



**COESO**

connecting research and society

---

# Developing a collaboratory for diverse SSH Citizen Science stakeholders

## The VERA design

TRIPLE2023 Conference, **02.02.2023**

Tiziana Lombardo - Net7



COESO project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No 101006325

# Setting the scene

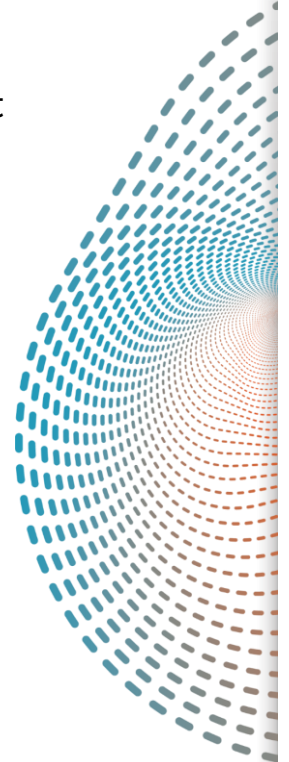
---



**Virtual Ecosystem for Research Activation** is an online platform built in the framework of the EU funded project COESO (Collaborative Engagement on Societal Issues).

COESO builds a set of services contributing to:

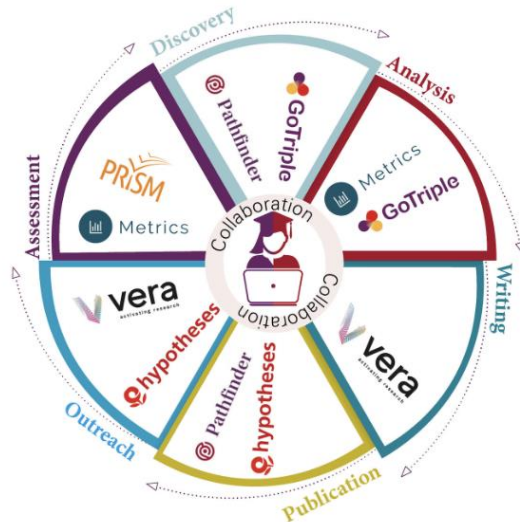
- overcome **the lack of visibility and recognition of the SSH contribution to citizen science**
- overcome **what hinders the development and funding of participatory research** within the SSH disciplines
- enhance **civic engagement**



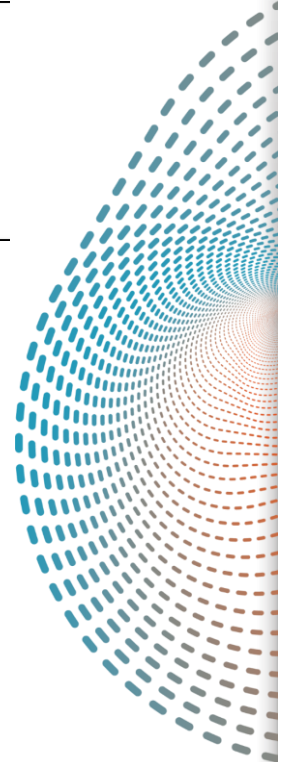
# The ecosystem

OPERAS

Open scholarly  
communication  
for social sciences and  
humanities



eu-citizen.science



# At the heart of Citizen Science in SSH



Image courtesy: <https://www.science-sparks.com/>

**1989:** first use of citizen science term in an issue of MIT Technology Review, which featured three community-based labs studying environmental issues

**OED (2014):** citizen science n. scientific work undertaken by members of the general public, often in collaboration with or under the direction of professional scientists and scientific institutions.

## **Citizen science in SSH emphasizes:**

- community participation,
- interdisciplinary collaboration,
- a focus on local knowledge and engagement to address complex social and cultural phenomena.



