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BETTER
Life

NEWSLETTER

**“BRINGING EXCELLENCE
TO TRANSFORMATIVE
SOCIALY ENGAGED
RESEARCH IN LIFE
SCIENCES THROUGH
INTEGRATED DIGITAL
CENTERS”
2022–2025**

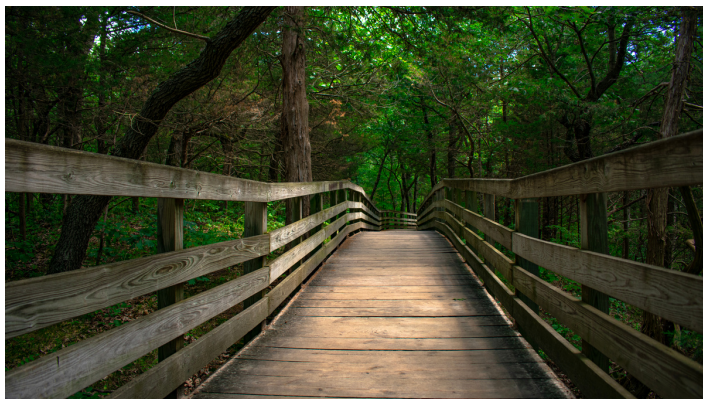


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BETTER Life

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LET'S CELEBRATE ONE YEAR OF BETTER LIFE PROJECT

When thinking about the text for this newsletter, I recognized that it has been being already one year since we started the implementation of our project named BETTER Life. It means we just celebrate one year anniversary of our common work. When looking back to see the outcomes of our activities, I think, there is a reason to celebrate. We have chance to celebrate our anniversary by our work we already did and by the work which is ahead of us. The newsletter informs about our activities because last year was full of our joint efforts, meeting, writings, and other issues reflecting work-packages of the project. I am glad we were able to build a team which has clear vision what we want to achieve: to contribute to better understanding of what must be done to make the early career researchers in life science to be more aware that their research can be socially engaged. We aim to work with early career researchers to foster such their knowledge, skills and competencies which will have the impact on society. This was the main message I wanted to deliver to the people from Idea Consult, the agency from Belgium, who were asking me about our project to provide suggestions for European Commission about better tailoring future calls under EU Horizon programme. It speaks out that our activities are already socially engaged.

Celebrations are not only the events used to think about the past. They should be used to think about the future. There are many activities in which our knowledge, we have developed, will be transferred into practical solutions aiming at preparing early career researchers to be more involved in socially engaged research. The themes like “Viticulural PDOs facing climate change, a multidisciplinary pedagogical approach for agronomist students. Case of Touraine wine in Loire valley wine region”, “A podcast to support the deployment of alternative grain-to-bread chains in Wallonia. An intermediary tool in a transdisciplinary research”, or “Participatory methodologies to promote Agroecology-based Local Agri-food Systems: Assessment of 5 case studies of Local Agroecological Dynamization in Spain” echo the nature of socially engaged research in life sciences. These themes were addressed by the presentations during the congress of European Society for Rural Sociology this year in July in Rennes. They confirm our activities are not marginal. They build an emerging new type of life sciences. The fact that our project and our activities are part of this transitioning is a perfect gift to our anniversary.



Michal Lošťák,
BETTER Life Principal Investigator

EMPOWERING CHANGE: THE ROADMAP TO SOCIALY ENGAGED RESEARCH IN LIFE SCIENCES

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of addressing societal challenges and involving diverse stakeholders in the research process. This is what we know as Socially Engaged Research (SER) and lies at the core of the BETTER Life project, taking life sciences as a pioneer field. The project has developed a comprehensive status quo of what SER entails, including policies and scientific developments, and use this status quo as a basis for the development of a framework and standards for socially engaged research.

