

DCitizens Fostering Digital Civics Research and Innovation in Lisbon

DELIVERABLE 3.2: Mid-term Report on ESR Activities

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Executive Summary

The deliverable reports on the major developments of Work Package 3 (WP3) and its primary objective within the DCitizens project: to elevate the scientific profile of Early-Stage Researchers (ESRs) through three core activities. First, the project facilitates scientific exchanges and internships, aiming to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing between ESRs and partner institutions. These exchanges typically span one week, while internships offer extended engagement opportunities lasting up to three weeks. Through these experiences, ESRs not only contribute to ongoing research activities but also gain valuable insights into different research methodologies and practices. Second, we support ESRs in participating in international conferences and scientific events. This involvement enables ESRs to present their research findings, engage with the broader academic community, and establish professional networks. By attending these events, ESRs gain exposure to cutting-edge research in their field, fostering a culture of continuous learning and collaboration. Third, the project provides targeted training courses tailored to the specific needs of ESRs. These courses go beyond traditional academic training, focusing on practical, hands-on experiences and methodological knowledge essential for conducting research in Digital Civics. Covering topics such as participatory research methodologies, academic writing, and presentation skills, these courses equip ESRs with the tools and skills necessary for success in their academic and professional endeavours. Overall, by focusing on these three activities, WP3 aims to empower ESRs with the necessary knowledge, skills, and experiences to become proficient researchers in the field of Digital Civics.

In WP3, significant progress has been made towards enhancing the scientific profile of ESRs within DCitizens. Notably, the project facilitated 16 ESR exchanges, supported 19 participations in premier international conferences and workshops, and delivered six comprehensive training sessions focused on participatory research. These achievements align with the project's key performance indicators and demonstrate a commitment to providing hands-on, excellence-driven training to ESRs.

This document provides an overview of the activities and outcomes of WP3 within the DCitizens project. It begins with an introduction outlining the interconnected nature of the project's work packages and the focus on training ESRs. Following this, the document is organised into three main sections corresponding to the major tasks of WP3: Scientific Exchanges and Internships, Participation in Conferences and Scientific Events, and Training Activities for ESRs. Each section describes the objectives, implementation, and outcomes of the respective task. Finally, it concludes with a summary of planned future activities within WP3.

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1 Introduction

A central aspect of DCitizens is training early-stage researchers (ESR). In Lisbon, the project aims to enable these ESRs to organise future municipal exchange projects between universities and civil society.

In DCitizens, several work packages (WPs) are interlinked: the Staff Exchanges (WP1), Organisation of Joint Events (WP2) such as the summer schools and the invited lecture series, Project Management Trainings (WP5), and this ESR training programme (WP3).

The focus is not on individual training for basic academic skills and personal career planning, but instead on in-depth, practice-oriented experiences of cooperation between higher education and local communities.

WP3 aims to provide very practice-oriented and methodological basic knowledge based on successful local examples that help to build local research and development infrastructures for municipal communities and civil society.

In cooperation with the other partners, the ESR training aims to harness local knowledge for transfer to other community contexts, following a socio-technical development perspective. The international academic partners are facilitators, opening opportunities and giving access to co-designing socio-technical, enabling infrastructures and good practice examples (PraxLabs, FabLab and computer clubs) – for the transfer of methods and experiences.

Besides basic academic skills (e.g., how to write a paper, how to publish in international conferences/journals, how to polish CHI submissions, how to do successful PhD research, how to write funding proposals, and how to do a good presentation), the ESR training programme focuses on practice-based, hands-on training measures for the transfer of methodological, conceptual and theoretical basics (e.g., grounded design, Design Case Studies, Participatory Action Research, and Participatory design).

WP3 - Enhancing the Scientific Profile of ESR - comprises three major tasks: T1) Scientific exchanges and internships, T2) Participation in conferences and events, and T3) Training courses for ESR. The following sections describe the work in each of these tasks. Finally, we conclude by describing key performance indicators and achieved results until the 16th month of the project.

2 Scientific Exchanges and Internships

Most ESR exchanges between partners were planned for a one-week stay, while internships could last up to three weeks. Exchanges aim to enhance IST-ID research and innovation competence in Digital Civics, share knowledge, and build rapport between partners. Internships are inherently longer stays, allowing ESR to collaborate

on scientific activities with the Twinning partners (e.g., prototypes, research activities, event organisation, and paper writing).