# VERA definition

---

## Keywords



# The VERA design process

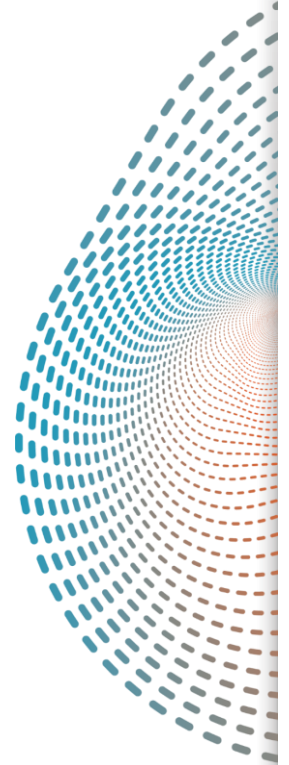
---

## Main challenges:

- Design and build something that users really want and will use
- Integrate with existing tools, developing only what is necessary
- Integrate and avoid overlapping with other EU-funded projects

## Main strategies:

- Benchmarking
- User involvement since the very beginning -COESO Pilots
- Lean approach
- Fast development iterations



# UX / UI Design - Personas

## Fernando

The criminology academic exploring participatory research for the first time

Age 49  
Location Rome, Italy  
Job Professor  
Work Place Sapienza University of Rome  
Expertise Criminology

## Tools

Sharing Teams & Owncloud  
Collab ML, Python, Kaggle  
Other Academia.edu

## Skills

Research ●●●  
Analysis ●●●●●  
Technical Tools ●●●●●  
Social Media ●●●●●

*“Societal issues should be a top priority from the start of a project”*

## Background

Fernando has been in academia for about 15 years, so **he knows how disconnected it is from the lives of regular people**. Having always worked within the academic world, **he's not sure how much public involvement he might need** during projects, but now he's **committed to an open dialogue with non-academics**.

## Scenario

Fernando has an idea to continue a previous study on crime in Rome. He wants to **use VERA to find new collaborators** and stop the cyclical nature of working with the same group of academics. He finds it useful that he can search by skill set to see what a potential collaborator can bring to the project. **Using VERA he manages to build a 5 person team** with another researcher, a political analyst, an anti-corruption advocacy group member and an investigative journalist. He **invites the team members to a newly created project** on VERA. The scope of the project is to do some semi-structured interviews and launch a survey to understand how Romans feel affected by criminal enterprises.

He then **organizes a brainstorming session** to decide what direction the project will take and define responsibilities. Fernando uses the outcomes of the brainstorming to plan the next activities: **he adds a tool to manage the project**, creates milestones, and assigns tasks to the teammates. Thanks to this **definition of roles**, he focuses on coordination and can take part in the discussions created online, while another teammate takes care of networking with journalists and PR.

The team has a really varied set of background skills, which has been a problem for Fernando in the past. **VERA helps him make sure everyone understands each other** by using goal-based terminology like “public engagement”, instead of “dissemination”. On VERA he also finds a workshop guide that he uses with the team to align everyone on what it means to conduct socially meaningful research.

As the project progresses, he is quite satisfied with the collaboration with the team members and decides to **add them to his VERA network for future collaborations**.

During the interview analysis Fernando and its team have developed a new transcription pipeline. At the end of the project they share it on Kaggle along with the data they've collected. He wants to share the model with people outside of the VERA project and find like-minded collaborators to suggest code improvements.

## Goals

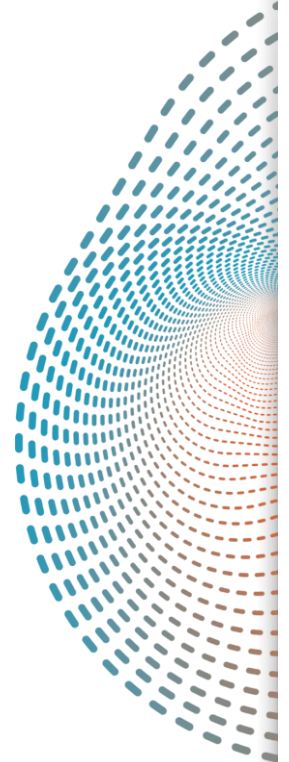
- Make work more accessible to the wider public
- **Explore participatory research** to bridge worlds and understand how research can be more useful for his own work and society
- Create a space with opportunities for more collaborations with citizens
- **Understand and use skills non-researchers bring to a project** for better integration
- **Contribute to an active community** and utilize the resources it provides

