, and discussions with stakeholders. The hotel owner was also willing to answer many questions from the participants as a local stakeholder. The national park was at a close distance, so the participants moved around the area on foot.

Case Study

The conflict between the decision to keep Edmund's Gorge closed to preserve natural values after the fire and the impact on tourism in the region when this destination is closed.



BOSNAP research questions:

- How do business owners, locals, and visitors perceive this?
- How would people perceive it if the National Park allowed the area to be cleared for tourism purposes to enable boat rides in the national park?

BOSNAP: Revitalization of nature after a huge fire or opening the park to tourists

The participants' tasks were to build possible scenarios/suggestions about what might have happened if:

- 1) Tourists were not allowed to enter certain parts of the park after the fire. The idea behind this approach was to protect the safety of potential visitors (since trees damaged by the fire were unstable in the rocky terrain) and to promote faster restoration of flora and fauna in the fire-damaged areas by minimizing human activity.
- 2) The park was fully opened to visitors. The idea behind this was that by generating sufficient income through tourism, local entrepreneurs would be able to pay taxes that would support the restoration of the fire-damaged areas. Visitors would also be able to witness the restoration process firsthand.

Stakeholders

Participants met with several local representatives of different stakeholder groups. Specifically, these included:

The representative of the municipal district: The mayor of the village bordering the national park. The local mayor of Doubice informed the participants about his attitude towards management in the national park, not only from the perspective of a mayor representing the local population but also from the perspective of a long-time forest manager. He gave the participants a comprehensive view of the management of the local forests, which are gradually being transformed from pure management forests to forests in the no-intervention zone of the national park. He readily answered all questions from the participants.

Representatives of local entrepreneurs: The second stakeholder the participants met was a **hotel owner** who has been running a family hotel for 30 years. He started his business in the locality even before establishing the national park. Currently, the hotel is located close to the national park. The owner shared his experiences, positives, and challenges in running



a hotel in this location with the participants. After his introductory narrative, a group discussion on the situation developed.

BOSNAP representative: During the second day in the national park, the participants had the opportunity to meet with the National Park Bohemian Switzerland spokesperson and the National Park Saxon Switzerland spokesperson on the German side. These two parks are directly adjacent to each other and have cross-border cooperation. The participants had the opportunity to learn and discuss the main priorities of the park and compare the biggest challenges in both national parks.

Local community representatives: Two young people of studying age were also included as stakeholders. One of them was a student from ČZU originating from the locality and whose parents owned a small family guesthouse near the national park. The other young stakeholder was a student who had recently finished his studies on the German side adjacent to the national park and had just started an internship in the national park on the Czech side. Their perspectives represented the young local generation that grew up near the park.



4. Kostelec nad Černými Lesy

Both groups departed their respective national parks around midday and arrived in the afternoon at Kostelec nad Černými Lesy, the final venue for the Summer School. The transition marked the beginning of the closing phase of the event, where participants were given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the field and consolidate their learnings. Situated in a serene environment, Kostelec provided the perfect setting for a deeper exchange of ideas and collaborative analysis of the work accomplished during the week.

4.1 Recap and Outlook

In the early evening of the fifth day (Friday), the participants who worked in KRNAP (Krkonoše National Park) presented their project scenarios/suggestions. Each group showcased their approach to addressing the challenges they encountered, providing insight into stakeholder engagement, balancing ecological and economic concerns, and integrating socially engaged research methods into their work. The presentations were followed by thoughtful discussions, with lecturers, mentors and fellow participants offering constructive feedback, raising key questions, and making recommendations for improving or expanding upon the proposed solutions.

The evening in Kostelec on Friday concluded with a farewell dinner at a local Czech brewery, where participants had the chance to relax and reflect on their experiences over the past week. The atmosphere was filled with camaraderie as attendees shared stories, celebrated their achievements, and forged lasting friendships. This gathering allowed everyone to unwind and appreciate the cultural richness of the region, enjoying traditional Czech cuisine and brews while discussing the insights gained from their fieldwork.

The next morning, on the sixth day (Saturday), the three groups from BOSNAP (Bohemian Switzerland National Park) presented their work. Similarly, each presentation was followed by a lively exchange of ideas, where participants received targeted feedback and suggestions for further development. The discussions highlighted not only the strengths of each group's approach but also areas for potential refinement, especially in the context of



long-term stakeholder cooperation and sustainable solutions. These dialogues were invaluable in shaping the final group outputs, and individual participants gained clear recommendations for how to proceed with their research and collaborative work beyond the Summer School.

After the final presentations, participants gathered for a certification ceremony to recognize their successful participation in the Summer School. Each attendee received a certificate that highlighted their engagement and achievements throughout the event. This formal recognition not only served as a tangible reminder of their hard work but also symbolized their commitment to applying what they learned in their future research endeavours. The ceremony reinforced the sense of accomplishment among the participants and marked a fitting conclusion to an enriching and transformative experience.

