

# NEWSLETTER

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

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## MEET BETTER LIFE PARTNERS

**CZECH UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES PRAGUE (CZU)**  
Czechia



**MARTIN LUTHER UNIVERSITY HALLE-WITTENBERG (MLU)**  
Germany



**UNIVERSITY OF CAMERINO (UNICAM)**  
Italy



**ACCREDITATION COUNCIL FOR ENGAGED AND ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITIES (ACEEU)**  
Germany



**ESTONIAN UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES (EMU)**  
Estonia



**DAUGAVPILS UNIVERSITY (DU)**  
Latvia



**POZNAŃ UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES (PULS)**  
Poland



**HELIXCONNECT EUROPE (HELIXCONNECT)**  
Romania



**EDUCONS UNIVERSITY (EDUCONS)**  
Serbia



## Intro

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The design and development of the tools is an important milestone for the BETTER Life project to foster more socially engaged research. Knowledge of challenges but also of potentials and the development of competencies are the basis for aligning research in the life sciences more closely with the needs of local and regional society.

The tools developed within the BETTER Life project present a wide range of topics and possible approaches. The opportunities and requirements for networking in the region form the core of two tools: Academic Bridging aims to network with local authorities, while the HUMAN ecosystem integration LAB opens up digital spaces for discussion and collaboration among the Quadruple Helix stakeholders.

Another tool takes a playful approach to the challenge of co-operative handling of challenges and in this way promotes understanding for different stakeholders. Two handouts focus on specific fields of application, such as city planning processes or design thinking for the co-design of public open spaces.

Communication is an important foundation for socially engaged research: Another handout focuses on communication with social media. The preparation of data-based results and communication through visual arts will also take centre stage. A self-reflection tool is designed for early career researchers to support the understanding of the requirements for engaged research while assessing and monitoring the individual efforts in the engagement activities. And last but not least, a mentoring plan supports effective mentor-mentee relationships in scientific contexts. The tools will be tested and adapted as part of the activities planned for the next year.

Researchers who focus on social challenges are actively involved in change. They are faced with various expectations regarding the provision of knowledge, the search for solutions and communication with the public or politicians. If research succeeds in aligning more closely with these expectations, change processes can lead to a better life for all. Our tools combine knowledge, suggestions and methods and help to pave the way to a BETTER life.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

**WP4 focuses on capacity building through a series of workshops and Think Tanks. Previously, we evaluated best practices and assessed the region-specific needs of our partners in LS for engaged research.**

We developed operational goals for WP2, established standards for assessing and measuring SER in LC (WP2), devised a toolkit, and established an international digital centre for SER. All these results from earlier WPs will be utilised as framework, background, frame and tools for organising capacity building activities. The purpose of this work package is to test the ideas and tools we have developed thus far and to put them into practice. The experiences from the Capacity Building activities will be further utilised in WP5.

As the initial step in our capacity-building activities, we have crafted a Capacity Building Plan (CBP) as a deliverable (D4.1). The CBP contains vital information and instructional context, as well as assessment and evaluation guidelines for the scheduled activities, including Think Tank sessions, boot camps for ECRs, boot camps for EMs, virtual international winter school, and on-site summer school.

**The following activities are planned within WP4:**



**Think tank sessions  
(November 2023-December 2024)**

The overall goal of the think tank sessions within the BETTER Life Project is to create a feasible and adequate mentorship program for HEIs specialised in life sciences. Each HEI will establish a mentorship program tailored to their specific conditions. Participants of Think tank sessions will be representatives of Quadruple Helix actors. Mentorship programs worked out by Think Tank sessions will start within the frame of BL project, and will not stop after the end of the project.





### **International Virtual Winter School (April 9-11, 2024)**

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### **Bootcamps for Engagement Managers**

Similarly, to ECR, Engagement Managers (EMs) will also be trained in virtual boot camps. EMs are university employees, advising ECRs on connecting with different non-academic actors. Thus, the knowledge that will be gained in the BETTER Life project will help improve their skills, including SER, in the long term.



### **Bootcamps for ECR.**

Early carrier researchers will be provided with the skillset necessary to conduct Socially Engaged Research. The boot camps will focus on sequentially developing or improving SER knowledge (Boot Camp I), skills (Boot Camp II), and competencies (Boot Camp III) of the participant ECRs. They shall also provide networking possibilities and peer-to-peer discussions, thus providing a holistic package intended to increase the ECR capabilities in SER.



### **On-site summer school in Prague**

Summer school participants will engage in hands-on activities, workshops, and group projects to develop solutions to real-life problems in life sciences. This collaborative approach fosters a deep understanding of the societal impact of research. The summer school's location in the Czech Republic allows participants to immerse themselves in Central Europe's cultural and regional dynamics.