## Needs

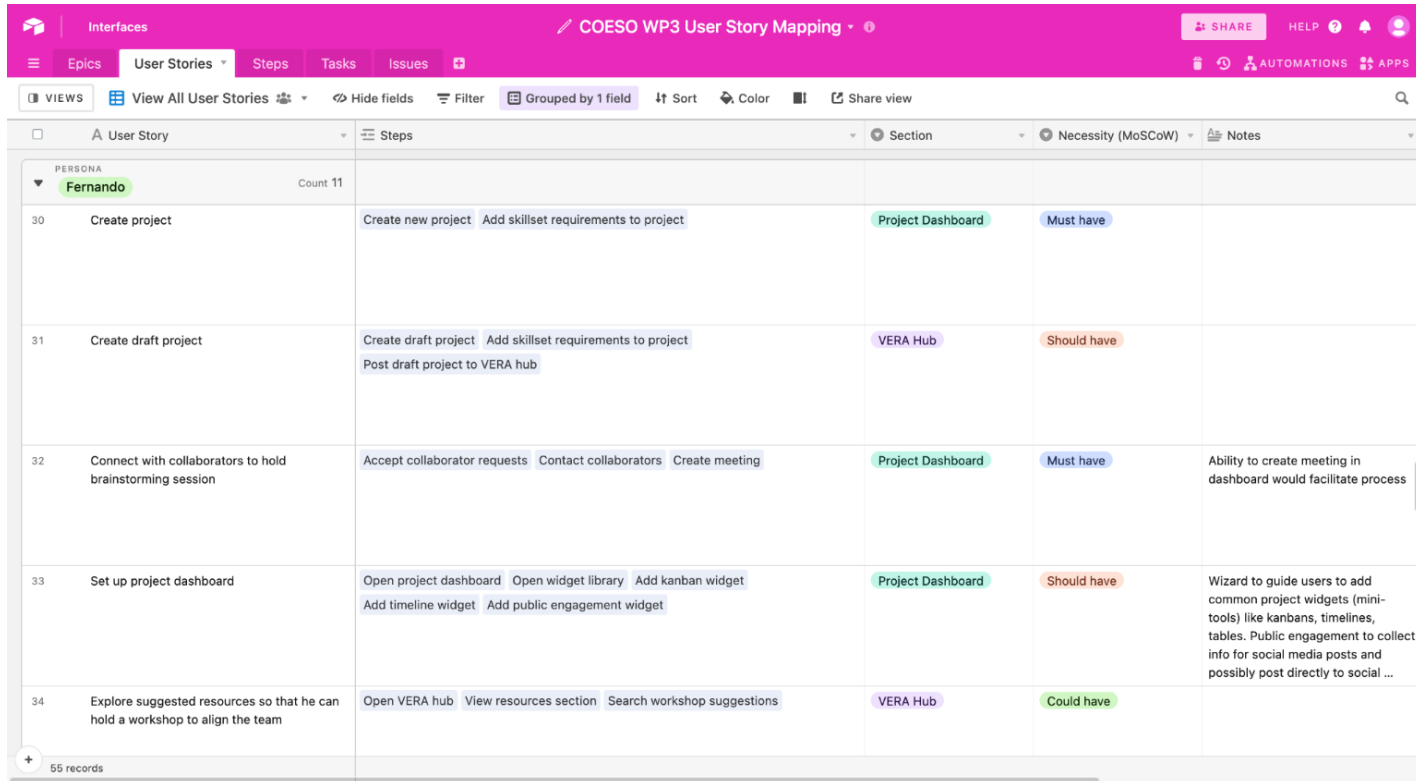
- New ways of reaching the public, not for crowdsourcing data but to **create an exchange**
- More awareness of interdisciplinary skillsets that could help his research
- **An intermediary for networking, organizational strategy, PR and to interface with journalists**
- Open source, adaptable tools with **institutional level security**