4.2 Wrap-Up and Closing Remarks

The joint meeting in Kostelec nad Černými Lesy fulfilled the expectations and objectives of the Summer School. It provided a platform for all participants to reflect on their fieldwork and engage in cross-group dialogue, allowing them to compare and contrast their approaches to solving similar challenges in protected areas. The wrap-up session emphasized the diversity of perspectives and solutions that emerged from the week, underlining the value of interdisciplinary collaboration in tackling complex environmental and social issues.

The final discussions also offered an opportunity for participants to exchange contact details and discuss potential future collaborations, fostering a network of early career researchers committed to socially engaged research in conservation and beyond. The closing remarks from the organizers highlighted the success of the event, not only in terms of the knowledge gained but also in building a community of like-minded individuals dedicated to solving real-world problems through socially engaged research methods. As the Summer School came to a close, participants left with a renewed sense of purpose, armed with practical skills, new ideas, and strengthened professional connections.



5. Conclusion and Evaluation

The BETTER Life Summer School was a significant and enriching experience, bringing together a diverse group of 41 participants and 17 organisers (teaching staff, mentors) from various countries. The event successfully fostered collaboration, knowledge exchange, and networking among early-career researchers in the field of socially engaged research. Participants gained practical skills, deepened their understanding of complex environmental and social issues, and engaged in meaningful discussions about their projects. The structured presentations and interactive workshops created a dynamic learning environment, allowing for constructive feedback and the sharing of diverse perspectives.

However, organizing such a large event based in four venues in only seven days, posed considerable challenges. Coordinating the logistics to bring together participants from different countries at the same venue was a formidable task. We encountered several last-minute withdrawals from applicants, making it difficult to fill the gaps left behind, which affected the overall dynamics of some groups. Despite these hurdles, the majority of participants engaged actively and expressed high satisfaction with their experiences.

Another significant challenge faced during the week was the weather. The Czech Republic experienced heavy rainfall throughout the duration of the Summer School, culminating in widespread flooding by the end of the week. While the adverse weather conditions posed some limitations on outdoor activities and fieldwork, they also highlighted the importance of the topics being discussed — emphasizing the need for effective research and action in response to environmental changes.

Positives

- The amount of materials provided to the participants before arriving at the summer school in Prague was positive. The participants could familiarize themselves with the practical part of the summer school, which most of them did.
- Active participation of stakeholders in the practical part, including willingness to share their thoughts and answer questions.



- Teamwork of participants with different degrees of scientific experience fostered a collaborative environment, promoting knowledge exchange and diverse perspectives on research challenges.
- The opportunity to have feedback and guidance from the present mentors and all other open conversation opportunities, which brought up many ideas and questions.
- Socializing with fellow researchers helped to build a sense of community and camaraderie, allowing participants to form valuable professional connections that may benefit their future collaborations.
- The inclusion of field trips provided hands-on learning experiences, enabling participants to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts and observe the dynamics of socially engaged research in practice.

Possible Improvements

- Greater time allowance for meetings with citizens and tourists from the surveyed areas. Their opinion could broaden the approach to solving the problem.
- Allowing participants more space for group work and self-reflection could lead to deeper engagement with their projects. This would encourage critical thinking and enhance the collaborative process among participants.
- Increasing the number of presentations based on practical examples of specific interactions between society and research projects would be beneficial. Such presentations could offer tangible case studies, illustrating successful collaborations and their outcomes, thus inspiring participants in their own work.

In summary, the Summer School achieved its primary objectives, despite some logistical challenges and inclement weather. It served as a platform for valuable learning, collaboration, and connection among emerging researchers dedicated to making a difference in socially engaged research. The experiences shared and the knowledge gained during this week will undoubtedly contribute to the continued growth and success of participants as they advance in their academic and professional careers.



ANNEXES

Annex I. – Programme

Sunday

18:00 – 19:30 Walk through the city centre. Starting point at “Hradcanska”.

Monday (9:00 – 17:00) – Room D1

09:00 – 09:15 Welcome by Patrik Toula – Introduction to BETTER Life Project

09:15 – 09:55 Characteristics of the Socially Engaged Research in Life Sciences (Diana Surová, CZU)

10:00 – 10:45 The problems and challenges of socially oriented research in the field of life sciences (Anton Sharuba, EMU)

10:45 – 11:00 Coffee Break

11:00 – 12:00 National parks - Conflict between the economic and environmental interests (Miroslav Hájek, CZU)

12:00 – 12:15 Group Photo

12:15 – 13:00 Lunch

13:00 – 13:15 Lesson of Czech Language (*Ice breaker*)

13:15 – 14:00 Introduction to toolkits created by BETTER Life - academic bridge, feedback, digital centre (Milan Školník, Michael Haman, CZU)

14:00 – 14:45 Introduction to the “competition”, division into groups, questions related to SER and round tables (Irena Benešová, CZU + All)