**In carrying out these capacity-building activities, we provide ECRs with tools, knowledge, networking, and collaboration opportunities, along with institutional support for conducting Socially Engaged Research.**

## Think Tank “Science Pub” at CZU: Academics and Mayors in a Unique Dialogue



**On 23 November 2023, a meeting was held in the representative premises of the Rector’s Office of Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CZU), which broke the traditional barriers between academics and mayors of municipalities.**

This initiative, which took place within the framework of the BETTER Life project funded by the European Union, became the first experimental forum for informal meetings between local government representatives and academics. The meeting was attended not only by academics from CZU but also from the neighbouring Czech Technical University.

Michal Lošťák described the event as a “science pub,” as he took inspiration from foreign science cafés when coming up with the name of the meeting. Compared to traditional lectures or conferences, this meeting had the relaxed atmosphere of a pub, where topics were discussed without a predetermined agenda. “We would like to use such meetings to help establish a collaborative community of communities and academia. This community will allow us to overcome the seemingly existing disconnection between science and everyday life, of which we are all a part,” explained the 1st Vice-Rector of CZU and the Principal Investigator of the BETTER Life project.





The discussion addressed specific problems faced by the communities and possible ways in which academics could contribute to finding solutions. Topics included not only local government issues but also municipalities' relations with regions and the government or ministries. The meeting brought together mayors from municipalities of different sizes, which contributed to the diversity of the discussion.

The participants expressed interest in regular meetings that could focus on specific topics such as the environment, transport, education, security, subsidy opportunities, and many others. Likewise, future meetings could take place in specific formats, e. g., mayors from either small villages or, conversely, from cities.

For future formats, it is also envisaged to invite other relevant actors such as relevant ministries, the Association of Regions of the Czech Republic or the Union of Towns and Municipalities together with the Association of Local Authorities.

The first “science pub” was thus a successful step towards strengthening the dialogue between academics and municipal representatives. The open atmosphere and informal setting allowed for a productive exchange of views and experiences. The participants look forward to future meetings that could further deepen the cooperation between academia and municipalities towards addressing specific challenges and needs at the local level.





Welcome to the

# BETTER Life EU Digital Centre

We connect researchers and actors in the region to transfer knowledge and enable a participatory approach to regional challenges.

[Discover more](#)



Tools



Capacity Building



Community



## A DIGITAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE – A SHOWCASE FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BETTER LIFE PROJECT

**Since its launch in November 2023, the BETTER Life EU Digital Centre ([www.better-life-digital.eu](http://www.better-life-digital.eu)) provides an interactive platform for networking, knowledge transfer and getting to know the toolkits developed under the project.**

In addition to the EU Digital Life Centre, seven national centres are now going to be gradually established over the coming months. These national centres, each in the language of the region it represents, are intended to focus on and showcase the regional activities within those regions.



In particular, the DCoE, together with the regional centres, will support particular ongoing efforts, including, but not limited to:

- the visualisation of the ten toolkits developed to address various challenges related to the advancement and implementation of SER in life sciences, supporting the implementation of the Virtual Winter School and the on-site Summer School, as well as supporting the bootcamps for ECR and Engagement Managers.

Find out more about how we aim to improve skills and competences for nurturing socially engaged research, get to know the community and its activities, or discover our 10 toolkits at [www.better-life-digital.eu](http://www.better-life-digital.eu).



## SER TOOLS

**With the objective of building the intra- and inter-institutional capacities to foster SER in life sciences at a regional and international level, ACEEU has designed the SER Self-Reflection Tool.**

The tool targets early career researchers (ECR) who wish to explore, understand and develop their engaging activity and potential with societal actors (including skills, knowledge, behaviour, etc.), especially non-academic audiences. It guides them through the process of identification, prioritisation and action planning in specific key areas. It diagnoses areas of strength and weakness, opens up discussion on the engagement efforts and allows to track evolution over time. You can access the tool here <https://se.better-life-digital.eu/>





## **BETTER LIFE CENTRES**

**ACEEU has contributed to the design and technical implementation of the EU BETTER Life Digital Centres. They will provide an inter-institutional support structure for developing capacities of early career researchers (PhD students and researchers not yet fully independent) to foster socially engaged research to tackle societal challenges in their surrounding ecosystems.**

ACEEU is responsible for hosting all the 8 digital centres for the whole EU and 7 centres in different countries. First, the EU Digital Centre is established and then the National Digital Centres are developed to be able to ensure the appropriate translations and links. We use Wordpress blogs and the website-building plugin Elementor to enable each partner to manage its national Digital Centre.



The Better Life Digital Centres will become a central point (of contact and resources) for advancing SER in life sciences in Europe. With the tools and the centres, the project becomes a solid and central point for encouraging dialogue, inclusivity, and shared power among researchers, institutions, and stakeholders to make a significant and positive impact on society.