The BETTER Life project started with characterising socially engaged research by defining its dimensions from both theoretical and practical perspectives to construe an operationalising framework. Preliminarily, the framework, built on four key dimensions (the institutional environment, stakeholders' engagement, adequacy of research, and impact) and subsequently twelve subdimensions, present a holistic view of the aspects needed to achieve SER. As a work in progress, the project will continuously refine the framework to ensure its effectiveness in guiding institutions, researchers, and stakeholders on how to make research closer to the society.



From an institutional standpoint, the framework allows institutions to identify their capacities, processes, and potential impacts related to socially engaged research. For researchers, it provides valuable insights into the requirements, support opportunities, and potential impacts associated with their engagement in research. Additionally, the framework facilitates the assessment and understanding of socially engaged research for both internal and external stakeholders.

Complementing framework, the consortium has also developed the standards for socially engaged research. From an institutional standpoint, the framework allows institutions to identify their capacities, processes, and potential impacts related to socially engaged research. For researchers, it provides valuable insights into the requirements, support opportunities, and potential impacts associated with their engagement in research. Additionally, the framework facilitates the assessment and understanding of socially engaged research for both internal and external stakeholders.

As the standards are operationalized, they constitute the evidence that demonstrate the level of achievement in each dimension. Moreover, the project is also in the process of creating tools to support the implementation within each dimension of a socially engaged research.





The BETTER Life project's efforts in developing a robust framework and standards for SER have significant implications for the field of life sciences. By promoting collaboration, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and knowledge generation that addresses societal challenges, the project aims to transform the research landscape to further positive societal impacts.

Moving forward into 2023, the project will focus on developing tools to foster SER, aligned with the framework and standards. Capacity-building activities, including virtual local and international bootcamps, as well as winter and summer schools, will be organized to support early-career researchers in conducting socially engaged research effectively.



These recent developments of the BETTER Life project mark a crucial step towards advancing SER in life sciences. With its framework and standards, the project creates a solid foundation for researchers, institutions, and stakeholders to engage meaningfully and collaboratively in research that addresses real-world challenges. By encouraging dialogue, inclusivity, and shared power, the project is poised to make a significant and positive impact on society through its socially engaged research endeavours.

TEN BETTER LIFE TOOLKITS HAVE BEEN DESIGNED

In recent months, the consortium partners have jointly designed toolkits to support Socially Engaged Research.

By supporting Early Career Researchers in navigating and leveraging the Quadruple Helix model and equipping them with the necessary tools and guidance, the project seeks to empower them to create research that aligns with real-world needs, contributes to community involvement in research, and ensures that the research initiatives have a tangible impact on addressing pressing challenges.

The toolkits were developed using a two-stage participative methodology combined with a desk research approach. The toolkits match one or more of the 12 previously identified standards, which are their “guiding stars”.



They address both the individual and the institutional level. All BETTER Life partners contributed to the development of the toolkits and spread the leadership, contribution, and interest in developing selected toolkits.

The toolkits will be further developed and operationalised through their implementation and use during WP4 activities.

More information is in the Deliverable 3.2 BETTER Life Toolkits, available at: <https://betterlifehorizon.eu/>



The BETTER Life project organized two online workshops focusing on social engaged research in life sciences and the co-creation of the strategy for the EU BETTER Life Centre in March 2023. The workshops aimed to design a framework for social engaged research in the field of life sciences and to identify key strategies and approaches for co-creating the BETTER Life Centre strategy.

BETTER LIFE PROJECT HOSTS WORKSHOPS ON SOCIALLY ENGAGED RESEARCH IN LIFE SCIENCES

The first workshop focused on co-creation of the BETTER Life Centre strategy, emphasizing the importance of working with stakeholders to develop a shared vision and strategy for the BETTER Life Centre. The session highlighted the need for co-creating the strategy, which includes defining the purpose, identifying the stakeholders, and outlining the action plan.

Through these workshops and other activities, the project aims to support the development of more sustainable and equitable solutions for improving the quality of life for all. The BETTER Life project team hopes that the knowledge and insights gained from the events will be used to develop more effective and inclusive strategies for social engaged research in the life sciences

The second event delved into designing frameworks for social engaged research in life sciences, emphasizing the importance of involving various stakeholders in the research process. The session highlighted the need for collaborative and participatory research.



