



# Fostering Funding for Citizen Science

in the Social Sciences  
and Humanities



**coeso**  
connecting research and society



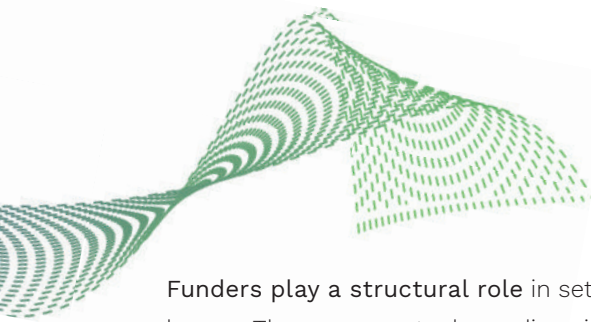
# The mis **match**

When engaged in intensive and locally rooted collaborations with society, researchers in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) can play a key role in socio-economic development and social innovation. These small-scale partnerships, in particular with the third sector, help address pressing societal challenges, such as sustainable cities, migration, justice, the fight against organised crime, or gender equality.

A large number of policies and funding programmes in Europe encourage civic or democratic participation in several areas, including research. Research using methodologies that engage with society is currently referred to by the umbrella term “citizen science”. **Citizen science is here understood as participatory and collaborative research in a broad sense.** It is not limited to crowdsourced data

collection and it does not imply that researchers lead the process of collaboration.

One of the main obstacles to the growth of citizen science in the SSH is a **strong mismatch between the current funding calls and the diversity of SSH citizen science practices.** Funders and funding recipients cannot exist without each other, but they do not always succeed in their effort to find each other: the recommendations presented here aim at providing solutions to better match funders and actors addressing key societal challenges through intensive citizen science practices in SSH. They build on the work carried out in the COESO project, which aims at fostering participatory research practices in the SSH.



## Why it **matters**

**Funders play a structural role** in setting priorities for research and innovation, and in the uptake of new challenges. They represent a large diversity of organisations. They can be local, regional, national, European and international research agencies, universities and research organisations, philanthropic and private foundations.

Depending on their nature and their agenda, they frame not only the topics addressed but also the implementation of the projects they support. **The way funders structure their programs, the specific wording they use in their calls, and the processes they implement to assess the projects all deeply impact the research itself.** The funders' actions contribute to a complex dynamic involving other relevant social actors (policymakers, industries, the third sector, academia), and affect the scope, content, direction, outputs and potential





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impact of research. Their role in shaping the future of citizen science as a research practice in the social sciences and humanities is thus central, even though the proportion of funding that has been devoted to this sector has been relatively marginal so far. This is a missed opportunity as—in the collective movement to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030—the contribution of citizen science, in particular its role in collecting valuable data, has been highlighted.

Beyond the advantages of crowdsourced data collection, **citizen science approaches and SSH disciplines both have a lot more to contribute to research and society, and even more when they join forces for SSH-intensive citizen science.** Participatory research in SSH has a huge potential to empower citizens and support them in their journey towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This specific type of research **helps define and understand the social dimension** that underpins the SDGs. COE-SO supports this type of research through its pilots, carefully selected in line with the different SDGs, and supporting citizens to be engaged in research.

“A mission will not inspire people unless they are part of it”: the 2018 report where Mariana Mazzucato outlined the problem-solving approach for the European Missions, considered the SDGs as too broad to be actionable, and many R&D projects not clearly linked with the societal challenges they might address. The European Missions’ aim is to fill the space between the broad challenges and concrete, specific projects. **Citizen science, and in particular SSH-intensive citizen science can help reach another level of granularity to tackle the complexity of societal challenges.** It links the local and the international dimensions and involves citizens in project co-design and implementation, allowing for innovative solutions at each stage of research. Both citizen science and

SSH bring a unique set of capacities, and it is thus crucial to allocate dedicated funding programmes for them. The funding calls should thus stipulate that the project, from its conception, is designed to include citizen science and SSH methodologies. Additionally, the quality of the collaboration undertaken should specifically be assessed during the selection process and the implementation of the project.

Citizen science implies **a great variety of methodologies, stakeholders involved, as well as data and output formats, and local and professional languages used.** **This is a valuable strength,** which must be highlighted and acknowledged. Funders should not only grant mission-oriented projects but also applicant-initiated, curiosity-driven research endeavours, fostering novel forms of collaboration, especially with the third-sector. In order to support the joint work and coordination of this diversity, **mediating infrastructures are needed as spaces for sharing resources and supporting initiatives.** Finally, as engaged stakeholders involved in citizen science projects tend to be small, grassroots organisations, which often cannot afford answering to large scale funding programmes, a cascade funding model helps stimulate novel and fruitful forms of citizen science.