## Challenges

- **Unable to connect with the public** through traditional methods
- Creating **common ground between collaborators** with different approaches from varied backgrounds and cultures
- Critical of academic values
- **No time for dissemination** on social media
- Tools aren't modifiable and aren't designed with researchers in mind



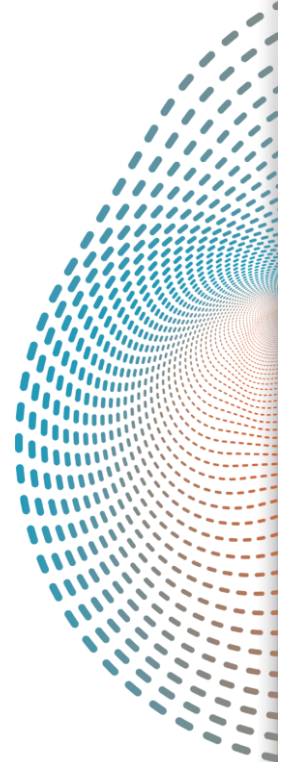
# UX / UI Design - User stories



The screenshot shows a software interface for user story mapping. The top navigation bar is pink and contains the title 'COESO WP3 User Story Mapping', a 'SHARE' button, and 'HELP' with notification icons. Below the navigation bar is a toolbar with options like 'VIEWS', 'View All User Stories', 'Hide fields', 'Filter', 'Grouped by 1 field', 'Sort', 'Color', and 'Share view'. The main table has columns for 'User Story', 'Steps', 'Section', 'Necessity (MoSCoW)', and 'Notes'. The table lists six user stories for a persona named 'Fernando'.

