

NEWSLETTER

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



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BETTER LIFE REPRESENTED IN CZECH PRESTIGE MAGAZINE: SCIENCE AND RESEARCH



VĚDAVÝZKUM.CZ
Nezávislé informace o vědě a výzkumu

VĚDA POLITIKA INOVACE A TRANSFER ROZHOVORY ANALÝZY NÁZORY GRANTY A DOTACE AKCE PODCASTY ZPRÁVY PRACOVNÍ POZICE

Michal Lošťák: Lze dělat vědu jinak? Ano, či ne?
11.12.2024

[věda](#) [Česká zemědělská univerzita](#)

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ZPRAVODAJ
Chci zpravodaj

Možná bude někomu tento titulěk znít divně. Onen údiv je však vyjádřen v samotné otázce – zda je možné, či zda není možné dělat vědu jinak, než tomu bylo po předchozí staletí.

The prestigious magazine Věda a Výzkum (Science and Research) recently featured an article titled “Lze dělat vědu jinak? Ano, či ne?” (“Can Science Be Done Differently? Yes, or No?”) by Prof. Michal Lošťák, the principal investigator of the BETTER Life project and first vice-rector of CZU. The article highlights BETTER Life as an innovative initiative reshaping scientific research in the Czech Republic. Addressing the central question, BETTER Life proves that the answer is a resounding “yes.”

BETTER Life bridges theory and practice, fostering collaboration between academia, industries, and international partners. By prioritizing practical outcomes, it ensures research translates into solutions that improve lives.

Key principles of BETTER Life include encouraging cross-disciplinary and global partnerships, focusing on research that solves real-world challenges, and adapting methods to meet society’s evolving needs.

BETTER Life demonstrates that science can be more impactful, inclusive, and transformative. By doing science differently, it paves the way for a better, more sustainable future. Read the full article in Czech language here: [Michal Lošťák: Lze dělat vědu jinak? Ano, či ne?](#)

IS IT POSSIBLE TO DO SCIENCE DIFFERENTLY?

This headline may sound strange to some. The surprise, however, is expressed within the question itself – whether it is possible, or not possible, to do science differently than it has been done for centuries.

Scientists approach the external world, which is the center of their research activities, from the perspective of specially prepared individuals. They possess a unique language and methods that are not accessible to ordinary common sense but require long-term professional cultivation, constant reflection, and refinement. Those who engage in scientific work explore the world around us using these methods (they interact with it) to bring new and innovative discoveries that help us better understand the surrounding world, with the aim of ensuring future prosperity for humanity.

This centuries-old way of doing science is based on a particular position where those conducting scientific research can only act if they are separated from the world they are studying. Scientists are thus in a position where they should not be a part of the world they are examining, in order for their scientific findings to be objective. This is how science has functioned for centuries, bringing progress to humanity. Therefore, it is logical to ask: why should science be done any differently?

The BETTER Life project (Bringing Excellence to Transformative Engaged Research in Life Sciences through Integrated Digital Centres), supported by the Horizon program, demonstrates that the answer to the question posed in the headline can indeed be “yes.” As suggested by the project’s title, it is transformative because it changes the concept of doing science and directly engages scientists in the world they are studying. Scientists do not stand apart from the world they are researching; rather, they are part of it, alongside other stakeholders. People from the scientific community move beyond the boundaries of their disciplines and employ transdisciplinary approaches.



Science is not only shaped by scientists, but is co-created with others, including various representatives of society, civil sectors, government, local administration and businesses of various sizes, turnovers and sectors.

The BETTER Life project contributes to a shift in the perspective of how science can be done. The key phrase here is “how science can also be done.” This does not mean that science must only be done in a transdisciplinary manner. Rather, the BETTER Life project creates a foundation for young scientists to work in a different way when needed and more beneficial, especially when faced with highly complex phenomena, such as the challenges of today, which our university is also confronting.

These challenges include climate change, biodiversity loss, digitalization, artificial intelligence, food security, sovereignty, socioeconomic inequalities, economic crises, innovation, and the need to preserve vibrant rural communities. When the original paradigm of science emerged, with scientists standing apart from the world they studied, such challenges did not exist. The problems we face today are far more complex than those of the past, and this complexity requires new approaches to their examination. This is where the transdisciplinary approach, involving scientists directly in the world they inhabit, proves essential.



