

Report 1st *Open*Citizen*Social*Science hangout CoAct, April 21, 2021

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CO-CREATING COACT'S COMMUNITY HANGOUT SERIES

On April 21, 2021 we hosted the first of CoAct's *Open*Citizen*Social*Science hangouts. Bringing together a lively diverse group of researchers, community organizers and hybrid actors, we gathered in order to discuss how to shape a series of community hangouts that is most beneficial to everyone. The overall objective of the hangout series is to foster discourse around topics relevant to the growing community we have initiated via our recently created *Open*Citizen*Social*Science Signal group. The group was set up to create an environment for a low barrier, instant exchange of thoughts, events, materials, and much more.

In the first hangout, we wanted to offer a space to answer questions and collectively identify the topics relevant to the community to co-create a future hangout agenda.

Through those two platforms, the signal group and a series of frequent hangouts, we wish to gradually strengthen the community, driven by what is relevant to everyone being part of it.

CoAct and co-creating a Citizen Social Science approach

CoAct is a transdisciplinary consortium of research institutions and civil society organizations from Spain, Germany, Austria, Argentina. We are working towards the shaping of a Citizen Social Science Approach, an approach to tackle social issues, where citizens are partaking in research in ways otherwise oftentimes dominated by academic researchers.

CoAct is doing this through four pilot studies. These so-called Research and Innovation Actions focus on Mental Health in Catalunya, Environmental Justice in Argentina, Youth Employment in Vienna, and Gender Equality as an Open Call where academic and civil society groups from various European geographies can apply with their own ideas and projects.

CoAct strives towards an approach that **gives citizens an equal seat at the table.**

The project does so by co-creating research, for instance through different knowledge coalitions. These are multi-stakeholder coalitions formed by representatives of public administrations, CSOs, educational organizations and co-researchers, to name a few. We are also gradually building a toolkit which will document our processes and share our methods for adaptation by other groups and contexts. And we are hosting frequent webinars to share knowledge around the topics and methods applied in our research and innovation actions.

Taking our intention to provide citizens an 'equal seat at the table' meant for us to make sure that all different actors are involved in the shaping of such an approach. We want to **make sure that this 'having a seat at the table' starts with the same understanding for academia and citizens** of what that means and what it can mean for people of entirely different contexts.

We want to prevent bias.

Therefore, engaging a diverse community into the shaping of the CSS approach is crucial for us. We are investing into the shaping of a community that brings together people from academia and civil society, from different geographic, cultural, and political contexts, as well as from different related traditions, such as the Open Sciences, Citizen Sciences, Community Organizing, etc. We want to

learn from each other and address topics that are relevant to very diverse actors since conversations or challenges oftentimes remain siloed and approaches are oftentimes shaped in rather closed environments, prone to bias, when rooted in the life worlds of a few.

The *Open*Citizen*Social*Science signal group was a first step to open up those silos. The regular hangouts we will co-curate together with the community strive to ensure an approach that will develop from the realities, contexts, interests, and challenges of the many, not the few.

The first community hangout, a summary

We kicked off the first hangout by embracing our diversity. With participants from x continents and x countries, composed of researchers, citizen organizers, makers, self-proclaimed geeks, and hybrid actors, we gathered with a rich assemblage of backgrounds and relevancies of how a c-creative approach to research can be beneficial to the many, not the few.

Based on the outcomes of the first hangout, we will co-create a hangout agenda, in which different community members will host sessions throughout the coming two years.

In a first step we gathered topics relevant to the participants to identify some guiding directions for the upcoming hangout themes. Out of a selection of very interesting topics to address during the coming hangouts, we can identify a number of 'meta topics' we can tackle in dedicated sessions.

One is the topic of inclusion, as expressed in the wishes to discuss gender and feminism, colonialism and digital colonialism, but also for instance community governance and digital literacy.

Foregrounding what it means to co-create a Citizen Social Science approach that actively reflects all those aspects in a global perspective shall be a core and cross-cutting theme.

We also identify the wish for topic specific sessions as well as for geographically focused sessions. Over the coming months we will provide space for people working on different thematic areas to host community sessions on how to best engage researchers and/or civil society in respective research activities. Providing space to openly discuss how co-creating research can look like, and what the challenges are, in different geographic, cultural, and political contexts will form another central focus of our hangout agenda. The latter is also intrinsically connected to discussions around how a feminist and decolonial citizen social science approach can look like.

