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ECSA openness guidelines

Introduction and background

The commitment to develop ECSA into a more open organisation is rooted in the legacy of the DITOs project.[1] DITOs was ECSA's first EU-funded project, running from June 2016 to May 2019. It was also the first major investment in the early phases of organization-building at ECSA.

The aim to build ECSA's capacity was successful. The number of members has grown; capacities within ECSA headquarters have increased; we successfully managed the first two transitions in leadership; our communication channels have been diversified; we are now funded partners in a number of EU projects; and the ecosystem of related networks and relations to neighbouring communities of practice has both grown and strengthened.

Additionally, ECSA has been designated the legacy organization for both the DITOs and EU-Citizen.Science projects. This means it can continue to promote citizen science, understood in a pluralistic way, and strengthen European cooperation and cross-fertilization between citizen science and DIY science practitioners.

ECSA used the DITOs project as an opportunity to discuss what this would mean in practice and how this can be achieved with ECSA members, partner organizations, staff, critics, competitors, funders of research and engagement initiatives, policy-makers and other stakeholders.[2] While the concrete nature of such support will always depend on the specific context, overarching principles can be identified for how ECSA shall realize its role as the central network organization to nurture a thriving, diverse and inclusive community of practice. In summary, we call this 'working openly'. It comes into play, for example, in the definitions that we use, how we interact with members, and how our team works.

This document outlines ECSA's commitment, as an association and practitioner network, to make working openly one of the fundamental pillars of its actions. This commitment is meant to guide strategically our future organizational development and programmatic work, for instance through orienting funding proposals, working group activities and conferences. This document provides a concept for working openly and results from the first practical applications. It acts as a basis for further experimentation and iterative refinement.

[1] This is explored in more detail in DITOs (2019).
[2] More on this work is documented in DITOs (2019).

This work emerged through the Doing-It-Together science (DITOs) project and other projects that ECSA has participated in. It constitutes an important part of the legacy of these projects, which ECSA is committed to building upon.

Six dimensions of openness for citizen science

ECSA is committed to becoming a more open organization, and to fostering openness by supporting citizen science practitioners. For us, this includes the following.

1. Using pluralistic concepts of citizen science that are based on a diversity of participation practices and account for multiple possible contributions to science. This is essential to realize the transformative potential of citizen science (cf. Strasser et al. 2018). The DITOs escalator model (DITOs 2016) represents a productive way to address this.

ECSA's commitment to using pluralistic concepts of citizen science complements the 10 principles of citizen science (Robinson et al. 2018) and ensures leeway for future innovations of this evolving research practice. Within the WeObserve project, ECSA is identifying diverse definitions and concepts of what makes a citizen observatory, to gain insights into the development, operation and challenges facing citizen observatories in Europe.

2. Improving situated openness of data and projects is another key challenge. An important share of citizen science activities are dedicated to data gathering and analysis. ECSA is committed to supporting the creation of frameworks to improve data findability, accessibility, interoperability and reusability (FAIR data)[3] and to address questions on privacy, data security, usage rights and ownership, with sensitivity to data that emerges from indigenous peoples' or marginalized groups' efforts. As part of the PANELFIT project,[4] ECSA is building a citizens information pack to make information about privacy issues and rights more accessible to the public.

3. Addressing questions of power head-on and more thoroughly is a third important call to action. Citizen science draws a lot of its visionary strength from concepts such as participation and democracy. It is important to critically interrogate different approaches of participatory research regarding their historical, social, political and moral contexts. ECSA is committed to making this a core dimension of its work.

4. Building more open organizations is a central task for adapting research infrastructures to participatory research. Doing citizen science and DIY science requires a shift in organizational cultures to enable working with people within and outside scientific institutions in new ways. In DITOs, the concept of innovation hubs was developed to guide

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FAIR_data
[4] https://www.panelfit.eu/

such processes (DITOs 2019). As an umbrella organization, ECSA is committed to supporting members and partners in becoming more open organizations.

5. Promoting cross-border cooperation and cultural diversity is important to improve citizen science. Environmental problems do not stop at national borders and the exchange of good practice is a motor of growth of citizen science communities worldwide. Collaborations, networks and platforms need to take the diversity of infrastructures and cultures for public engagement, research and civic action into account.

