



NEWSLETTER

BETTER Life

AUGUST, 2025

VOLUME 6



**“Bringing
Excellence
to Transformative
Socially Engaged
Research in Life
Sciences through
Integrated Digital
Centers”
2022-2025**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome to the Final Edition of the BETTER Life Newslette	4
CZU and the Union of Local Government Units of the Czech Republic Join Forces to Support Municipal Development through Research and Education	5
BETTER Life Team at the Ethics in Public Administration Conference	6
BETTER Life Extends Its Reach Beyond Europe – and Beyond Project’s End	7
BETTER Life Annual Meeting in Tartu: Turning Progress into Long-Term Impact	8
Securing the Future of SER: Institutional Action Plans Take Shape	9
Research in Action: Dr. Sanita Kecko Connects Innovation and Community through REBUS	11
BETTER Life at the Summer School on Sustainable Development in a Regional Context	12
BETTER Life Showcased at 4th SURE World Conference in Istanbul	13
BETTER Life at ESRS: Championing Socially Engaged Research in Riga	14



WELCOME TO THE FINAL EDITION OF THE BETTER LIFE NEWSLETTER

From the start, BETTER Life set out to make life sciences more socially engaged. As project coordinator Prof. Michal Lošťák reminded us, life sciences are never value-free—they touch the very essence of life. When science is open, connected, and responsive, it not only produces knowledge but also improves people's lives.

Socially Engaged Research (SER) brings this vision to life. By involving researchers and diverse societal stakeholders at every stage—from ideas to data collection, analysis, and dissemination—SER builds bridges, enhances accountability, and sparks meaningful innovation.

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As we reflect on the project, BETTER Life's legacy is clear and inspiring. It leaves a stronger foundation for socially engaged life sciences, a Digital Centre that preserves and grows collective knowledge, and a generation of early-career researchers ready to work with—and for—society. While the project itself concludes, its impact is only beginning. BETTER Life reminds us that improving life sciences goes hand in hand with improving life itself—and that when science is rooted in society, both knowledge and people thrive.



CZU AND THE UNION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC JOIN FORCES TO SUPPORT MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH RESEARCH AND EDUCATION



A meeting between representatives of the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU) and the Union of Local Government Units of the Czech Republic (SMS ČR), which brings together over 2,500 municipalities across the country, marked the beginning of a promising collaboration aimed at connecting academia with the support of local governance.

Municipalities are the foundation of local self-government and democracy, and their development is crucial for the well-being of citizens as well as for sustainable regional progress. Both institutions see great potential in joint efforts in the fields of research, innovation, and professional education.

The two dedicated teams met at the CZU campus in which the CZU delegation was led by Vice-Rector Prof. Michal Lošťák, Principal Investigator of the BETTER Life project, while the SMS team was guided by Executive Director and Mayor of Srbc, Jana Přecechtělová.

During the meeting, the BETTER Life Academic Bridge toolkit was presented. The toolkit is designed to support collaboration between researchers and stakeholders. However, in this particular case the emphasis was on municipalities, which addressed real-life societal challenges. It offers a practical framework for co-creation and knowledge transfer between academia and local governments.

This meeting marks an important first step in what is expected to become a long-term partnership. Both sides expressed strong interest in continuing and strengthening cooperation in science, research, and lifelong learning with the shared goal of building bridges between academic expertise and the practical needs of municipalities.



