

D7.5 Report on engagement with citizen science initiatives, strategy for collaboration and possible joint activities



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What is Biodiversa+

Biodiversa+ is the European co-funded biodiversity partnership under Horizon Europe, supporting excellent research on biodiversity with an impact for policy and society. It was jointly developed by BiodivERsA and the European Commission (DG Research & Innovation and DG Environment) and was officially launched on 1 October 2021.

Biodiversa+ aims at making the bridge between science, policy and practice as part of the European Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

Biodiversa+ currently gathers 74 research programmers and funders and environmental policy actors from 36 European and associated countries to work on 5 main objectives contributing to a sustainable ecological transition in Europe:

1. Plan and support research and innovation on biodiversity through a shared strategy, annual joint calls for research projects and capacity building activities
2. Set up a transnational network of harmonised schemes to improve monitoring of biodiversity and ecosystem services across Europe
3. Contribute to high-end knowledge for deploying Nature-based Solutions and valuation of biodiversity in the private sector
4. Ensure efficient science-based support for policy-making and implementation in Europe
5. Strengthen the relevance and impact of pan-European research on biodiversity in a global context

More information at: <https://www.biodiversa.eu/>

Table of contents

What is Biodiversa+	3
Introduction.....	5
1. Citizen science initiatives mapping.....	5
2. Workshop on citizen science with WP2	7
3. Strategy collaboration and possible joint activities foreseen.....	8
3.1. Activities foreseen.....	8
3.2. Foreseen key collaboration with CETAF	9
3.3. Other citizen science initiatives.....	9
Conclusion	9

Introduction

As part of Biodiversa+ WP7 on stakeholder engagement, task 7.3 aims at advancing the participation of civil society and the co-production of knowledge with citizens.

For the first 2 years of the Partnership, activities were developed with the purpose to reinforce capacities of research to engage with citizens through citizen science. This includes the further development of the Biodiversa Citizen science toolkit (D7.3), exploring ways to further promote its use and working on advancing the understanding and evaluation of citizen science in R&I programmes (e.g. further showcasing and exemplifying successful CS approaches and factors, promoting capacities to support CS in R&I programmes, providing guidance for applicants/evaluators, etc.).

An exploration of collaboration and co-development of activities around Citizen science with CS initiatives (MS118) started through the mapping of Citizen science organisations, and the organisation of a joint workshop with task 2.3.2. on reinforcing citizen science in the relevant Biodiversa+ workstreams of activities in February 2023.

1. Citizen science initiatives mapping

In 2022, we started to map citizen science initiatives, mostly from European countries or with an international scope of actions. Some initiatives were already known by Biodiversa+ thanks to being featured in the Citizen Science toolkit, or by having previously worked with BiodivERsA.

For the rest of the initiatives identified, a scan of CS organisations was performed on eu-citizen.science and similar websites focused on citizen science. Then, Biodiversa+ partners active in the working group, as well as participants in the Biodiversa+ joint workshop in February 2023, were able to suggest initiatives and add them to the mapping.

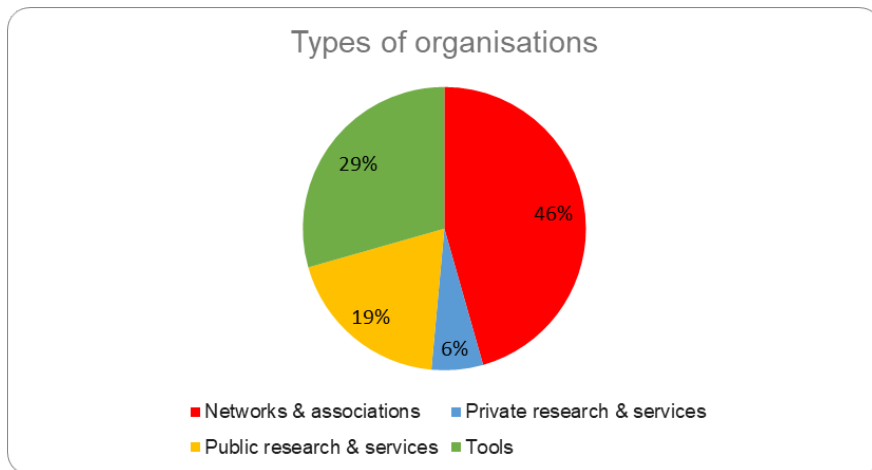
In the mapping, the organisations were classified according to the nature of their work relevant for researchers:

- Name of organisation
- Type of organisation: Networks & associations, Tools, Public research & services, or Projects
- Country (where the organisation is based)
- Scale (of activity of the organisation)
- Link (to the website)
- Topics covered (e.g. education, databases, CS tools, pollinators, mammals, nature conservation focus, observations etc.)
- Focus exclusively on Citizen Science or not

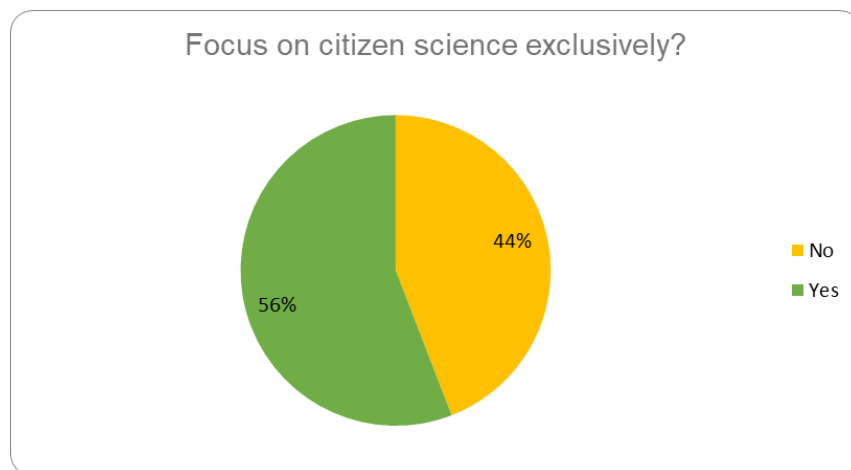
Besides assessing the citizen science landscape and the main key players, it also helped identify relevant CS stakeholders to work with potentially. For instance, with plans to develop Biodiversa+ capacity-building masterclasses on citizen science in 2024-2025, some initiatives will be very relevant to include in the work.

The mapping achieved was also a great support in targeting initiatives to invite to the workshop organised in February 2023 (see below).

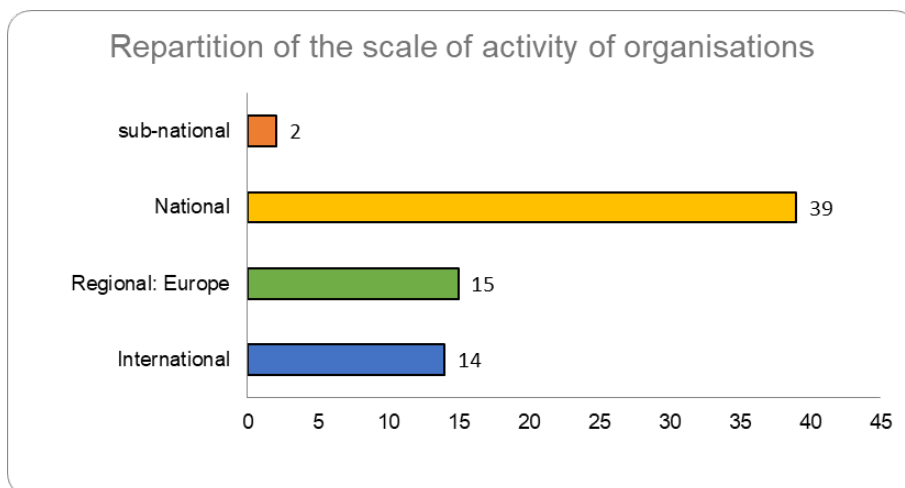
Of a total of 70 identified organisations, more than half have an exclusive focus on citizen science. The majority has activities at the national level and can be categorised as “networks & associations” or “tools” (70% combined). The three graphs below show the repartition of the identified CS initiatives in the mapping.