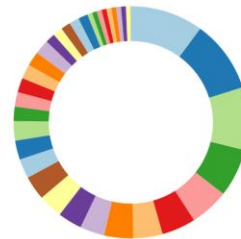
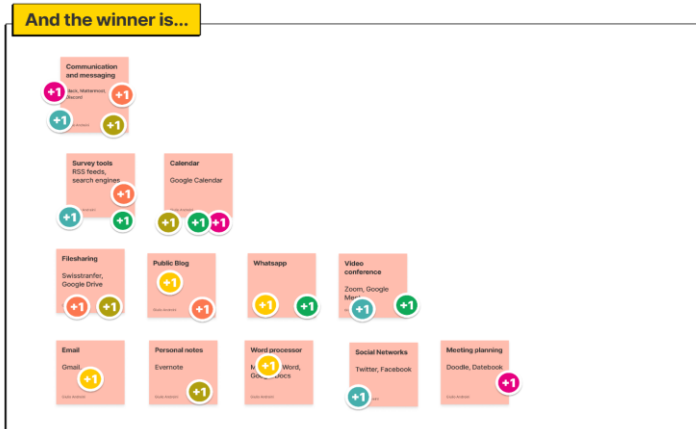
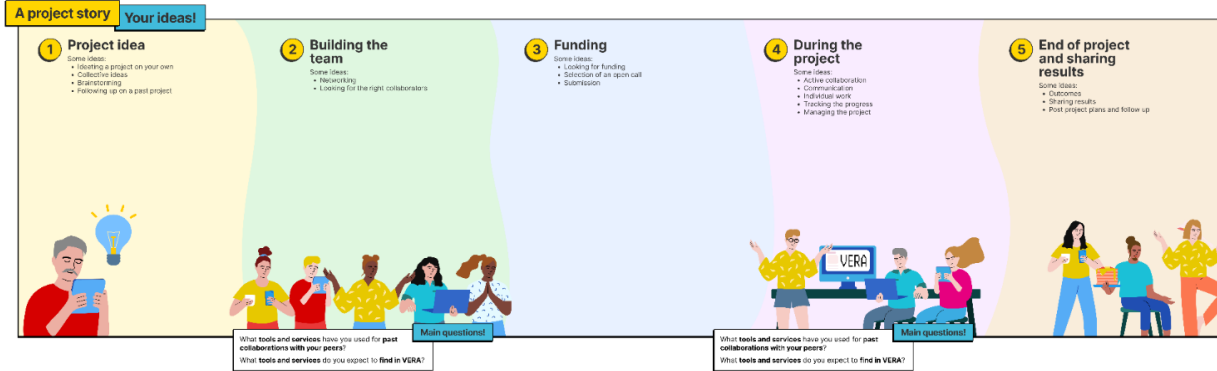
User Story	Steps	Section	Necessity (MoSCoW)	Notes
30 Create project	Create new project Add skillset requirements to project	Project Dashboard	Must have	
31 Create draft project	Create draft project Add skillset requirements to project Post draft project to VERA hub	VERA Hub	Should have	
32 Connect with collaborators to hold brainstorming session	Accept collaborator requests Contact collaborators Create meeting	Project Dashboard	Must have	Ability to create meeting in dashboard would facilitate process
33 Set up project dashboard	Open project dashboard Open widget library Add kanban widget Add timeline widget Add public engagement widget	Project Dashboard	Should have	Wizard to guide users to add common project widgets (mini-tools) like kanbans, timelines, tables. Public engagement to collect info for social media posts and possibly post directly to social ...
34 Explore suggested resources so that he can hold a workshop to align the team	Open VERA hub View resources section Search workshop suggestions	VERA Hub	Could have	

55 records

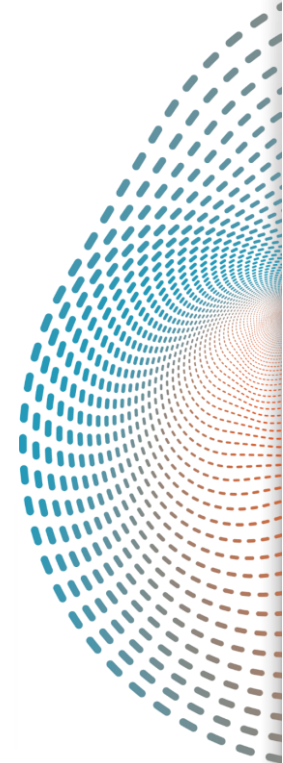




# UX / UI Design - Co-design workshops



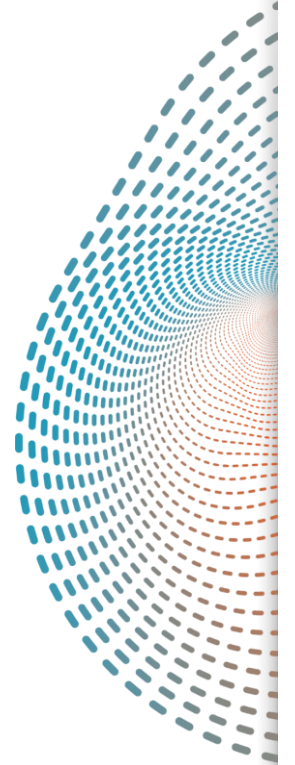
Tool category	Mentions
Email	15
Video conference	15
Word processors	13
File storage and sharing	10
Social networks	8
Web communication platforms	7
Paper notebook and pen	6
Mobile instant messaging	6