### **The Digital Centres will include:**

- ✓ Information about the Project and the Centres
- ✓ The Self-Assessment tool (to be developed in WP4 in 2024)
- ✓ The 10 tools of the toolkit
- ✓ The capacity building program with the Community of Practice, Think - tanks and Mentorship Program
- ✓ Link to the National Centres
- ✓ Further resources

## **A THREE-DAY VIRTUAL WINTER SCHOOL**

The BETTER Life Consortium is excited to announce the upcoming BETTER Life Virtual Winter School, a three-day event designed to introduce the concept of Socially Engaged Research (SER) to Early Career Researchers (ECRs).



*BETTER Life  
Winter School 2024*

### **OUR GOAL**

Our primary target audience is ECRs, both within our consortium and from other universities and regions. The main focus of the Winter School is to provide an extensive overview of the applications, uses, and procedures in SER, with the aim of sensitizing participants to SER and generating interest for more in-depth and detailed virtual bootcamps in the future.

### **OUR APPROACH**

The Winter School will present approaches and concrete examples of how to utilize SER to ensure that academic research is more oriented towards overcoming social challenges. It aims to generate a better understanding of SER, inspire future research projects and academic activities, and showcase examples from practice.

## A THREE-DAY VIRTUAL WINTER SCHOOL

## PROCEEDINGS

The Winter School will be conducted virtually over three consecutive days, April 9-11, 2024, each with a specific focus:



Day 1: Introduction to SER and examples from practice.



Day 2: Interactive exchange in smaller workshops and discussion of outcomes in plenary.



Day 3: Wrap up, outlook of future efforts, potential collaborations, and an open space suited to the needs of the participants.

**Participants will initially listen to expert lectures introducing SER and providing concrete examples of its application, outcomes, and lessons learned. They will then break into smaller groups to discuss and reflect on the theoretical knowledge gained and potentially develop a small presentation to be discussed in the plenary.**

## LIMITATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

We recognize that without established experts in the field of SER, it may be challenging to attract the necessary number of participants. To make the event enticing to ECRs, we are considering concrete benefits such as the acquisition of experts in the field of SER or the issuance of certifications after the event.

Another option under consideration is to expand the target audience to include PhD or even MSc students. This would make reaching the intended number of participants less challenging and could also provide ECRs for their studies. The specifics of this approach are still under discussion within the consortium.

We look forward to welcoming you to the BETTER Life Virtual Winter School and exploring the exciting field of Socially Engaged Research together.



# BETTER LIFE IN E<sup>3</sup>UDRES<sup>2</sup> ENT-R-E-NOVATORS PROJECT NEWSLETTER

In an exciting partnership aimed at fostering innovation and transforming the landscape of research and development, the BETTER Life and E<sup>3</sup>UDRES<sup>2</sup> Ent-r-e-novators projects have joined forces. The E<sup>3</sup>UDRES<sup>2</sup> Ent-r-e-novators project is working to create a European Research and Innovation Center for Smart and Sustainable Regions, promoting open science and innovation. In tandem, the BETTER Life project is establishing a Digital Center of Excellence for Socially Engaged Research in Life Sciences.

Read more about both projects in the E<sup>3</sup>UDRES<sup>2</sup> Ent-r-e-novators newsletter, where the BETTER Life is represented.

Project Status | News | Recent Events |

## BETTER Life Starts to Make a Better Life (E<sup>3</sup>UDRES<sup>2</sup> Ent-r-e-novators cluster project)

It is not easy to communicate the project which deals with socially engaged research. It is even more difficult when such communication concerning science is one of the essential pillars of socially engaged research in life sciences. However, the wording and acronym of the project **BETTER Life** perfectly suits this intention. The project by its full name **"Bringing Excellence to Transformative Engaged Research in Life Sciences through Integrated Digital Centres"** underscores its primary goal: establishing an inter-institutional support structure dedicated to enhancing the capabilities of early career researchers.

The BETTER Life project is establishing the European **Digital Centre of Excellence** for Socially Engaged Research in Life Sciences together with seven local digital centres, which will help early career researchers **boost social engagement** in their research and will contribute to tackling societal challenges in diverse regional ecosystems.

Socially Engaged Research in the field of life sciences serves as the cornerstone for forging connections among **research, government, industry, civil society, and the environment**, embodying the innovative concept of the **quadruple helix model**. Strengthening the capabilities to foster socially engaged science will not only enhance the influence of life science research but also facilitate the alignment of researchers with the demands of their surrounding ecosystems.