Graph 1: Distribution of identified citizen science organisations per type (Networks & associations, Tools, Public research & services, or Projects)



Graph 2: Repartition of the identified citizen science initiatives per their exclusive focus on CS or not



Graph 3: Repartition of the identified citizen science initiatives per scale of activity. One initiative has one scale of activity associated.

2. Workshop on citizen science with WP2

On 16th February 2023, WP7 and WP2 jointly conducted an online workshop on citizen science in biodiversity. 60 people participated in the workshop, amongst which 18 were from Biodiversa+ partners and 3 European Commission representatives, 7 from Citizen science organisations focusing on biodiversity and 6 CS organisations not only focusing on biodiversity. Also, 12 registered participants were from an Enlarged Stakeholder board member organisation, as for some organisations they are working directly with citizen sciences. Finally, some participants were from biodiversity monitoring programmes (6) and others from organisations working with citizen sciences but not as a focus of their activities (7).

The workshop is part of the second workstream of activities of Biodiversa+ on biodiversity monitoring and the transversal workstream of activities on stakeholder involvement in research & innovation. Following a plenary session with keynote speeches, the workshop participants were split into two main sessions:

- Session 1: Support citizen science approaches in biodiversity monitoring
- Session 2: reinforce citizen science in the relevant Biodiversa+ workstreams of activities

More specifically, session 1 of the workshop aimed to support citizen science approaches in biodiversity monitoring by identifying bottlenecks and challenges preventing a better use of citizen science in biodiversity monitoring. In this line, themes examined were for example governance models for data curation or the valorisation of citizen science investment in biodiversity monitoring. This workshop also aimed to identify possible support from Biodiversa+ to address these bottlenecks and challenges.

After the workshop, Biodiversa+ will promote the uptake of these needs in the development of a European biodiversity monitoring centre for which Terms of Reference are currently being designed by EuropaBON, in close collaboration with Biodiversa+ and other relevant actors. The outcomes of this workshop also aimed to help Biodiversa+ draft its annual work plan for the next two years.

Session 2 of this workshop aimed to identify relevant Citizen science initiatives to work with in future Biodiversa+ activities and to collect feedback on how citizen science could be better included in Biodiversa+ activities (e.g. in joint calls, capacity-building activities). More specifically, the outcomes of this session fed Biodiversa+ work in identifying capacity-building needs in citizen science, especially on the reinforcement of capacities for scientists to engage with citizens as well as advancing the understanding and evaluation of citizen science in research and innovation programmes.

The workshop discussions were building on previous work performed by Biodiversa, namely:

- [The Biodiversa Citizen Science Toolkit](#)
- A [Biodiversa report](#) identifying biodiversity monitoring knowledge gaps and research & innovation priorities (including for citizen science).

In the sub-group discussions, group 2 was led by the WP7, and helped to define the strategic involvement of citizen science in Biodiversa+ by responding to some guiding questions: based on the potential challenges associated with citizen science identified in the Biodiversa Citizen Science Toolkit, do you see any new barriers and/or entry points? Are there any details to the currently identified challenges that must be added to better scope the avenues of work for Biodiversa+? What are the relevant leverage points for action that Biodiversa+ can use to respond to these challenges? What are the relevant initiatives (either at local or global scale) to support and collaborate with?

The main outcomes of this session are detailed below.

During session 2, it was emphasized that there's a need for greater support and collaboration within the community, fostering connections between citizen science (CS) projects and expertise from outside the research community, such as non-governmental organizations, which hold valuable CS knowledge.

The session also highlighted the importance of capacity building and raising awareness about CS, particularly in schools and education programs. Collaborating with existing initiatives and providing support for such programs was discussed as a possible means to achieve this goal.

Funding and calls for CS projects were much discussed, with a specific role proposed for Biodiversa+ in supporting the integration and valorisation of CS in scientific projects. The session stressed the importance of allowing non-academic entities, including private organisations, to participate in consortiums responding to calls, as they often possess valuable CS expertise.