BETTER LIFE: WORKSHOP ON DESIGN STANDARDS FOR SOCIALLY ENGAGED RESEARCH IN LIFE SCIENCES - APRIL 2023

The BETTER Life project, a consortium of research institutions committed to advancing socially engaged research (SER) in life sciences (LS), recently organized another online workshop to discuss the development of design standards for this area of research. The workshop brought together consortium members from various fields to share their insights and experiences with the goal of creating a set of standards that will guide the implementation of socially engaged research in life sciences.

The workshop partially followed up on two previous workshops that focused on the Framework of SER, which aimed to define the key principles, values, and practices of socially engaged research. The development of the design standards for SER in life sciences builds on the foundation established by the Framework and reflects the ongoing commitment of the BETTER Life consortium to advancing socially responsible research that is relevant and beneficial to society.

The need for standards in SER in LS arises from the increasing importance of engaging with society in the research process. Socially engaged research recognizes that scientific knowledge is not created in a vacuum, but is shaped by societal needs, values, and expectations. As such, SER seeks to integrate the perspectives and knowledge of quadruple helix stakeholders in the research process.

Based on the status quo, consultation events, and regional reports, the BETTER Life consortium aims to develop a set of standards for SER applied to life sciences on the interinstitutional level. These standards will serve as a guide to ensure that SER in LS is conducted in a rigorous and systematic manner, with appropriate consideration for the perspectives and needs of stakeholders. The standards will also provide a barometer to assess, measure, and recommend actionable items for SER in life sciences.

The workshop resulted in the identification of key issues and challenges in SER in life sciences, as well as the development of a preliminary set of design standards. These standards will be further refined and validated through consultations with stakeholders and experts, with the aim of producing a comprehensive set of standards that can guide the implementation of SER in LS.

The BETTER Life consortium believes that the development of the design standards is an important step towards promoting socially responsible research that is aligned with the needs and expectations of society. The consortium remains committed to advancing socially engaged research in life sciences and looks forward to continuing the dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders and experts in this area.





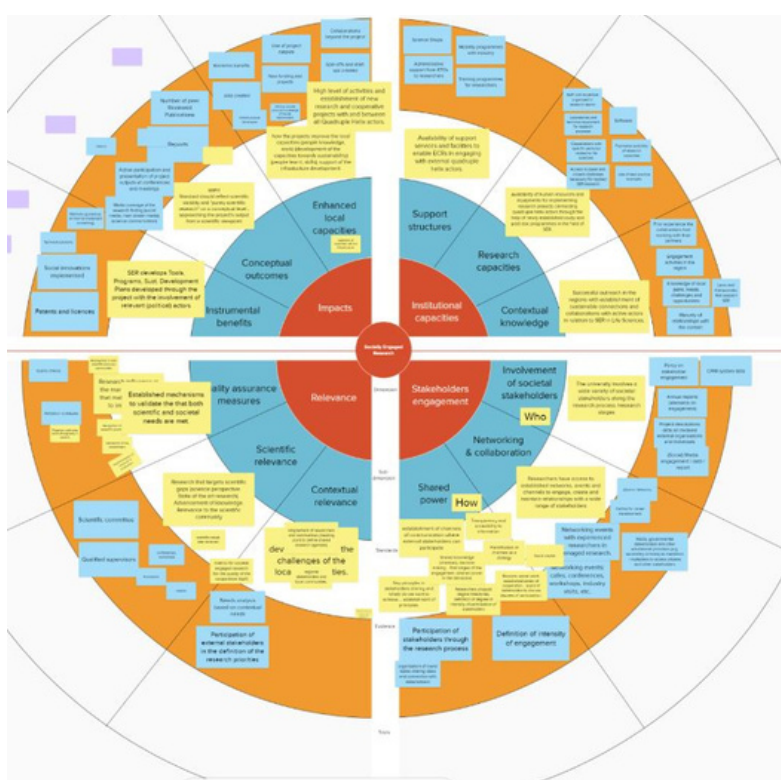
BETTER LIFE HOLDS SECOND WORKSHOP ON DESIGN STANDARDS FOR SOCIALLY ENGAGED RESEARCH IN LIFE SCIENCES