However, this involvement— this transdisciplinarity — not only requires cooperation among scientists from different scientific disciplines (especially between natural sciences, technical fields, and social sciences) but also equitable collaboration with individuals outside of the scientific world. Only by working together in this way can we respond to the challenges we face. The connection between the scientific community and people outside it helps eliminate the “freeloader effect,” where some feel excluded or that their opinions, no matter how strange or nonsensical, are ignored

Doing science in this way is not easy and requires certain tools. Some of these, in digital form, are being developed by the BETTER Life project (for example, the “Academic Bridge,” which allows scientists and local communities to connect digitally and solve problems together). Young scientists also have the opportunity to receive mentoring on how to prepare and conduct such transdisciplinary research.

So, if you are interested in learning how to do science differently, visit the BETTER Life project website, especially its section dedicated to the Digital Centre of Excellence. This center serves as a support system for transitioning to a new way of doing science. Or, you may reach out directly to the author of this text.

Prof. Michal Lošťák,
First Vice-Rector of Czech University of
Life Sciences Prague (CZU)



SOCIALLY ENGAGED RESEARCH IN ACTION:

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2024 ACEEU EUROPE - AFRICA FORUM

ACEEU and the BETTER Life project teamed up to host the 2024 ACEEU Europe-Africa Forum at NOVA University Lisbon, Portugal, from September 18–20, under the theme: "Engaged Research and Intrapreneurship for Societal Impact: Creating Legacy through Action." The forum built upon BETTER Life's mission to bridge academia and society by promoting Socially Engaged Research (SER) in Life Sciences. Through SER, the project drives collaboration among academics, businesses, policymakers, and citizens—turning research into action and impact.

This event united leaders and change-makers from Europe and Africa to advance entrepreneurship and engagement in higher education. A standout moment was the "Engaged Research for Societal Impact" panel, featuring experts who are reshaping research to address real-world challenges from different perspectives. Moderated by Dr. Lina Landinez (CEO of ACEEU), the panel showcased:

- **Dr. Claudia Quaresma** (3D Printing Centre for Health, Portugal)
- **Dr. Oksana Holovko-Havrysheva** (Ukrainian European Studies Association)
- **Joana Costa** (Executive Director, NOVA SBE Leadership for Impact Knowledge Centre, Portugal)
- **Prof. Michal Lošťák** (Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, BETTER Life project lead)

The panel underscored the transformative power of co-creation and inclusiveness, emphasising that research becomes more relevant when communities actively participate as partners and decision-makers rather than passive observers.

The discussion highlighted the critical role of integrating lived experiences into all research phases, ensuring that findings are deeply rooted in real-world contexts and resonate with the needs of society.

Additionally, the panellists stressed the importance of transdisciplinary collaboration, arguing that communication, trust and teamwork are essential elements to accelerating meaningful societal change and amplifying the impact of engaged research initiatives.





The workshop “Synergies in Action across EU-Funded Projects” turned collaboration into action to strengthen partnerships and unlocking new opportunities for impactful projects.

Guided by Dr. Emilia Binchiciu (HelixConnect) and Federica Casaccio (ACEEU), participants used innovative tools like the Synergy Map and ACEEU Project Canva to address shared challenges and pave the way for future EU-funded initiatives. Through structured need identification and stakeholder analysis, the session contributed to identifying key priorities, enabling participants to craft actionable, context-driven ideas for future projects. These tools offered an easy-to-use framework to design the impact in life sciences research by inspiring solutions that could drive meaningful change at institutional, community, and societal levels.

The 2024 ACEEU Europe-Africa Forum, together with the BETTER Life project, showcased the power of collaboration, innovation, and engaged research in driving societal impact.

From thought-provoking discussions to hands-on workshops, the event demonstrated how partnerships across disciplines and sectors can address today’s challenges and shape a more inclusive, sustainable future. As participants return to their communities and institutions, the ideas sparked and connections made at the forum serve as a catalyst for action, ensuring that the legacy of engagement and intrapreneurship continues to grow, creating real and lasting change.

SER Toolkit: <https://www.better-life-digital.eu/toolkit/>

SER Framework: <https://betterlifehorizon.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/D2.2-Framework-for-SER-in-Life-Sciences.pdf>

DCoE: <https://betterlifehorizon.eu/digital-centre-of-excellence/>

BETTER Life Project: <https://betterlifehorizon.eu/>

2024 ACEEU Europe-Africa Forum:

<https://forum.aceeu.org/europeafrica2024/program>

BETTER LIFE'S CONTRIBUTION AT THE CZECH POLITICAL SCIENCE CONGRESS



On September 12th and 13th, members of the BETTER Life team, Milan Školník and Michael Haman, attended the Congress of the Czech Political Science Association, held in Ústí nad Labem, Northern Bohemia. This is a prestigious professional association, as evidenced by the participation of representatives from various relevant institutions who presented their contributions at the Congress.

The contribution from our team focused on changes in communication on Twitter (now X) following its acquisition by Elon Musk.