It was noted that a significant amount of CS expertise and infrastructure resides with organisations that are only in part or even not eligible for public research funding. The session highlighted the added value of including these entities as funded partners in consortia where relevant.

Another important outcome was the need to sustain research that explores the valorisation and impact of CS itself, not just research that employs CS as a tool. This broader perspective can lead to more comprehensive insights and outcomes.

Finally, there was recognition of a general mismatch between research life cycles and CS life cycles. Biodiversa+ was identified as having the potential to address this mismatch using the levers and strategies discussed throughout the session.

To the question "What are the relevant initiatives (either at a local or global scale) to support and collaborate with?", the responses contained initiatives, projects and case studies that were then featured in the mapping of initiatives.

3. Strategy collaboration and possible joint activities foreseen

3.1. Activities foreseen

The first workshop in February 2023 was key in doing a first scope of Biodiversa+ added value in the CS landscape and potential activities to lead and/or to support in collaboration with other initiatives.

The Biodiversa+ WP7 (stakeholder engagement) and WP2 (Promote and support transnational biodiversity monitoring) will have dedicated activities to citizen science. More specifically, for WP7, and thanks to the outcomes of the scoping WS on Biodiversa+ strategy towards CS, it has been decided to focus on capacity building for researchers. To that extent, masterclasses will be developed to explore more focused topics related to CS, with potential collaboration with specialist CS initiatives to develop these. Also, the further development of annexes to the citizen science toolkit is foreseen (including information on the collection of case studies and data, good and bad practices, and key identified topics), that may be featured in masterclasses when relevant, and with potential collaboration of relevant key players of the CS landscape.

3.2. Foreseen key collaboration with CETAF

CETAF stands for Consortium of European Taxonomic Facilities. It is a network of biological and geological collections, and leading the European voice for taxonomy and systematic biology.

Initial discussions with CETAF on collaboration started, and the General Assembly of Biodiversa+ formally agreed to explore what could be the avenues of work of a key collaboration with CETAF, to collaborate on the topic of citizen science. CETAF is a key organisation to engage with when it comes to citizen science and taxonomy.

3.3. Other citizen science initiatives

Several other initiatives mapped are already appearing as promising for future collaboration on this theme. That is the case for the European Citizen Science Association (ECSA), and GBIF, for which the General Assembly approved to explore a potential key collaboration. Biodiversa+ is already actively working with the latter in activities in WP2 and WP5 to align their priorities and strategies on transnational monitoring design and governance, upscaling from national to regional of monitoring best practices, support open science development, work on taxonomic, potential co-design of some flagship programmes. Biodiversa+ and GBIF collaborated to organise a joint workshop on “data beyond borders” and in the monitoring pilot governance. The collaboration is still foreseen to be pursued.

Besides GBIF, other CS initiatives mapped are already very active within Biodiversa+ such as EarthWatch which is a member of the Biodiversa+ Enlarged Stakeholder Board until at least September 2025. Earthwatch representatives actively participated in the February CS WS along with other Board members.

Biodiversa+ aims at extending the collaboration with citizen science initiatives that have experience on the topic, to collaborate in the development of the masterclasses. More specifically, they will be offered opportunities to feature their tools and expertise in these capacity-building activities for Biodiversa-funded projects.

Conclusion

As part of the development of Biodiversa+ strategy related to citizen science, several key initiatives such as ECSA and CETAF were identified to collaborate with. As discussions have already started with GBIF, CETAF and private sector organisations like Earthwatch, exchanges with other initiatives such as ECSA or iNaturalist still need to be formalised.

It is foreseen to develop more direct interactions with CS initiatives, either at the EU level or local level, in order to refine the topics for the masterclasses and develop collaboration with initiatives that would be relevant to participate in these trainings (e.g. specific expertise, tools and case studies to feature).

An implementation WS for the citizen science strategy of Biodiversa+ is foreseen, with experts from CS organisations, to support the development of the Biodiversa+ CS strategy and keep refining its position and added value in the landscape. The outcomes of this workshop, in which key initiatives identified will participate, aim to also feed the D7.14, an update of this current report that will be enriched with a strategic roadmap of Biodiversa+ for the years to come.

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