On May 17, the BETTER Life project, a consortium of research institutions dedicated to promoting socially engaged research (SER) in life sciences (LS), conducted its second online workshop. The purpose of this workshop was to further discuss the development of design standards for socially engaged research in the field.

This workshop served as a continuation of two previous workshops that focused on the Framework of SER. Those earlier workshops aimed to establish the fundamental principles, values, and practices of socially engaged research.

The development of the design standards for SER in life sciences builds upon the foundation laid by the Framework and reflects the ongoing commitment of the BETTER Life consortium to advance socially responsible research that is both relevant and beneficial to society.

The necessity for standards in SER in LS arises from the growing recognition of the importance of engaging with society throughout the research process. Socially engaged research acknowledges that scientific knowledge is not generated in isolation but rather shaped by societal needs, values, and expectations. Thus, SER seeks to integrate the perspectives and knowledge of quadruple helix stakeholders – representing academia, industry, government, and civil society – in the research process.



BETTER LIFE PROJECT HELD ANNUAL MEETING IN ITALY

The BETTER Life project recently held its annual meeting in Italy. The event took place from May 29 to May 31, 2023, at the Scuola di Ateneo di Architettura e Design in Ascoli Piceno. The meeting brought together experts, stakeholders, and project partners to discuss the progress made so far and plan future activities

The Annual Meeting was mainly focused on sessions concerning the development of standards and toolkits to facilitate the establishment of the Digital Centre of Excellence. The launch of the Digital Centre will mark a significant milestone in the project's technological advancements and digital integration

On the first day, a press conference was held to highlight the project achievements and create awareness about its objectives. The final day of the event provided the participants with a unique opportunity to engage in a guided excursion focused on an urban redevelopment plan in the Napoli neighbourhood. The participants had the chance to meet local stakeholders, including academic representatives.

As the project continues to progress, the annual meeting served as a platform for fruitful discussions, networking, and the exchange of knowledge and best practices, reinforcing the importance of socially engaged research and its impact on society.



BETTER LIFE MEETS LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES IN ASCOLI PICENO

During the BETTER Life Annual Meeting in Italy, the project representatives had a unique opportunity to meet local stakeholders, authorities, and other project representatives involved in socially engaged research.

The focus of the meeting, in the form of an outdoor excursion in a pilot area, was the urban redevelopment plan for the Tofare and via Napoli neighbourhoods. Participants had the chance to meet and communicate with local stakeholders, including academic representatives (Prof. Maria Federica Ottone, Prof. Rosalba D'Onofrio, Prof. Salvatore Santuccio, Prof. Roberta Cocci Grifoni and Dr. Simone Porfiri School of Architecture and Design, University of Camerino), as well as representatives of the local administration (Dr. Donatella Ferretti – City Hall Councillor for Culture), and of local NGOs (Dr. Claudio Bachetti – ACLI & Associazione “Cose di Questo Mondo”).

After a morning coffee and an introduction to the field trip, the participants embarked on a fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences with the local stakeholders. The visit to the neighbourhoods allowed for a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to socially engaged research and urban redevelopment in academic projects of applied research.

"COOK WITH MARIJA AND SANJA" AN EXAMPLE OF POPULARIZATION OF SCIENCE TO CHILDREN



Prof. Dr. Marija Lesjak

In a world of information overload, it is a real skill to highlight important information and an even greater skill to choose what is most useful to young, not yet fully formed people.

In the scientific community, divided into developed and developing ones, there is an equally pressing problem of decreasing investment in basic science and increasing commercialization of research and predetermined researches.