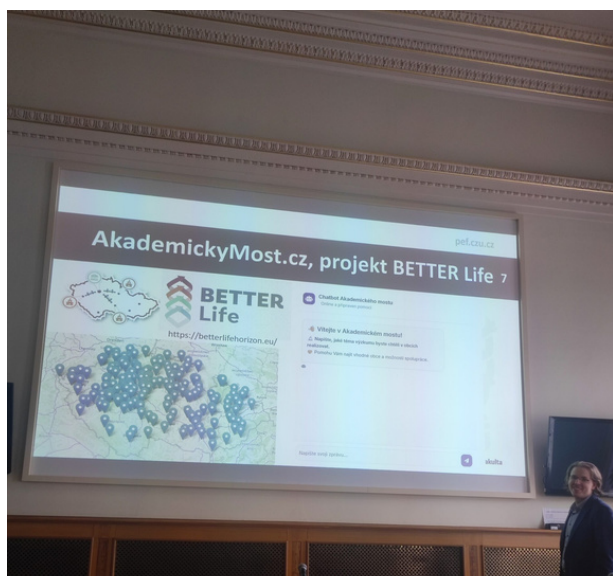


BETTER LIFE TEAM AT THE ETHICS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CONFERENCE

Members of the BETTER Liferesearch team, Milan Školník and Michael Haman, participated in the interdisciplinary conference Ethics in Public Administration, held on June 19, 2025, at the Czech Academy of Sciences.

They presented Academic Bridge, an online platform connecting researchers with public administration stakeholders.

The presentation focused on the potential of artificial intelligence to support the effective transfer of academic knowledge into practice and to promote ethical and transparent governance. The conference provided a valuable opportunity to exchange insights and build connections across sectors.





BETTER LIFE EXTENDS ITS REACH BEYOND EUROPE – AND BEYOND PROJECT’S END

As a part of a larger partnership, The BETTER Life team from the Estonian University of Life Sciences has been awarded the Erasmus+ CBHE project ENTER – Environmental open data for engaging curricula and research training.

This project has been developed as a part of the BETTER Life exploitation strategy with its central idea to promote the BETTER Life toolkit and capacity building efforts. ENTER aims to develop and pilot a sustainable model for the engagement between the academia and stakeholder communities in India and Malaysia that is driven by sharing, co-creation and joint application of environmental data.

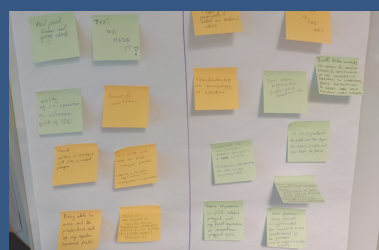
During the project lifetime ENTER will pilot 5 living labs, 4 citizen science projects by connecting them to research and educational provision. The project will develop a total of 70 ECTS of degree and micro credential courses, it will also pilot 3 hackathons and make all the learning materials available through its learning platform ENTERnet, with more than 460 enrolled students.

It will ensure access to data and research facilities to partners. ENTER will run over 20 impactful training and disseminating events addressing both academic and broader stakeholder communities with a total audience of 150 learners. This will include the events for training “engagement managers” as well as data and IT literacy at both HEIs and local communities, in particular for underrepresented and vulnerable social and gender groups.



The 36-month project is expected to commence in October 2025. It includes a total of 11 partners in Estonia, Germany, Italy, Hungary, India and Malaysia, including 8 universities, research organisations and 3 non-academic partners.

BETTER LIFE ANNUAL MEETING IN TARTU: TURNING PROGRESS INTO LONG-TERM IMPACT



In May 2025, the BETTER Life consortium gathered in Tartu, Estonia, for its annual in-person meeting, which was hosted by the Estonian University of Life Sciences. Over two days, partners celebrated achievements, exchanged insights, and shaped strategies to ensure the project's positive outcomes continue well into the future.

Tools in Action: From Feedback to Innovation

The meeting began with a deep dive into the project's key digital tools, particularly the Self-Assessment Tool and the development of institutional action plans. Partners Educons University (EDUCONS) and Helixconnect Europe (HELIXCONNECT) shared valuable user feedback, which led to thoughtful enhancements including clearer instructions, video tutorials, a CV template and a refined scoring system.

The consortium reaffirmed its commitment to completing seven tailored action plans, along with a general version designed for broader institutional adoption. These resources are set to become a strong foundation for embedding Socially Engaged Research (SER) into institutional practices, which was strengthened further by the Digital Centre of Excellence (DCoE).