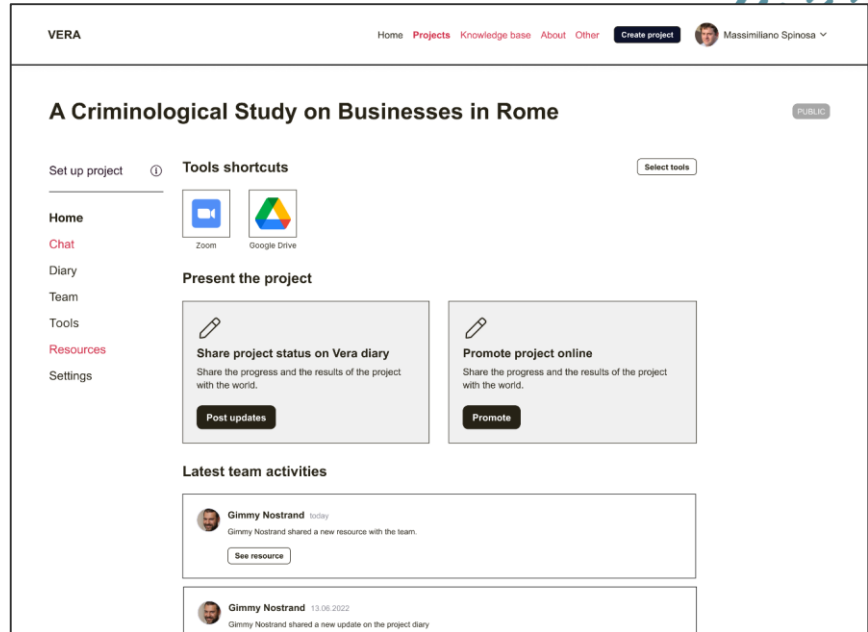
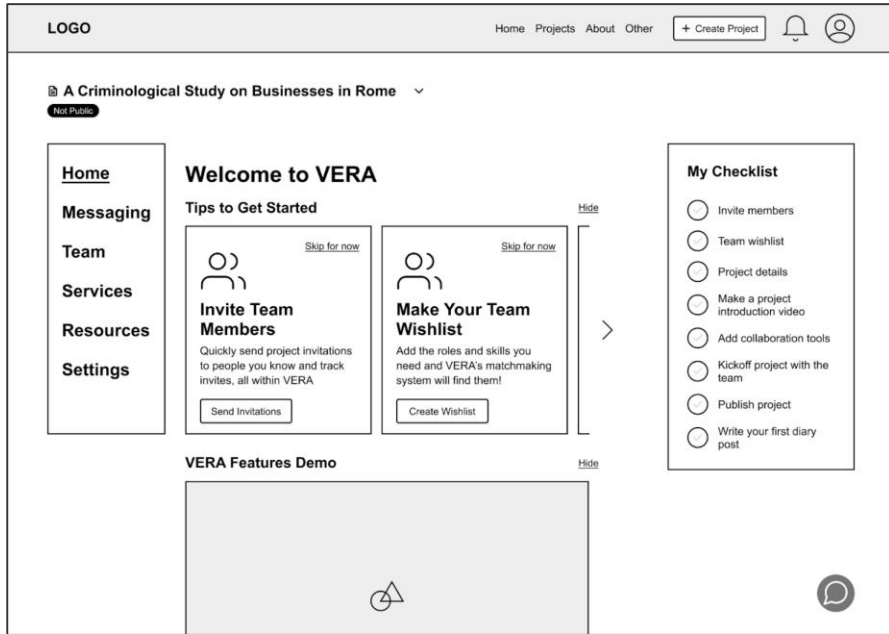
# VERA main features

---

- Profile creation (public/private mode)
- Project creation (public/private mode)
- Browsing projects to collaborate, follow or share
- Discovering other users with different interests, backgrounds and expertise
- Creating a team by inviting team members
- Sharing thoughts, notes and results using a project diary, publicly or just between team members
- Exchanging messages on Mattermost
- Searching for funding
- Creating a toolbox to access multiple tools from one place