From the perspective of young researchers in undeveloped scientific communities who have no other alternative but to fit into the existing patterns and who do not have an opportunity to have freedom in choosing research topics, there is a great need to motivate and spread the importance of science in wider social community.

When individuals see and feel the benefits of applied research and get the opportunity to participate in the development of products that will improve their lives, we will have more and more well-educated individuals from wider social community.

As a result of the project's activities, we will present a great example of the popularization of socially engaged science with a slogan Science for real life in local circumstances in this month's Newsletter issue.

We spoke with the scientist and academic entrepreneur Prof. Dr. Marijom Lesjak, who is, among many other professional achievements and merits, responsible for the popularization of science among children. A few years ago she had the segment "Cook with Marija and Sanja" in the series "When the bell rings" with her colleague Sanja Belić on Vojvodina Radio and Television. Interesting experiments, explained in clear and simple terms, certainly brought science closer to the youngest viewers.

We are not even aware of how many scientific achievements we already use in our everyday life, and that is why, as much as we want to preserve investments in basic research, we also want to reduce the harmfulness of excessive consumption of natural resources and, through the additional involvement of the wider social community, to raise awareness of the power of the individual to influence the well-being of his own life and the environment in which he lives. By connecting local stakeholders (academia-local government-private sector-civil society institutions) we are achieving the following: better education for all people with new tools and technologies; faster implementation of knowledge and science results in educational system; enhanced work habits for all age groups; building a sense of accomplishment with own knowledge and skills among young people; better quality of life in local communities.

"It was a great experience. In that show we presented scientific phenomena in a very simple and entertaining way to the youngest audience, because it was intended for the audience from preschool to the fourth grade of elementary school. We enjoyed popularizing science and creating a good atmosphere for children to fall in love with science. It worked well for us and we loved doing it because we thought it was very important for young children to become interested in science, to understand that science is something phenomenal, something that will make their lives better and that will really help them in the future. Children, if they become interested in science, discover what is at the core of what surrounds us, how a tree grows, how we are alive, how we breathe, how the sun shines, why the wind blows and so on, they will naturally engage in science, to read scientific achievements as entertaining literature. It is important that people in general are interested in science because it will make them better understand the world they live in. They will better understand trends, politics, new pandemics, new environmental problems and will be able to think for themselves. Love for science creates people who are smarter, who can think for themselves, make the right decisions, and make this world better for themselves and everyone else."

NEWS FROM EDUCONS UNIVERSITY



Board of Directors Meeting of the Faculty of Ecological Agriculture at Educons University

The Faculty of Ecological Agriculture at Educons University organized a Board of Directors meeting in Vrdnik, held within the educational center. Educons University, in collaboration with prominent agricultural companies, is actively involved in projects aimed at facilitating the transfer and exchange of knowledge and skills. These initiatives foster long-term partnerships and create employment opportunities

Educons University maintains close partnerships with various companies, including the Institute for Field and Vegetable Crops, ABS GLOBAL, ECOAGRI, and others. Through these collaborations, the university develops practically-oriented teaching programs that cater to the needs of students, the labour market, and society as a whole. This collaboration ensures that students acquire relevant and practical skills while embracing innovative thinking, which is essential in today's job market.

During the networking session of this event, Dr. Andrea Andrejević Panić and Dr. Gordana Racić presented the BETTER Life project. The presentation was made not only to the Companies comprising the Board of Directors but also to the representatives of companies that had contributed to the consultation events held for the BETTER Life project.

Board of Directors Meeting of the Faculty of Environmental Protection at Educons University

The Faculty of Environmental Protection at Educons University recently convened its Board of Directors at the educational center in Vrdnik. In collaboration with prominent companies specializing in environmental protection and sustainable development, Educons University is dedicated to projects that facilitate the transfer and exchange of knowledge and skills, fostering the creation of long-term partnerships and employment opportunities. These initiatives aim to inspire innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity in addressing business and academic challenges, leveraging novel teaching, learning, and student practices.