The presentation discussed how these changes might also affect municipalities and their mayors. It was essentially based on two BETTER Life tools: “Promote your Research Communication” and “Academic Bridge.”

Participation in the event was particularly valuable, as team member Milan Školník was elected to the broader leadership of the Czech Political Science Association, which will facilitate further networking and deepen professional collaboration in academia.

For more information about this professional association, visit [the Czech Political Science Association website](#).





SECOND SCIENCE PUB FOSTERS DIALOGUE ON MUNICIPAL COOPERATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The second Science Pub successfully took place on Thursday, September 26, continuing the positive momentum from the first meeting. The event was held at the premises of the Regional Authority in Hradec Králové and began with a greeting from Professor Michal Lošťák, the principal investigator of the project, which contributed to a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

Once again, representatives from the Czech Technical University (CTU) and the Centre for Investments, Development, and Innovations in Hradec Králové attended, along with several municipal mayors. As part of the program, BETTER Life team members Milan Školník and Michael Haman presented the results of a survey on the topic “Cooperation of Municipalities with Regions and the Government: Challenges and Opportunities.” The original data obtained from the mayors generated significant interest, and the timing of the presentation was particularly noteworthy as it occurred between the regional and parliamentary elections, during which a new government is being formed. Additionally, Radim Löwe, the Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences, spoke about “Care for Green Spaces and Forests Owned by Municipalities,” which sparked lively discussions on current environmental issues.



The organizers are eagerly looking forward to the next Science Pub, which is scheduled for next year. The open and informal atmosphere of this gathering once again facilitated a fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences between academics and representatives of local governments, paving the way for effective solutions to specific challenges and needs at the local level.



35 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY: A DEBATE ON SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM



On November 13, 2024, the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague hosted a debate to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. Held in the university's auditorium, the event brought together students, staff, and members of the public. It was organized in collaboration with student associations and the Post Bellum organization, including its international Memory of Nations project.

The debate featured prominent speakers, including the university's First Vice-Rector, Michal Lošťák, who is also the principal investigator of the BETTER Life project, and Petr Sklenička, Rector of the university. The event also welcomed Michael Žantovský, former ambassador to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel, as well as a spokesperson for President Václav Havel and director of his post-presidential library, and Vladimír Hanzel, Havel's long-time personal secretary. Milan Školník, a member of the BETTER Life project team, co-moderated the discussion.

A central theme of the discussion was the enduring legacy of the Velvet Revolution, which not only initiated the transition to democracy in the Czech Republic but also created a foundation for academic freedom and international collaboration, as seen in projects like Horizon Europe. The debate explored the opportunities and challenges surrounding social engagement in Czech society. While civic participation is no longer as intense as it was in the early 1990s, events like this one aim to reinvigorate interest in addressing societal challenges through socially engaged initiatives and research.

By bridging the academic and civic sectors, this debate highlighted the importance of social engagement as a driver for democratic resilience and societal progress, embodying the spirit of the Velvet Revolution.

BETTER LIFE REPRESENTED AT 5TH ESP CONFERENCE IN WAGENINGEN



Dr Anton Shkaruba of the Estonian University of Life Sciences and his doctoral student, Ruthi Veibiakkim, hosted a BETTER Life co-organised session at the 5th ESP (Ecosystem Services Partnership) Europe Conference, held in Wageningen, the Netherlands, from November 18th to 22nd, 2024.

The session titled Urban Form and Ecosystem Delivering Capacity – relations and Implications for Urban Planning and Governance was co-hosted by Dr. Stefano Salata of Politecnico di Milano, Italy. Total 12 papers were presented on the session, including 3 by Anton and Ruthi, who talked about the integration of urban residents' perception of urban ecosystems into urban planning processes. They explored the aspects of nature that residents perceive negatively, which is also known as ecosystem disservices (EDS). EDS formed the foundation for the BETTER Life Toolkit' Integrating Citizens' Perceptions of Urban Environmental Quality into Inclusive City Planning Processes, which features a decision-making tree and procedure for involving local communities in the planning co-creation exercise.

The collection of session abstracts is available [here](#).



THE INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF THE BETTER LIFE DELIVERABLES IS UNDERWAY!

Dr Anton Shkaruba has presented to students and academic staff of the Faculty of Science and Marine Environment at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT FSSM) two project-related sessions.

On November 18, 2024, he talked about the tool “Integrating Citizens’ Perceptions of Urban Environmental Quality into Inclusive City Planning Processes” from the BETTER Life toolkit, where he explored both methodology challenges and application issues.