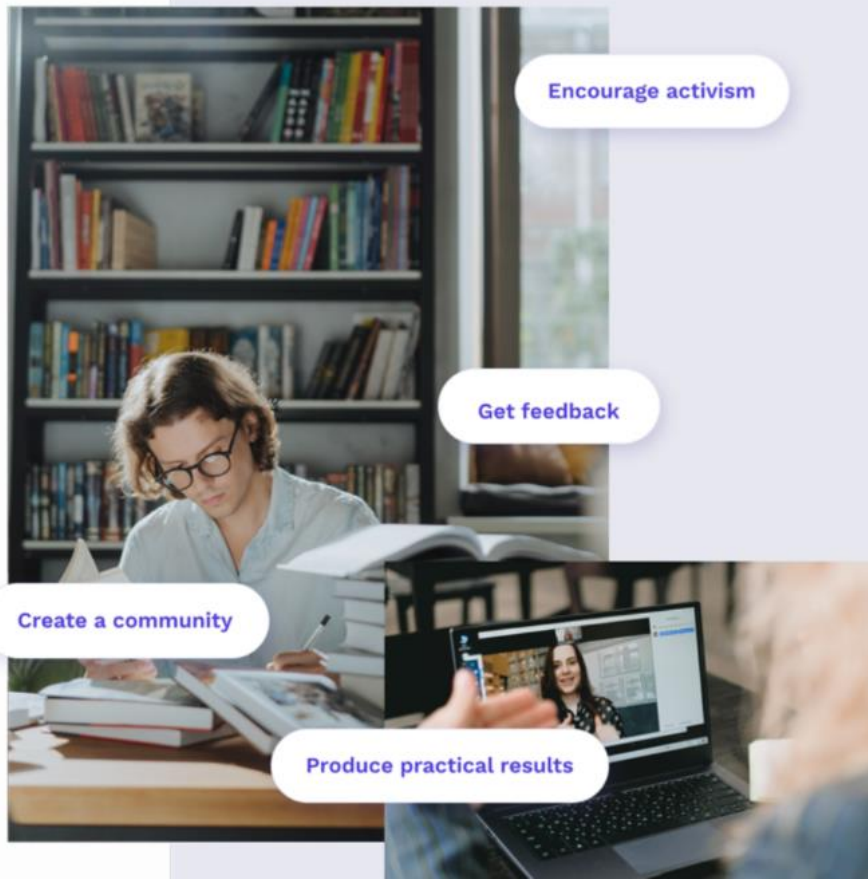


# UX / UI Design - Wireframe Evolution



# Enabling collaborative research with and for society

VERA empowers participatory research in Social Sciences and Humanities by making it easy to create a diverse team, find funding, work together and share with the world

[Get started](#)

# VERA beta - Get involved!

---

**Register at:**

<https://vera.operas-eu.org/>

Create your profile  
Find projects or create your own  
Build your team  
Start to collaborate

**Help us improving VERA!**

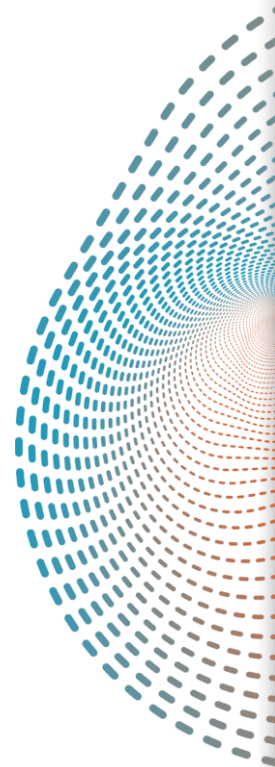
Volunteer for our second user testing round:

[lombardo@netseven.it](mailto:lombardo@netseven.it)

**Learn more about COESO:** <https://coeso.hypotheses.org/>

**Follow our podcast**

<https://open.spotify.com/show/4Ue7VTnvavtn6YLeYqudbo>



# How to get involved (VERA beta)

---

Thank you!