Expanding Reach and Ensuring Longevity

The session "From Tools to Action" encouraged partners to identify new opportunities where digital resources can inspire long-lasting institutional change. The consortium embraced the opportunity to refine business model templates and define clear sustainability pathways together.

Planning, Reporting and Collective Progress

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU) presented the final reporting roadmap and deliverable deadlines, covering the period from December 2023 to August 2025. To support ongoing visibility and localisation, partners are actively updating national DCoE pages with translated content and visuals.

Key results so far:

- Over 100 early-career researchers completed self-assessments at partner institutions
- Over 300 additional assessments from external institutions
- Seven institutional action plans are under development
- Contributions to scientific publications, including in Triple Helix journal.

Planning, Reporting and Collective Progress

To conclude the event, participants visited Setomaa, a region in south eastern Estonia known for its rich cultural heritage and the indigenous Seto people. The visit featured traditional cooking workshops, folk dress activities and a performance of Seto leelo, the UNESCO-recognised polyphonic singing tradition. This experience reinforced the project's emphasis on local engagement and cultural sensitivity in socially engaged research.

SECURING THE FUTURE OF SER: INSTITUTIONAL ACTION PLANS TAKE SHAPE

As the BETTER Life project enters its final phase, one of its most meaningful and enduring outcomes is taking shape: the development of Institutional Action Plans by each partner institution. These plans are more than formal obligations—they represent a shared commitment to ensuring that the principles and practices of Socially Engaged Research (SER) become embedded in the everyday work of universities and research organizations across Europe.

Since its inception, BETTER Life has aimed to support a shift in how research is conceived, conducted, and communicated. Central to this has been the idea that research should not happen in isolation—but in dialogue with society. The Institutional Action Plans are the concrete next step: a way to ensure that this dialogical, inclusive, and impact-driven approach to research is not just a temporary project activity, but a long-term institutional strategy.



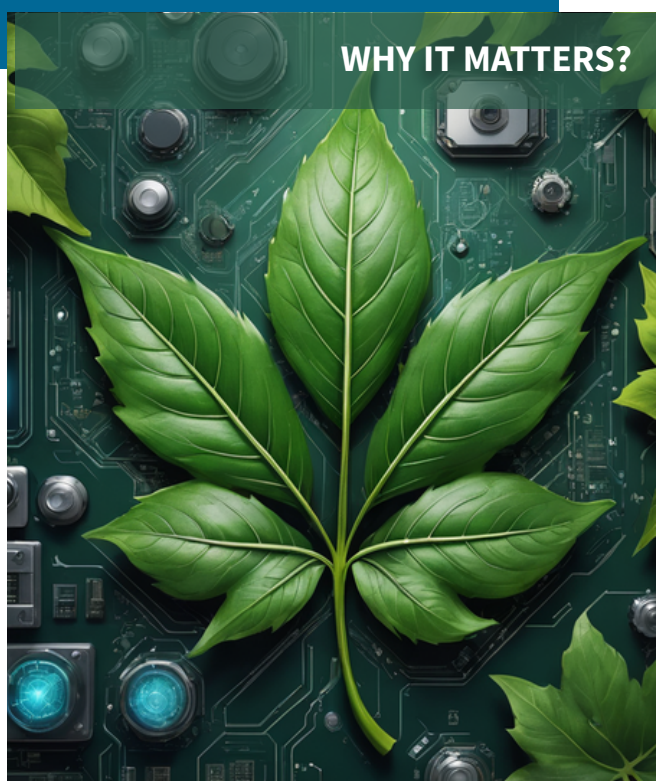
TURNING VALUES INTO STRUCTURE

BETTER Life action plan outlines how SER will be integrated into the institution's structures—academic, administrative, and strategic. While each plan reflects the unique context of the institution, they all share a common architecture, which includes:

- A clear strategic vision for SER and its alignment with the institution's mission;
- Specific implementation measures, from internal training and evaluation systems to cross-sector collaboration mechanisms;
- A selection of tools and practices developed through BETTER Life, such as the SER self-assessment tool and guidelines for stakeholder engagement;
- A time-bound plan of action with measurable outcomes;
- Designated roles and responsibilities to ensure ownership and accountability.