Overall, DCitizens supported 16 weeks of ESR exchanges in the first year. D1.2 - Mid-term Staff Exchange Report provides a detailed description of all exchanges. Most ESR exchanges occurred during the projects' lab retreat in Siegen in November 2023 (see Section 4 - Training Activities for ESRs).

We supported an [internship at Umeå University](#), where Prof. Teresa Almeida hosted Ana Henriques (IST-ID) to collaborate on a lecture series related to Digital Civics, Ethics, and Participatory Research. For 2024, DCitizens intends to continue executing the exchange program proposed in D3.1 - ESR Training Programme - and improve the projects' internship program by co-organising a "Digital Civics Exchange" (<https://www.dcx.events/>) at Newcastle. We plan to leverage an existing internship programme between Purdue and Indiana Universities with UNN. IST-ID will support four ESR internships to have hands-on experience crafting citizen-centric digital technologies in Newcastle in May 2024.

Finally, IST-ID also supported a Summer Internship for an undergraduate student who worked on Civic Technologies to support both commissioned case studies of WP4 - Joint Research. The student conducted ethnographic field research (observations, interviews, workshops) for three months and contributed to a community-based web platform.

3 Participation in Conferences and Scientific Events

In 2023, DCitizens supported 15 participations from IST-ID (100% women) in premier international conferences and workshops related to Digital Civics. We adopted a strategy of supporting in-person and online events to optimise exposure and financial resources. Moreover, we also supported workshop participation to provide students with hands-on and networking experiences during scientific conferences. We supported:

- The in-person attendance of Soraia Paulo (PhD student) at the ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI'23).
- The in-person attendance of Patricia Piedade (MSc student) at the INTERACT IFIP TC13 International Conference (INTERACT'23) and co-located workshop on Designing Technology for Neurodivergent Self-Determination: Challenges and Opportunities.
- The remote attendance of Ana Henriques (PhD student) at the ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW'23) and workshop on A Toolbox for Feminist Wonder: Theories and Methods that can Make a Difference.
- The in-person attendance of Katharina Buckmayer (PhD student), Patricia Piedade (MSc student), Ana Henriques (PhD student), and Filipa Rocha (PhD

student) at the ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility (ASSETS'23). Patricia Piedade, Ana Henriques, and Filipa Rocha also participated in the co-located workshop on tackling the Lack of a Practical Guide in Disability-Centered Research.

In 2024, DCitizens already supported the participation of Katharina Buckmayer and Filipa Rocha at the ACM Interaction Design and Children conference (IDC'24) and the workshop Participatory Design with Young Children: Failures, Challenges and Successes.

4 Training Activities for ESRs

From November 21st to 23rd, 2023, the University of Siegen hosted 25 guests in a three-day program of training sessions focused on enhancing the research potential of ESRs within the DCitizens consortium. The program comprised the following sessions:

ESR Training 1 with Margarita Grinko, M.Sc.: Presentation on "Trust in Participatory Research". Drawing on literature and current field research projects, Grinko explored the meaning of trust within participatory research settings, emphasising the role of trust in fostering a collaborative environment that facilitates engagement and knowledge exchange among researchers and participants. Attendees actively engaged with the topic, discussing trust building within diverse communities, power imbalances, and ethical considerations in participatory research. By questioning how trust is established and why it is important, Grinko's presentation prompted ESRs to reflect on their research practices, contributing to a deeper understanding of trust dynamics in participatory research.

ESR Training 2 with Philip Engelbutzeder: "Participatory Research and Resilience". This session discussed sustainable practices such as surplus redistribution, fairness, and urban gardening, aiming to promote resilience within grassroots communities. Participants visited and learned about [ReSi's MitWelt](#), an initiative established in 2020 through collaboration between citizens and the University of Siegen that promotes resilient practices and fosters a culture of sharing in the region. The project facilitates participatory development, testing, and implementation of sustainable distribution, production, repair, and education models. Participants in the session raised questions and shared insights on community engagement in participatory design, technology integration, sustainability and resilience building.

Round Table Discussion: "Citizens – Collaborators, Clients, or Victims?" Participants engaged in a thought-provoking discussion exploring the multifaceted roles of citizens in research endeavours. Topics included the dynamics of citizen involvement as partners, beneficiaries, or subjects within the research process. Questions were raised about power dynamics, ethical considerations, and the impact of citizen engagement on research outcomes. The conversation fostered a broader

understanding of the complexities surrounding citizen participation in research and highlighted the importance of ethical and collaborative approaches to engagement.