14:45 – 15:15 Coffee break

15:15 – 17:00 Group work (decide who are the stakeholders (municipality, national parks, other interest groups)) (All)

Tuesday (9:00 – 17:00) – Room D1

09:00 – 10:30 Presentation of projects with socially engaged research (7-10 minutes introduction per project)

- MOVING – Diana Surová, CZU
- Framework – Kristýna Janečková Molnárová, CZU
- Fem2forests – Petra Palátová, CZU
- SMART-U-GREEN – Ana Sopina, UNICAM

Followed by Round Table moderated by Milan Školník (CZU)



- What were the biggest obstacles in obtaining information from people, convincing them to participate, and how to formulate questions so that everyone understands each other?
- What are the biggest challenges in socially oriented research?
- What worked best, and does it make sense?
- What is the greatest benefit for the given locality?

10:30 – 11:00 Coffee

11:00 – 11:55 Various stakeholders mapping (Raimonds Ernšteins, DU)

12:00 – 13:00 Lunch

13:00 – 14:30 Biodiversity and socially engaged research methods (Viktoria Takacs, Pawel Sienkiewicz, PULS)

14:30 – 15:00 Visual Methodologies and Design Thinking for Socially Engaged Research (Ana Sopina, UNICAM)

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee Break

15:30 – 16:15 Toolkits – game, Feedback – notebook (Milan Školník, Michael Haman, CZU)

16:15 – 17:00 Group work

Wednesday, Sept. 11, 2024

08:00 Departure CZU Prague

10:30 Arrival

11:00 – 12:00 Presenting the case on the spot

12:00 – 13:30 Lunch time (lunch is the responsibility of each participant, not covered by organizers)

13.30 – 14:30 Questions and answers related to case study

15:00 – 19:00 Local Programme

19:00 – 20:00 Working in groups on an assigned case (possibility to use consultations from mentors formed by people involved in the BETTER Life project)

20:00 on Dinner and free time (dinner is the responsibility of each participant, not covered by organizers)

Thursday, Sept 12, 2024

9:00 – 9:30 Summarizing experience of last day; tasks for this day

9:30 – 12:30 Meeting with representatives of the National Park (discussion and walk with comments about the issues of the case study)

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch time (lunch is the responsibility of each participant, not covered by organizers)



14:00 – 14:30 Working in groups on an assigned case (possibility to use consultations with mentors formed by people involved in the BETTER Life project)

14:30 – 16:30 Activities of summer school participants aiming to collect needed data (utilising socially engaged research in real conditions)

16.30 – 17:30 Discussion in the groups on data collection implements (possibility to use consultations with mentors formed by people involved in the BETTER Life project)

17:30 – 19:00 Work in groups on the first draft of the case study

19:00 on Dinner and free time (dinner is the responsibility of each participant, not covered by organizers)

Friday, Sept 13, 2024

08:30 – 09:00 Summarizing experience of last day; tasks for this day

09:00 – 10:30 Data collection activities on the spot (interviews, observations, fieldwork, sampling) to get saturated answers to formulated research questions

13:00 Departure

15:30 Arrival to Kostelec and Černými lesy

16:00 – 17:30 Work in groups on the first draft of the case study (possibility to use consultations with mentors formed by people involved in the BETTER Life project)

17:45 – 18:45 Evaluating experience gained during summer school (feedback from participants)

19:00 Farewell dinner at Kostelec Brewery

Saturday, Sept 14, 2024

9:00 – 10:00 Conclusion, Evaluation and Certification

Departure (breakfast included)



Funded by the European Union



Annex II. – Poster I.




Summer School

Ecosystem Services, Tourism, Community Engagement, and Conservation Strategies in National Park

September 9 - 14, 2024

Join us for an immersive Summer School focusing on socially engaged research through Ecosystem Services, Tourism, Community Engagement, and Conservation Strategies in National Parks! Engage with experts, participate in hands-on activities, and explore innovative approaches to environmental conservation. Don't miss this opportunity to expand your knowledge and network with **50 participants from 7 countries** and many professionals in the field!

3 ECTS credits for participation

Venue: Czech Republic

- Prague
- National Parks
 - Krkonoše
 - Bohemian Switzerland
- Kostelec nad Černými lesy



Application Deadline: **15th June 2024**

More information
<https://www.better-life-digital.eu/summerschools/>





Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Funded by the European Union



Annex III. – Poster II. (Landscape)

Ecosystem Services, Tourism, Community Engagement, and Conservation Strategies in National Park

Summer School 2024 (3 ECTS)

September 9 – 14

Location:

- Prague
- Krkonoše National Park or Bohemian Switzerland National Park,
- Kostelec nad Černými lesy



Bohemian Switzerland National Park Krkonoše National Park

Kostelec nad Černými lesy

More information







Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Funded by the
European Union



Annex IV. – Photo Documentation







Funded by the
European Union





Funded by the
European Union