Lastly, we also identify space to further discuss best ways to stronger connect our 'sister communities' and how to best learn from each other. This relates to the Open Science and Open Science Hardware community. It also relates to already relevant discussions in the Citizen Science community, such as on topics of inclusion, equity, and participation.

For the CoAct community hangouts we are deriving an open agenda in combination with continuous attention to and shaping of approaches to the cross-cutting topics. This means that we are going to create a spreadsheet for the community in which members can sign up to host the discussions most relevant to them. We will also host sessions on the cross-cutting aspects of shaping a feminist and decolonial citizen social science approach and the alignment of the CSS approach with already existing frameworks. Attention to the latter discussions will also accompany all hangouts and we will make sure to weave those crucial underlying aspects into the overall shaping of CoAct's CSS approach.

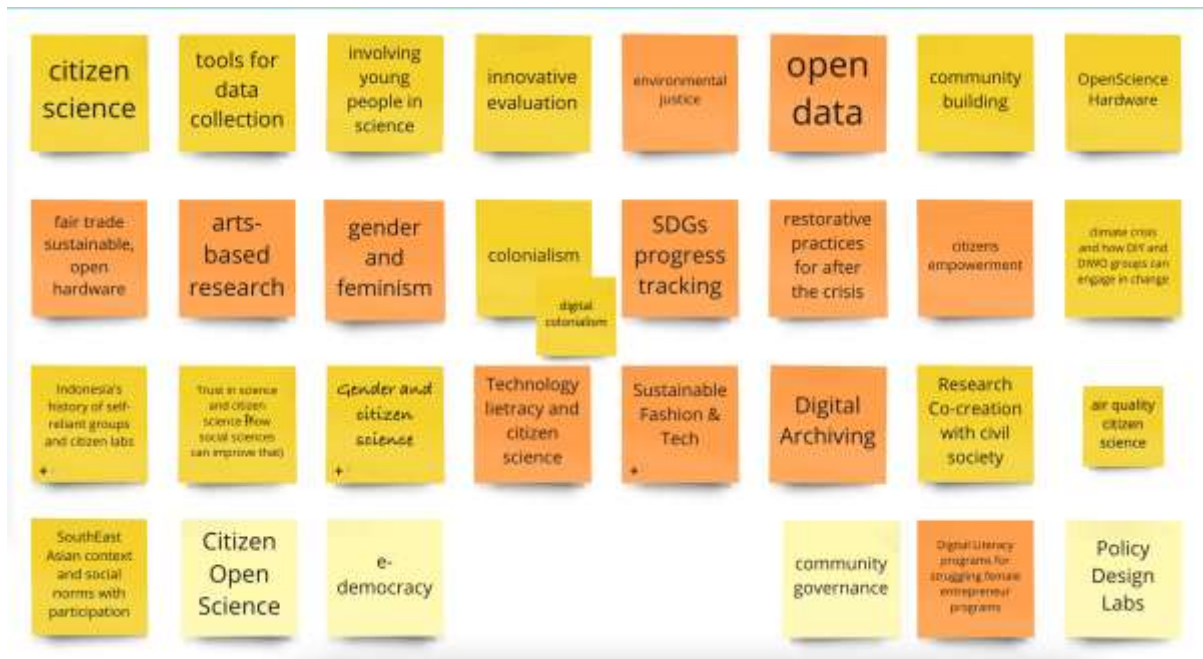


Figure 1: Interesting topics

Platforms, formats, outreach and engagement

Beyond the collective shaping of a thematic agenda, we also discussed how to best host the hangouts, which platforms might work best, and how to invite others in order to grow the community.

Discussing appropriate platforms basically center on two main concerns. One is the choice between the use of proprietary platforms, which still a lot of people use for their daily communication, versus the use of more secure free and open source solutions. Here it is about striking a balance between moving into the common communication spheres of people to lower the threshold for participation. Many people might be reluctant to have to install and familiarize with yet another messenger or other tool in order to be part of a new community. This discourse crosscuts another one, which has gained increasing importance throughout the Covid pandemic which led to most work-related communication and interaction at large to move into the digital. Using the same tools for private and work communication creates a notion of constant availability, having negative effects on a healthy work life balance and our overall mental health in general. Growing and nurturing healthy communities in a responsible manner shall place such consideration at the center of attention. Given that different people use different platforms for work and private communication, making decisions that feature into the realities of everyone is increasingly difficult though.