What emerges is a comprehensive yet flexible framework—one that allows institutions to adapt, respond, and grow while staying anchored in the values of socially engaged research





WHY IT MATTERS?

These action plans serve multiple purposes. First and foremost, they support sustainability: they ensure that the resources, practices, and knowledge developed through BETTER Life remain in use, continuously refined through institutional learning.

Second, they promote institutionalisation—that is, the integration of SER into the formal procedures, criteria, and expectations that guide how research and teaching are done. This means embedding SER into staff development, research evaluation, and strategic planning.

Third, the plans introduce structures for accountability by assigning clear responsibilities to individuals and units within the institution. They also enhance visibility and measurability, with indicators that allow progress to be tracked and shared both internally and externally. Finally, the IAPs are built for adaptability. They are not static documents, but living ones—designed to evolve in response to new challenges, emerging opportunities, and ongoing reflection.



BUILDING A CULTURE, NOT JUST A PLAN

Perhaps most significantly, the process of developing these plans has fostered meaningful dialogue within institutions. In many cases, researchers, administrators, leadership, and external stakeholders have come together to discuss what socially engaged research means in their specific context—and how it can be supported. This is where the real impact lies: in the creation of shared understanding, common goals, and institutional will.

The diversity of approaches reflects the diversity of institutional environments. But the common thread is clear: these are not one-size-fits-all solutions, but tailored strategies that translate shared European values into local action.



LOOKING AHEAD

As the BETTER Life project draws to a close, the Institutional Action Plans stand as a key legacy. They provide a foundation for lasting change, ensuring that socially engaged research continues to grow in both visibility and impact. They also offer a model that can inspire other institutions, within and beyond the project, to take concrete steps toward more open, responsible, and socially responsive research practices. In the end, BETTER Life was never just about tools or frameworks. It was and remains about people, relationships, and the belief that research can and should contribute to the public good. Through these action plans, that belief takes root in institutional practice—helping to secure a future in which science works with and for society.

RESEARCH IN ACTION: DR. SANITA KECKO CONNECTS INNOVATION AND COMMUNITY THROUGH REBUS

In the evolving landscape of socially engaged research, Dr. Sanita Kecko stands out as a bridge-builder between academia, innovation, and the wider community. As a Director of the REBUS Research and Business Centre at Daugavpils University (Latvia), she is leading a regional transformation by ensuring that research outcomes do not remain confined to academic papers, but become real-life solutions for real-life challenges.

REBUS, established in 2024, is a platform for innovation, knowledge transfer and interdisciplinary collaboration in South-Eastern part of Latvia, in one of 5 planning regions, named Latgale. Under Dr. Sanita Kecko leadership, it actively supports early career researchers (ECR) by providing access to regional partners, project incubation support, and practical tools for navigating the space between science and society.

In 2024, Dr. Sanita Kecko participated in the BETTER Life Summer School, an EU initiative dedicated to advancing socially engaged research (SER) across Europe. As a mentor, she led practical sessions on how researchers can identify community needs, how to structure their



**"A scientist today is not only
a researcher in a lab.
They are a communicator,
a problem-solver and a bridge
between academia and society,"**

Dr. Sanita Kecko emphasized
during a keynote session.

projects in order to implement them, and build sustainable partnerships with municipalities, NGOs and industries.

Her work exemplifies the synergy between the BETTER Life Digital Centre and REBUS. While the former equips young scientists with tools and frameworks for SER, REBUS ensures these ideas are implemented through collaborative projects with a measurable impact.