In the D-NOSES project,[5] within which ECSA is leading the German pilot study, each issue of odour pollution is addressed locally to incorporate local conditions and approaches. ECSA approaches this diversity as a richness to build on. Sensitivity to cultural practices and traditions should be part of this practice.

Similarly, within the WeObserve project,[6] ECSA is an active member of the communities of practice that are strengthening the knowledge base for tackling environmental challenges using citizen observatory-driven science, and extending the geographical coverage of this knowledge base to new communities to support the implementation of best practices and standards across multiple sectors.

6. Fair working conditions, team support and self-care are an essential basis for the growth of citizen science. Structures need to be improved to offer good working conditions and fair compensation. Nurturing healthy teams and self-care should become an explicitly supported practice at workplaces, both for academic researchers and volunteers engaging with citizen science. ECSA is committed to exploring this area further, and implementing internal measures to support better working conditions at its headquarters.

Making ECSA more open: first procedures and structures

During DITOs, we implemented these principles in a series of pilot activities that shall be continued, expanded and evaluated to serve as a basis for future activities. The first lessons learned are included in training materials for ECSA staff.

- **ECSA's work should be accessible, visible and inclusive.** Our projects, members, committees and procedures need to be documented transparently on the ECSA website. Our resources and infrastructures should become more accessible (e.g. through a website with more languages).

[5] https://dnoses.eu/
[6] https://www.weobserve.eu/about/wo/

- When **representing citizen science communities**, for example at events or in policy briefs, ECSA needs to ensure that it is drawing on insights from across the diversity of citizen science approaches and disciplines, and representing them as fully as possible. This can be done, for instance, by providing a pluralistic and nuanced definition of citizen science, rather than a narrowly defined one. Another way is to invite a number of practitioners and experts from different subfields to bring forward their views and experiences, instead of providing a single voice for an allegedly uniform citizen science community. The co-creation of a pluralistic and nuanced definition of citizen science, through the involvement of stakeholders from all possible fields, is one of the fundamental tasks of the EU-Citizen.Science project,[7] which is building a central platform for citizen science across Europe, and for which ECSA is the legacy partner.
- Beyond representation, diversity should also inform **ECSA's strategies for community building,** drawing in new members and communication.
- **Encourage diversity and inclusiveness for ECSA knowledge-gathering and capacity-building activities.** As a European umbrella organization, ECSA often undertakes and supports synthesis work and the collection of good practice. While the aim is to involve as many relevant stakeholders as possible to increase quality and promote uptake, not all stakeholder groups are represented equally. For example among the ECSA membership and those participating in citizen science events, people from CSOs, freelancers, SMEs, and citizen scientists are still underrepresented. Strengthening the role of civil society, and of those actors in new and more irregular professional roles, should be a strategic priority. ECSA has started changing its event timing and framing to make the participation of those with other jobs more feasible. We have also started to experiment with co-keynote speakers, having a member of a research institution and a CSO present together on a cooperation project they undertook. For the international conference in 2020, more measures for inclusiveness are planned by the working group on empowerment, inclusiveness and equity. Another concrete measure is to create a procedure to pay a modest honorarium for actively contributing to ECSA events, which is designed to support the participation of CSOs, freelancers, SMEs and citizen scientists in knowledge-gathering and capacity-building activities.
- When planning for events as part of proposals, a useful way to increase inclusiveness is to reserve some **money for open calls for activities**. We have experimented with this for the teacher training workshops in DITOs, and could multiply the capacities used for the project, increase the reach beyond consortium partners and bring more practitioners into the ECSA network.

[7] https://eu-citizen.science/

- ECSA working groups are key instruments for bringing work on topic areas further, such as interoperability, citizen science and education, and national citizen science platforms. Two ECSA working groups - on citizen science and open science, and on empowerment, inclusiveness and equity - have dedicated time to the development and testing of small steps for working more openly. These experiences have now been documented and enriched with resources and workflows in a **guide for working group chairs and ECSA staff**.

Sources

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