We agreed upon a monthly sequence as most appropriate to allow for dedicated participation without overwhelming people. Moreover, a co-hosting format in which members can sign up for sessions they would like to take on, whilst receiving support from the CoAct team, has been welcomed. We also explored the community positioning towards a community internal hangout format which will only be available to the, steadily growing, signal group or a format open to anyone to join and promoted through public channels such as LinkedIn, relevant social media groups, newsletters, etc.

CoAct is hosting frequent public webinars alongside the hangout series. With the hangouts we aimed at providing a more intimate and safe space for people to openly discuss their concerns. Thus, we will proceed with the two-step procedure in which people who have joined the signal group and introduced themselves to the community will be invited to the community hangouts. However, we will provide public reports documenting the main discussions of the hangouts, without revealing anyone's identity.

For the CoAct community group and hangouts we are taking the following actions in response. The community group is run on signal. Whilst increasingly people, especially active in civil society organizing, are using signal as their main messenger option, the tool provides the feature to turn off notifications for desired periods of time. This allows the user the option to switch off community notifications during out of office hours.

For the monthly hangouts we will not pre-assign a specific platform but leave it open to the respective members organizing a hangout which platforms and tools they wish to use. This allows us to address the needs of different members. Additionally, it allows the community to learn and try out tools some of us have potentially not yet been familiarized with. The community hangouts will provide a safe space for members, therefore not being publicly announced nor recorded.



Figure 2: Platforms, formats, outreach and engagement

Co-owning the community - experiences and expectations

Given that we wish to grow a collectively co-owned community, including the different hangouts we will host throughout the coming years, we shared experiences and expectations of the community in order to co-create formats that are most beneficial to everyone. Building on existing experiences and lessons learned also allows us to prevent trial and error.



Figure 3: Experiences and expectations

The community did agree upon the need for some central coordination despite the co-owning nature of our community building agenda. Moreover, identifying dedicated tasks alongside the sharing of recurring tasks has been highlighted in order to make the process ahead of us a realistic and continuous endeavor.

To hold the community together the clear framing of our collective aim as well as engaging in other than the common way of discussing different topics, but also for instance cooking and eating together have been highlighted as beneficial to the gradual nurturing of the community.

Expectation setting brought about a variety of aspects to embrace for the shaping of our future community hangouts. Sharing knowledge and failure have been the two overarching wishes expressed by the community. The wish for knowledge sharing, relates to concrete context relevant practices as well as concrete methodologies, tools, and materials was omnipresent, focusing on the 'How to'.

For the CoAct community group and hangouts this will mean the creation of dedicated spaces to exchange tools and materials. This can for instance be through the option for community members to share their knowledge via the CoAct toolkit environment. We will offer particular attention on the sharing of knowledge from specific contexts and explore how experiences from dedicated e.g. cultural or political contexts can be adapted in different environments. Lastly, we will ensure to celebrate failures as much as successes since we learn and grow from failures and our responses to same as much as to those things that work out well right from the start.

Summing up – first step towards community building

To summarize our outcomes from the first hangout in which we aimed to establish the foundations to co-creating a community.

- An open agenda based on topics identified as most relevant by the community
- Cross-cutting topics we will be attentive to throughout all thematic discussions, creating a feminist and decolonial approach to Citizen Social Science
- Community members can 'sign up' to host hangouts relevant to their interest or expertise
- We continue to use signal for our everyday communication, embracing free open software solutions for the safeguarding of our community and enabling members to switch off notifications during leisure times



- Every community member hosting a monthly hangout can decide upon the platform used for the hangout
- We will keep the hangouts a safe community space only shared with the community members joining the signal group
- We will not record the hangouts but provide public de-personalized summarizing reports of the hangouts
- We will put emphasize on knowledge sharing from different contexts
- We will embrace failure as much as success for our joint learning

During the coming weeks we will co-shape the concrete topic agenda of the upcoming hangouts which will be hosted by different community members and in various formats. We will also work on our support mechanisms in order to make sure the community always has the desired support and overall coordination mechanisms are in place. Lastly, we will set up an environment for documentation in which we will share the reports, of which this is the first, of all our gatherings with the broader public.

If you wish to join CoAct's vibrant and growing *Open*Citizen*Social*Science community, and be part of our monthly hangouts, you can sign up to our signal group bit.ly/2NtDeCW.