ESR Training 3 with Dr. Max Krüger: "Careful Intervention - Participatory Research with Vulnerable Persons". This session addressed ethical considerations when conducting research with vulnerable populations, emphasising reflexivity, power dynamics, and ethical engagement. Sharing his experiences working with refugees, Krüger cautioned against heroising researchers and stressed the importance of nuanced understanding, drawing on Care Theory. To conclude, he emphasised the importance of the young researchers remaining attentive to their perspectives and behaviours in participatory design while suggesting techniques for cultivating continuous critical reflection.

ESR Training 4: Alumni Career Planning. In a Q&A format, this session aimed at guiding ESRs in navigating their next career steps. Dr. Martin Stein, co-founder of the start-up open.INC shared how his university experience influenced his business development, emphasising ongoing involvement in university projects. Additionally, Dr. Peter Tomie, with extensive experience in academia and industry (including roles at Xerox Research Centre Europe's Cambridge laboratory), provided insights into various career paths. Discussions covered transitioning to industry, maintaining connections with the university, and practical strategies for career advancement. The session sought to equip ESRs with actionable steps for transitioning to their desired career paths, whether within academia or beyond.

ESR Training 5 with Marios Mouratidis, M.Sc.: "FabLab Siegen and House of Innovation – Communal Co-Design and Making". This session introduced participants to the [FabLab Siegen](#), emphasising its collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to innovation and experimentation. Participants took a tour of the FabLab, an interdisciplinary open-to-all space focusing on collaborative experimentation and project implementation across various fields, fostering a culture of knowledge exchange and community involvement. They explored the array of tools and equipment available, including 3D printers, laser cutters, CNC milling machines, sewing machines, cutting plotters, and various materials and parts.

ESR training 6 with Dennis Kirschsieper: ^[L1]_[SEP] "Participatory Research in Neighborhood PRAXLABS" The session explored projects within the [PRAXLABS](#), a research and competence network established in Germany since 2009. ESRs gained insights into the 'Caring Community Obfelden', an initiative aimed to develop new care models for individuals with complex needs to facilitate long-term residence at home. ESRs discussed the challenges of citizen science in a hybrid setting and the importance of enhancing context understanding and identifying stakeholders' needs. Key reflections emphasised navigating power dynamics and uncertainties surrounding scientific methods while maintaining an inclusive and enjoyable participatory research environment.

The three-day program at the University of Siegen aimed to equip ESRs with knowledge and ethical considerations to conduct participatory research effectively. Attendees demonstrated high levels of participation, actively engaging in the sessions through questioning, suggesting, and contributing their personal experiences, thereby enriching the discussions with diverse insights and perspectives.

Other key training activities for ESRs include the Summer School in Lisbon, the International Internship Programme at Newcastle, and the Invited Lecture Series from WP2, described in D2.2 - Mid-term Report on Joint Events.

5 Conclusion

Overall, until month 16, DCitizens supported 20 ESR exchanges between partners, 17 conferences and workshops participation in premier academic venues, and six short courses related to Participatory Research in a 3-day event. These results fulfil all key performance indicators proposed in the Grant Agreement (see Table 1).

Table 1. Key Performance Indicators related to WP3 from Month (M) 1 to 24.

Key Performance Indicators	Target M1 to M12	Result M1 to M12	Target M13 to M24	Result M13 to M16
Internships and exchanges	2	16	2	4
Conference and workshop participation	10	15	10	4
Short courses (number / participants)	1 / 10	6 / 72	1 / 10	- / -

Among the next steps planned by the University of Siegen within the DCitizens project and its WP3 is participation in upcoming ESR training sessions. These sessions are scheduled to take place at Northumbria University in Newcastle in May 2024 and at the IIT (Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia) in Genova in November (date to be confirmed). In the final year of DCitizens, we will continue following the same strategy to provide a hands-on and excellence-driven training programme to ESRs by leveraging the international internship programme at Newcastle and the annual joint lab retreat.

Such visits will afford our ESRs the opportunity for immersive learning and collaboration in topics related to digital civics and participatory design. Additionally, it will enable the project coordinators from Siegen to strengthen ties with fellow researchers within the consortium and discuss the progress of the DCitizens initiative.