On November 19, 2024, he delivered a session on problems and challenges of socially engaging research that was based on materials presented in the BETTER Life summer school in Prague in September 2024.

Both sessions were very well received and sparked a lively discussion on the replicability of BETTER Life tools and approaches in Malaysia, as well as about the engagement with local communities over coastal and marine planning and management.





EMPOWERING RESEARCHERS THROUGH THE SER SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

As part of the BETTER Life project, the innovative Socially Engaged Research (SER) Self-Assessment Tool is set to transform how researchers evaluate and enhance their societal impact. Designed to empower researchers across disciplines, the tool provides a user-centric platform that assesses social engagement practices and delivers tailored, actionable recommendations.

At its core, the tool features a SER Diagnostic Survey, which evaluates key dimensions of socially engaged research, such as understanding SER, relationship building, and sustainability. Additionally, a CV Submission and Analysis Module employs advanced Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques like SciBERT and PubMedBERT to analyze researchers' CVs. This module links career achievements to SER engagement metrics, providing personalized insights and resource recommendations.

The development process has been systematic and collaborative, leveraging state-of-the-art technologies such as the Django framework for backend support and cutting-edge NLP models for CV analysis. A strong focus on user feedback and analytics ensures the tool evolves to meet researchers' needs.

To ensure intuitive user interaction, the tool incorporates a dynamic Resource Synchronisation Dashboard, featuring real-time progress tracking, a curated resource library, and interactive analytics. Researchers can access practical tools and training materials to address gaps and amplify their societal contributions.



Looking ahead, the sustainability framework ensures the tool remains relevant and adaptable to new research landscapes and technologies. By bridging gaps in engagement diagnostics, the SER Self-Assessment Tool aligns with BETTER Life's mission to foster innovation and drive meaningful societal impact.

With this groundbreaking tool, researchers are equipped to measure, improve, and elevate their societal contributions, paving the way for more impactful and sustainable research practices.

INTERNATIONAL SPRING SCHOOL FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS IN LIFE SCIENCES

SOCIALLY ENGAGED RESEARCH IN LIFE SCIENCES: FROM STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION TO REAL-WORLD IMPACT

Date: March 13-14, 2025

Time: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM (CET) each day

Location: Online via Zoom

Cost: Free of charge

Language: English

ENHANCING RESEARCH IMPACT THROUGH SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

As global challenges become increasingly complex, interdisciplinary and collaborative research is essential to generating meaningful scientific and societal advancements. Early-career researchers are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between academia and society by fostering research that directly addresses stakeholder needs and promotes broader societal impact.

The International Spring School for Early Career Researchers in Life Sciences offers a structured and in-depth exploration of the principles, methodologies, and applications of socially engaged research. Through interactive workshops, expert-led discussions, and collaborative exercises, participants will develop essential skills to conduct research that effectively integrates stakeholder engagement and real-world impact.



INTERNATIONAL SPRING SCHOOL FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS IN LIFE SCIENCES

SOCIALLY ENGAGED RESEARCH IN LIFE SCIENCES: FROM STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION TO REAL-WORLD IMPACT

UNLOCK THE POWER OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED RESEARCH!

Interest in collaborative and interdisciplinary research is growing as societies grapple with pressing global challenges. Early-career researchers have a unique opportunity to take the lead in addressing these issues by transcending traditional academic boundaries and aligning their work more closely with societal needs and priorities.

Our International Spring School offers a comprehensive introduction to the opportunities and challenges of socially engaged research. You'll delve into personalized approaches, explore innovative methods, and participate in interactive workshops and sessions designed to enhance your ability to conduct impactful research that responds to societal demands.

**13th of March to
14th of March
2025.
9-12 a.m. each day**

Our International Spring School takes place online via Zoom in English and is free of charge.

If you are interested, please register on the following link by 8th of March:
<https://forms.gle/76FgKjWaqmGYMCY97>



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The two-day program will explore essential aspects of socially engaged research, including:

- Foundations of Socially Engaged Research – Understanding its significance and impact within the life sciences.
- Stakeholder Expectations and Best Practices – Examining diverse perspectives and institutional requirements.
- Challenges and Ethical Considerations – Identifying potential obstacles and ethical implications.

Methodologies and Research Tools – Acquiring practical strategies and techniques for implementation.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The program is designed for master's students, PhD candidates, and postdoctoral researchers seeking to integrate socially engaged research practices into their academic and professional pursuits.

REGISTRATION DETAILS

**Participation is free, but registration is required.
Register by March 8, 2025: [Registration Link](https://forms.gle/76FgKjWaqmGYMCY97)**

For inquiries and additional information, please contact:  Email: anton@mespom.eu

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