For more information, please visit the official [BETTER \(betterlifehorizon.eu\)](http://betterlifehorizon.eu) website, and follow us on [Linkedln](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). Stay engaged with BETTER Life

Patrik Toula, BETTER Life Coordinator (Czech University of Sciences Prague)



**BETTER Life**  
BRINGING EXCELLENCE TO TRANSFORMATIVE ENGAGED RESEARCH IN LIFE SCIENCES THROUGH INTEGRATED DIGITAL CENTRES

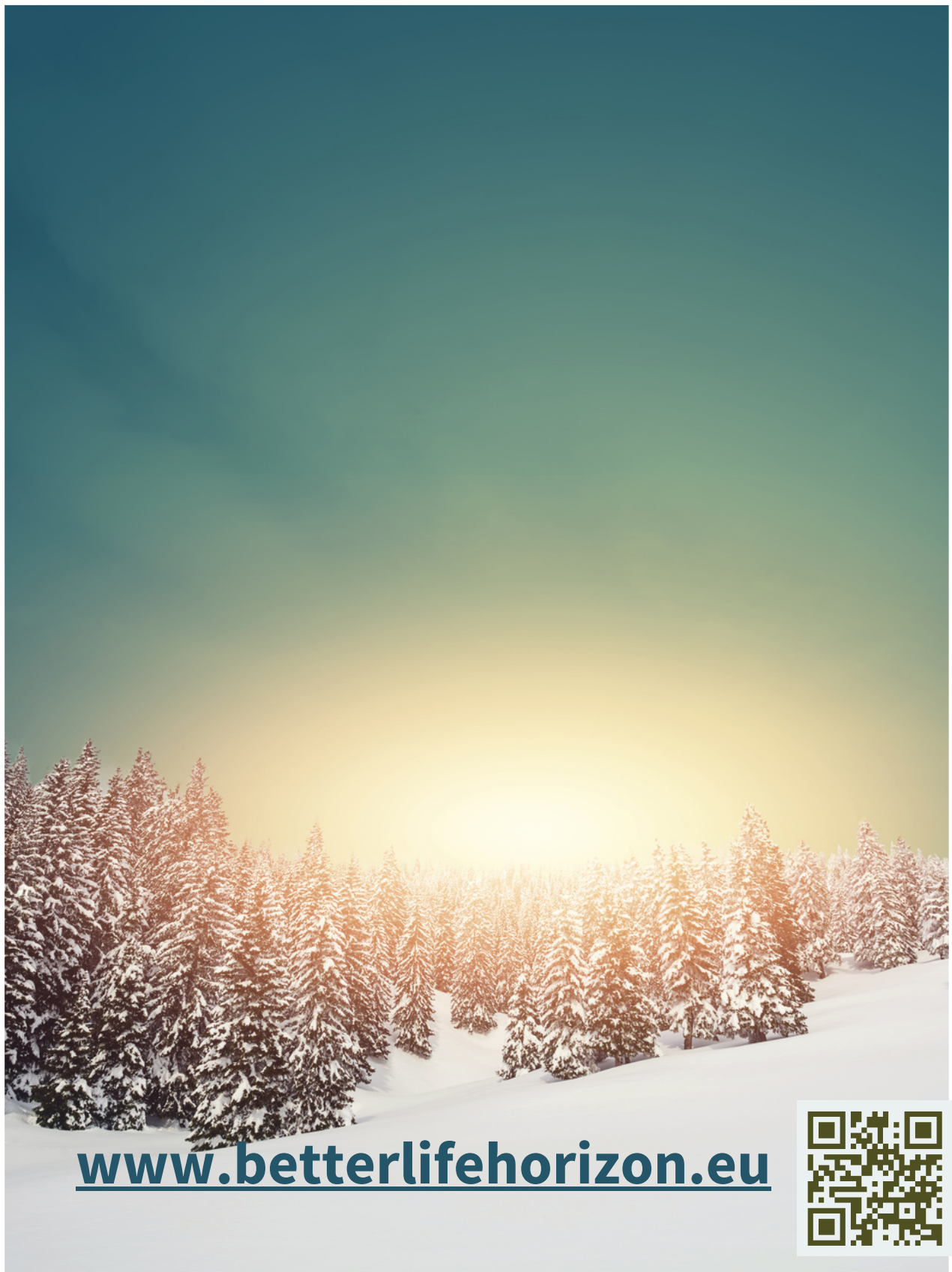
01 **Strategic Planning**  
To consolidate a strategic vision for the EU BETTER Life Digital Centre committed to long-term sustainability.

02 **Development of Tools**  
To build intra- and inter-institutional capacities to foster socially engaged research in life sciences through diverse tools.

03 **Capacity Building**  
To develop the individual capacities of early career researchers for implementing socially engaged research in life sciences.

04 **Finetuning and Sustaining**  
To consolidate the EU BETTER Life Centre as a platform for socially engaged research in life sciences.

www.betterlifehorizon.eu



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