The close cooperation between Educons University and these companies plays a vital role in jointly developing practically oriented teaching programs that cater to the needs of students, the labour market, and society as a whole. Consequently, students gain relevant and practical skills while embracing new ways of thinking that are indispensable in the job market.

During the meeting, Dr. Andrea Andrejević Panić and Dr. Gordana Racić presented the BETTER Life project, which received significant interest from colleagues in the company. The attendees expressed support for the project's objectives and advocated for further actions to be undertaken to advance sustainable environmental research in the field of life sciences.



BETTER LIFE CO-ORGANIZED ENGAGE SUMMER SCHOOL IN TARTU



The Estonian University of Life Sciences in collaboration with the BETTER Life project and other initiatives organized the ENGAGE! summer school in Tartu from August 7th to August 18th, 2023. This dynamic program had featured interactive sessions, field trips, and group work, focusing on urban green and blue infrastructure management and planning. The purpose of the summer school was to promote socially engaging science for resilient and liveable urban environments.

The school began with a two-day scoping phase offering insights into urban sustainability challenges worldwide. Participants were engaged in research training workshops covering various skills such as data collection techniques, GIS, and science-policy-society communication.

During the project phase, participants worked in groups to develop practical solutions for real-life urban problems or detailed paper proposals. The school faculty and tutors had provided guidance, and stakeholder communication was a key component.

The summer school concluded with project presentations, discussions, and graduation. Successful participants had received an ENGAGE! Certificate of Completion and 3 ECTS credits. Additionally, there were opportunities to transform final reports into academic papers or project applications.

Limited to 30 students or young experts, the ENGAGE! summer school provided an enriching learning experience fostering a memorable and enjoyable atmosphere. Visit the official ENGAGE! summer school website for more information: <https://conference.emu.ee/summerschools/engage/>

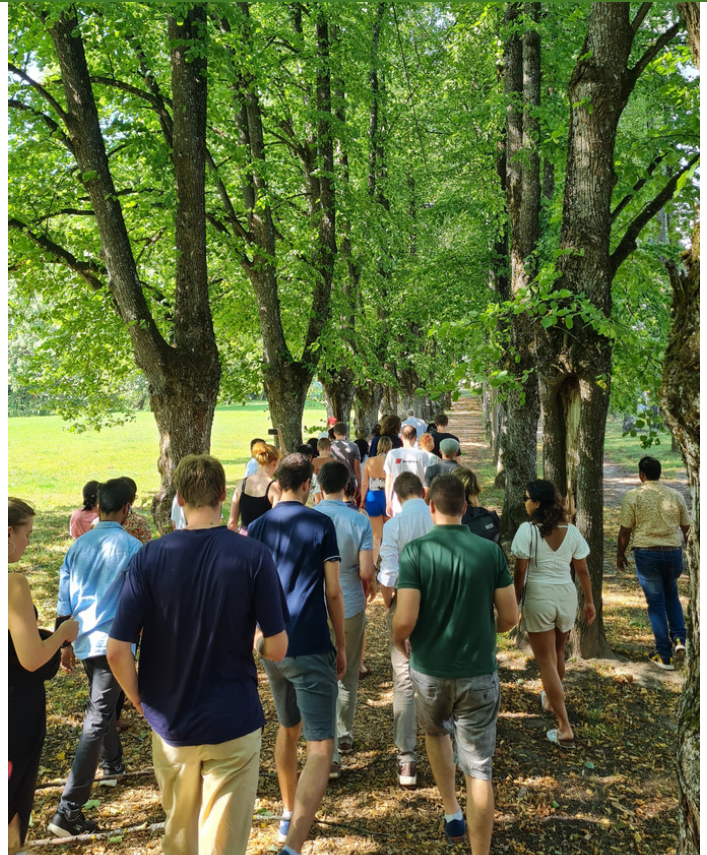
The ENGAGE! summer school in Tartu was supported by the BETTER Life project. While the summer school benefits from BETTER Life's support, it also had served as a valuable platform for the project to test its developed standards and shape the toolkits. This collaboration had ensured a mutually beneficial relationship, driving innovation and progress in socially engaged research in life sciences.