Beyond mentoring, Dr. Sanita Kecko is also contributing to the strategic sustainability of the BETTER Life initiative by connecting it to long-term regional development goals and building institutional capacity to continue its mission well beyond the project's lifecycle. Her leadership is a powerful reminder that true innovation thrives where knowledge, collaboration and local relevance intersect.



BETTER LIFE AT THE SUMMER SCHOOL ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT

The BETTER Life project was proudly represented at the international summer school Sustainable Development in a Regional Context, held at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU).

Dr. Diana Surová delivered two engaging lectures focused on Socially Engaged Research (SER), drawing on valuable insights and practices from the BETTER Life project. Her sessions—Socially Engaged Research: Lessons from the BETTER Life Project and Practical Examples and Class Learning in Socially Engaged Research—introduced participants to key concepts such as:

- Why we need socially engaged research
- Varieties of transdisciplinary approaches
- Who to involve in SER
- Participatory methods and tools
- Online meeting tools
- How to motivate people to participate

The summer school ran for one week and brought together undergraduate students and early-career researchers primarily from Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW) and Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU).



**BETTER
Life**

ELLS

Euroleague for Life Sciences

Socially Engaged Research
– Lessons from the BetterLife project

Ing. Diana Surová, Ph.D.
Czech University of Life Sciences Prague



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BETTER LIFE SHOWCASED AT 4TH SURE WORLD CONFERENCE IN ISTANBUL (TURKEY)

Ruthi Veibiakkim, PhD researcher at the Chair of Estonian University of Life Sciences, Environmental Protection And Landscape Management, took part in the 4th SURE World Conference held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 16-19 July 2025. This year's theme – Cities Under Global Social Transformations: Embracing Change for a Greener Future – set the stage for discussions on urban sustainability.



As a junior research fellow in environmental sciences and applied biology, Ruthi presented her paper titled “Urban Nature and Inclusive Planning: Managing Ecosystem Services, Disservices and Urban Challenges.”

In this paper, jointly with Dr. Anton Shkaruba and Prof. Kalev Sepp she explored the conceptual foundations of the BETTER Life toolkit “Integrating Citizens’ Perceptions of Urban Environmental Quality into Inclusive City Planning Processes” (Guidelines to Support Interaction of Community, Science, and Governance). In particular, she discussed the relevance of the tool to inclusive planning and the One Health approaches to managing sustainability.



30th European Society for Rural
Sociology Congress

7–11 July 2025 Rīga, Latvia

BETTER LIFE AT ESRS: CHAMPIONING SOCIALLY ENGAGED RESEARCH IN RIGA(LATVIA)

At the 30th European Society for Rural Sociology (ESRS) Congress held in Riga (Latvia), Prof. Michal Lošťák represented the BETTER Life project. His presentation, titled “Opening Window for Socially Engaged (Transdisciplinary) Research in Life Sciences,” focused on the need to rethink the role of science in society.

The contribution highlighted how the BETTER Life project supports socially engaged research by developing tools and training programs aimed at early-career researchers. These efforts help equip researchers with the skills to work across disciplinary and institutional boundaries, addressing real-world challenges in cooperation with societal stakeholders.

Prof. Michal Lošťák emphasized that transdisciplinary research is not just a methodology but a form of social innovation that reflects the growing societal demand for more relevant, inclusive, and participatory science. He shared insights from the project regarding the key obstacles and incentives for implementing such research in the life sciences.



Opening window for socially
engaged (transdisciplinary)
research in life sciences

Michal Lošťák, CZU Prague

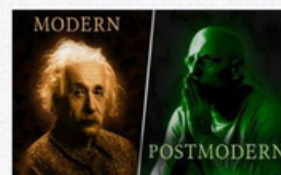
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Introductory questions and remarks

Why socially engaged research (transdisciplinary) research?

Reflects changes in the society and in the science: time when society and science face significant changes due to addressing complex issues





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