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## Supporting a **better matching**

### R/1

### Create innovative **funding schemes**

To incentivise SSH-intensive citizen science, funders are encouraged to launch innovative funding schemes that could include: 1) providing small scale grants, including grants for **emerging projects** and support for **partnership-building activities**; 2) setting up adapted evaluation processes, by gathering **diversified teams of evaluators** able to understand and assess projects at the intersection of research, innovation, and development —including members from the SSH, and by **rewarding them**; 3) creating grant processes adapted to the size of the grant, by **shortening the gap between submission and starting** of the projects and by allowing more **administrative flexibility** for the grant spending possibilities; 4) creating inclusive funding calls, by building grant processes adapted to the size and diversity of the applicants, by taking into account **diversified management capacities and legal frameworks**; 5) being open to a wide variety of methodologies, to unanticipated evolutions of the projects, and supporting innovation in the formats of the outcomes; 6) encouraging **integrative approaches between traditional funding and new opportunities** provided for instance by digital crowdfunding, that could lead to actions like “civic crowdfunding”; 7) supporting open science through **encouraging the connection between open access, data FAIRification and citizen science**, thus ensuring that citizen science and participatory research can be nourished by the open access research content, and can produce it in return; 8) and, finally, assessing not only the results, but also the **quality of the cooperation** that actually takes place.

### → **takeaway**

- Offer small scale grants
- Employ adapted evaluation processes
- Consider the diversity of stakeholders
- Support innovative outputs
- Connect open access and citizen science





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## Supporting a **better matching**

### **R/2** Share knowledge about **funding practices**

The constitutive diversity of citizen science is a strength rather than a weakness. Recently introduced as an umbrella term, “citizen science” gathers a wide diversity of approaches, whose diversity is made even more complex to embrace given its various translations in different national or professional languages. Funders do not always adopt the same operational definition of citizen science. They are thus encouraged to **share knowledge about best practices for citizen science funding** among themselves, by practising mutual learning about this diverse field and the means to fund it. They are also encouraged to **build funder alliances** that can allow them to push the boundaries of their respective frameworks, in order to enhance funding for citizen science. Sharing knowledge supports the adoption of best practices in terms of workflows and tools by: 1) creating model documents for grant proposals (evaluations, agreements) that take into account the diversity of stakeholders, the open science framework, and the multilingual framework of citizen science and SSH; 2) creating common evaluation workflows (to compose evaluation committees and set up the evaluation processes and criteria); 3) identifying open and interoperable services to manage the evaluation workflow, to develop **interoperable funding platforms**, to develop shared databases on funding opportunities, to apply common standards for funding metadata, and to facilitate the funding acknowledgements of research outputs. Sharing this technical know-how will **empower the organisations willing to manage cascade funding schemes**.

### → **takeaway**

- **Build synergies among funders**
- **Provide supporting documentation**
- **Share the technical know-how**
- **Develop interoperable funding platforms**



# Supporting a **better matching**

## **R/3** Articulate **local and international** dimensions

Similar to SSH research, citizen science activities are often locally grounded, employ a diversity of working languages, and are intertwined with diverse cultural backgrounds. At the same time, individual projects need to exchange knowledge through international networks addressing common topics. In doing so, they can contribute collectively to developing effective practices and informing broader funding policies at national and international scales. Taking into account **the multilingual dimension of citizen science is both a challenge and an opportunity**. In this respect, **the wording used in the calls for proposals is key to reduce any potential mismatch between funders and funded entities**. It is important to preserve the variety of ways of naming citizen science in the national languages as well as in professional languages while supporting all stakeholders to recognize that they are contributing to a common field. Additionally, allowing funded entities to report in the language(s) they use within their project promotes clear communication about their research; this, coupled with providing access to translation and proofreading services is instrumental in effective international sharing.

The connection of the local and international dimensions can be further supported by cascade funding models. However, when using these models **the organisations that redistribute funding need specific support**: to create and manage open calls, they need access to standardised grant processes suited for SSH-intensive citizen science, including common grant application models, access to tools to manage the evaluation process, and criteria for evaluation that are shared, inclusive and open to innovation.

### → **takeaway**

- **Support multilingualism in the grant application process and reporting**
- **Pay attention to the variety of professional vocabularies**
- **Provide support to cascade funding management**



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## Wrap up

The full potential of citizen science in the social sciences and humanities can be achieved through appropriate funding. Success in providing **better visibility, recognition and funding** to these practices requires adaptation in the structures underpinning the funding systems, as well as in their evaluation processes. This change needs to take into account the **constitutive diversity** of citizen science in the social sciences and humanities, with regards to the rich diversity of stakeholders involved, approaches to citizen science and the natural and professional languages used.

**Systemic change is most likely to happen from the inside-out:** funders should be encouraged to share knowledge about their current funding schemes and practices. Funders can work together to **build a “community in action”**, a living network that would

build on and develop funding schemes for SSH-intensive citizen science.

Building complementarities between “old” and “new” funding models and funding distribution practices – including cascade funding and crowdfunding – contributes to building effective **local and international SSH-intensive citizen science practices and projects**. Citizen science in the social sciences and humanities has great potential to tackle the various scales and realities of the societal challenges we are facing today: **make it visible, get it funded**.

### To go further:

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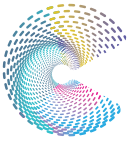
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Pelacho, M., & Sanz, F. «Landscape study on funding schemes for Social Sciences and the Humanities’ Citizen Science activities (COESO D.4.1)». Zenodo, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5137247>

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Ernst, E., Murray, C., Pelacho, M., & Morabito, L. «Funding Advocacy Action Plan (COESO D.4.3). Zenodo, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5599008>

This policy brief also draws from the discussions raised during a series of **country-based workshops addressed to funders** that the COESO consortium organised in Germany, France, Spain and Italy in May and June 2022, with the contribution of the **OPERAS national nodes** in Germany and France, the *Institut français du monde associatif*, and the **University of Turin**.



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