

T4ERI FOLLOW-UP PROJECT ON CITIZEN SCIENCE

One of the objectives of the European University Alliances is to generate new projects at European, regional, or national level. Such a project was launched at Vytautas Magnus University in August 2023. Called „Encouraging Citizen Involvement in Research Campaigns of Vytautas Magnus University by Creating a Supportive Ecosystem for the Use of Citizen-Collected Data in Research (Vis.DuomUo)“ No. 10-040-T-001, it will continue for 18 months. The project value is EUR 59 960, and it is funded by the European Union Next Generation EU under the Recovery and Resilience Regulation. The Project leader is dr. Saulė Milčiuvienė.

As advertized by the university media,¹ the project aims to create a supportive ecosystem at Vytautas Magnus University for the use, opening and management of citizen-generated data in research, thereby involving citizens as much as possible in the research campaigns of Vytautas Magnus University. Citizen science, defined as public voluntarily help to conduct scientific research, especially to design experiments, collect data, analyze results, and solve problems. It is an important tool to democratize science. Data generated by citizen science groups is becoming an increasingly important resource for researchers. Currently, scientists conducting and organizing research at Vytautas Magnus University are confronted with issues of data openness, intellectual property, and personal data protection. The lack of clear guidelines on the conditions for opening, managing, and storing data collected by citizens in research is one of the reasons why researchers are reluctant to involve citizens in their research activities. T4ERI based initiative could be regarded as a a best-practice example for those universities of the T4EU alliance that do not have their open data policies. The project will develop a Map of Opportunities for the Use of Citizen-Collected and Generated Data in Research, its Openness, Management and Stewardship and Guidelines for the Use of Citizen-Collected and Generated Data in Research, its Openness, Management and Stewardship at the Vytautas Magnus University. If the Map of Opportunities has

¹ Internet access <<https://www.vdu.lt/lt/vdu-vykdo-projekta-skirta-pilieciu-itraukimui-i-mokslo-kampanijas/>>.

a more informative and educational function, the Guidelines will provide specific recommendations and algorithms for opening, managing, and processing data. The planned outputs of the project will be developed in active collaboration with all stakeholders: researchers, students, citizens, and social partners. Three different questionnaires and surveys will be developed to ascertain stakeholders' needs and attitudes towards the use of citizen data in research. In addition, three seminars – round table discussions – will be organized during the project to present the results of the project and to hold discussions with stakeholders.

The project was presented to a broader audience during a seminar-discussion “Ethical issues in citizen science: between closure and freedom” on November 24, 2023. The themes of presentations included ethical standards for citizen science (docent dr. Tomas Berkmanas from Vytautas Magnus University, Senior Analyst at the Office of the Ombudsman for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania dr. Birutė Liekė), opportunities and challenges for citizen science (professor dr. Eglė Butkevičienė from Kaunas Technical University), and examples of good practice of citizen science in the world (Viktorija Kavaliauskaitė-Vilkinienė). Moreover, the newly launched project was introduced (docent dr. Saulė Milčiuvienė from Vytautas Magnus University) as well as an ongoing project “University Libraries Strengthening the Link between Academia and Society through Citizen Science in the Baltic States (LibOCS),” represented by the library of Vytautas Magnus University.

During the discussion the most obvious virtues of citizen science (such as its added value to research, increased credibility and dissemination of its results, improved science communication) were highlighted. Problematic areas included the concept and the term „Citizen's science“ that can be misleading and even discriminating if taken literally. Citizen science does not have to do with citizenship, the emphasis is on volunteer activities of non-professionals. Another important issue to be discussed and clarified has to do with motivation of non-professional researchers to take part in the academic research as well as motivation of institutional researchers to seek help and to involve people from broader neighborhood and stakeholder communities. Without good motivation on both sides citizen science is next to impossible. The most problematic issues deal with ethical standards, and credibility of data, collected by non-professional researchers, also with copyright issues, to mention a few. It is envisaged that many of these issues will be attempted to be addressed in the project. Participants of the discussion part of the seminar drew attention to the fact that citizen science has a long history, just under a different name. That shows how deeply rooted the phenomenon of non-professionals taking part in professional science is and makes it even more important.

The virtual seminar and the discussion were very well received, they are expected to be followed by other events planned as part of the citizen science project.