SUMMER SCHOOL IN TARTU - THE STAGE FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The highly anticipated **ENGAGE Summer School in Tartu** sets the stage for a transformative learning experience focused on enhancing science for resilient and liveable cities and socially engaged research.

Diving deep into the heart of the BETTER Life project, Patrik Toula from the Czech University of Life Sciences (CZU) and Arjan de Groot from Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (MLU) presented the project's intricate details. They elucidated the mission, vision, original idea behind the project's proposal, objectives, and goals that underpin the project approach to socially engaged research in life sciences – which is the cornerstone of the whole project. The speakers underscored the significance and implications of conducting research that resonates with communities, policymakers, and various stakeholders

One of the most interactive segments of the presentation involved the unveiling of ten tools envisioned for creation within the digital centre. These tools, designed to be innovative tools of the **Digital Centre of Excellence**, received enthusiastic feedback from participants representing various corners of the globe. The diversity of the participants is another enriching aspect of the event. Hailing from different parts of the world, including India, Mongolia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Latin America among others, participants bring a wealth of perspectives and experiences to the table. Their input and perspectives will further enrich the discourse, contributing to the ongoing refinement and development of these tools. This global gathering not only enriches the discussions but also underscores the universal relevance of the challenges and solutions being explored. Participants will work in groups to develop practical solutions for real-life urban problems or detailed paper proposals. The school faculty and tutors will provide guidance, and stakeholder communication will be a key component.



As part of the summer school and its interconnection with the BETTER Life project, one case study focusing on socially engaged research and closely connected with one of the tools is underway. The purpose of the case study is to provide an interactive and learning experience that enables participants to understand and improve the engaging performance of socially engaged research at the Estonian University of Life Sciences in Tartu.

As the event continues to unfold, it promises to be a dynamic space for cross-cultural learning, innovative idea exchange, and the incubation of practical solutions. With the BETTER Life project as a guiding light, the participants are set to emerge from this experience not just as learners but as active contributors to the future of socially engaged research.





SHARING NEWS: THE E³UDRES² ENT-R-E-NOVATORS PROJECT

The E³UDRES² Ent-r-e-novators (entrepreneurs-researchers-educators-innovators) project brings together the six founding partners of the E³UDRES² European consortium (under construction since 2020) and will be on the ground until 2025 with the mission of surveying the conditions of research work on the extensive E³UDRES² campus - from Portugal to Latvia, passing through Hungary, Romania, Austria and Belgium.

Over 36 months of project work, E³UDRES² Ent-r-e-novators proposes to carry out a diagnosis of the existing capacity at the partner institutions in terms of Research and Innovation, focusing on fundamental areas such as infrastructure, equipment and human resources, activities, RD&I lines, groups and networks, as well as Open Science policies and practices and engagement with society.

The project started in October 2022, and is funded by the European Commission, through the Horizon Europe programme, within the framework of its pillar on scientific excellence (call HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-05), which aims to strengthen the Research and Innovation capacity of higher education institutions, countries and their ecosystems. In line with its vision, mission, core values, culture and principles, the E³UDRES² Ent-r-e-novators project aims to co-create a more specific joint Research and Innovation Strategy and a common agenda to accelerate the transformation into a European multi-institutional Research and Innovation Hub for Smart and Sustainable Regions.

E³UDRES² Ent-r-e-novators is committed to scientific excellence and research integrity within its cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral key Research and Innovation (R&I) networks and promotes (future) R&I competencies, skills, resources, methods, training, services and management for collaborative research and open innovation for smart and sustainable regions.

To discover more about E³UDRES² Ent-r-e-novators visit us in our website in <https://www.entrenovators.eu/>

**“IF EVERYONE IS MOVING
FORWARD TOGETHER,
THEN SUCCESS TAKES CARE
OF ITSELF.”**

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