

Citizen Science Roadshow in Hungary

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Abstract

Citizen science, as an integral pillar of open science, has gained increasing recognition in Western Europe, yet its adoption in Central and Eastern Europe has faced unique historical, cultural, and socio-economic challenges. This article presents the Hungarian experience with citizen science in libraries, focusing on a national roadshow organized between November 2024 and July 2025 under the aegis of the Association of Hungarian Librarians. The paper explores the historical background affecting volunteer engagement in the region, the specific strategies needed to foster participation, and the role of libraries as catalysts for community involvement in research. The roadshow's structure, objectives, and early outcomes demonstrate how libraries, despite limited resources, can effectively implement citizen science initiatives and foster collaborations with researchers and communities. The study highlights the importance of tailored approaches, sustained outreach, and creative problem-solving to advance citizen science in Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Citizen Science, Libraries, Open Science, Volunteer Engagement, Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary

Introduction

Citizen science is a pillar of open science. It is also mentioned in the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science.¹ In Hungary, the National Research, Development and Innovation Office issued a Statement on open science² in 2021, which also considers Citizen Science to be a key pillar of the open science ecosystem.

Around the world and in Hungary, there are an increasing number of participatory or citizen science projects involving volunteers, especially in the natural sciences. In fact, it is easy to see that although the concept of citizen science is relatively new, the practice of involving volunteers in scientific research is by no means new. In Hungary, as in many European countries, research and observation involving large numbers of volunteers was already taking place in the 19th century. Ágost Heller's 1881 call for storm observations, published in the *Természettudományi Közlöny*³ (Natural Science Gazette), is well documented. Ágost Heller listed the observation methods in 13 points, which allowed for detailed description and comparison. Two years later, in the same journal, he thanked those who had submitted their observations and published a new call for observations.

¹ UNESCO, *Recommendation on Open Science* (Paris: UNESCO, 2021), accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.unesco-floods.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/379949eng.pdf>.

² „Állásfoglalás a nyílt tudományról”, *Nemzeti Kutatási, Fejlesztési és Innovációs Hivatal*, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://nkfih.gov.hu/nyilt-tudomany>.

³ „Zivatarok statisztikája érdekében”, *Természettudományi Közlöny* 142, 13th évf., 277 (1881), accessed October 3, 2025, http://real-j.mtak.hu/6576/1/TermTudKozl_1881.pdf#page=289.

Historical and Cultural Context of Volunteerism in Central and Eastern Europe

The involvement of libraries in citizen science projects does not seem self-evident in our region. In order to engage with colleagues, volunteers, and researchers with the appropriate sensitivity, we need to understand the closed nature of society and the skepticism of researchers. We don't have to go too far back in time; there is still a generation alive today that experienced the less pleasant memories of the 20th century firsthand. In the games played by the great powers, the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe (or Zwischeneuropa – Europe Between) were vulnerable. In terms of voluntary assistance and work, the most memorable activities are those that were forced upon us in the 20th century and called social or voluntary. Primarily, it was based on forced collectivization, compulsory community service (social work), the elimination of charitable organizations, and the destruction of church communities. For at least two generations, the concepts of voluntarism and charity were either eradicated or made pejorative. The parents of Generation Z did not have the opportunity to be born into the institution of volunteering and charity in the same way as similar generations in Western Europe. This simple historical fact means that in Central and Eastern Europe we have to address volunteers differently, organize training differently, and find different ways to raise their awareness. Another part of our historical legacy is the differences in salary and wages within Europe. Unfortunately, we have not been able to work off fifty years of socialism, and average earnings in the region have not kept pace with price increases. It is a regrettable fact that many excellent professionals have to find additional sources of income, so a significant part of society has no „free time.” Even if they are interested in another field as an amateur or hobby, they cannot devote time to it because they have to take on a second job in their „free time” to support themselves and/or their families.

The Emergence and Development of Citizen Science in Hungarian Libraries

Each of the two points above would be enough on its own to make us stand up, organize, and think differently about how libraries take on citizen science. In Hungary, the term „citizen science” wasn't even known in the library world until 2020. That's when an article about citizen science appeared in the librarian journals.⁴

Over the past five years, Hungarian librarians have been able to move forward in small steps, building from the ground up. It is difficult to identify milestones in the succession of events, but it is a fact that we can talk about mass information transfer since November 2024, when librarians in Hungary held the first stop of the national roadshow at the Szabó Ervin Library in Budapest.

Under the aegis of the Association of the Hungarian Librarians, the first mini-conference was held in September 2023 at the National Széchényi Library. By then, we librarians were already able to showcase good practices involving museums and libraries in Hungary. It was a very short afternoon event with 5-6 presentations, but it was enough to draw the attention of librarians and show them that the many efforts invested will pay off and that there are numerous advantages to libraries participating in citizen science projects.

In September 2024, the Association of the Hungarian Librarians and the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences organized a one-and-a-half-day citizen science training with international speakers Thomas Kaarsted (SDU – Southern Denmark University), Anne Kathrine Overgaard (SDU), and Tiberius Ignat (SKS – Scientific Knowledge Services), to which only colleagues from Hungary and the Central and Eastern European region

⁴ „Civilek a kutatásban – közösségi tudomány a könyvtárban”, *Könyvtári Figyelő* 66, no. 1 (2020): 54–57, accessed October 3, 2025, https://epa.oszk.hu/00100/00143/00359/pdf/EPA00143_konyvtari_figyelő_2020_01_054-057.pdf.

who already showed some openness to and interest in citizen science were invited. The title of the training was meant to convey a message: „One size does not fit all”. Facilitators were chosen who were also well experienced in citizen science: Alisa Martek (NULZ – National and University Library in Zagreb) and Professor Mária Hóhn (MATE – Magyar Agrár- és Élettudományi Egyetem). In many ways, this training provided the final impulse to launch the citizen science roadshow.

The roadshow was made possible by the collaboration of three library directors (libraries), while the work of the facilitators was the driving force behind the events. Between November 2024 and July 2025, the team visited seven locations. The first stop was the Szabó Ervin Library in Budapest. This was followed by five major towns (Szeged, Pécs, Miskolc, Eger, Győr), where either the county library or the university library hosted the program, with colleagues from different types of libraries being „mixed” for the group tasks. Although it differed from the usual schedule, the Annual Conference of the Association of Hungarian Librarians was still considered part of the roadshow, as the citizen science roadshow was presented through five presentations within the framework of the Scientific and Special Libraries Section, as well as the citizen science projects that were created as a result of the roadshow.

The roadshow is essentially an off-site training session. The program consists of three presentations, each lasting 30 minutes. The first presentation is about citizen science and its significance for libraries (presenter: Dóra Kalydy, Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), followed by Ágnes Kovácsné Koreny, who presents foreign examples and introduces the citizen science projects of the Ervin Szabó Metropolitan Library. Since November 2024, one project has been implemented, another will start in September 2025, and a bioblitz project is being organised for spring 2026. The third presentation is given by Beáta Darabosné Maczkó, head of the MATE Buda Campus Entz Ferenc Library and Archives, on the Ivy research project, which has been ongoing for two years and is being carried out using citizen science methodology.

The three speakers, who work in three different types of libraries, present the projects from three different perspectives, describing the circumstances of their implementation and the results achieved at their given institutions. Another clear goal is to highlight the cooperation between local libraries as a particularly good setting for citizen science projects. Public and university libraries are natural partners, each strong in different areas, thus complementing each other well. During the morning training sessions, two group tasks were incorporated into the lectures, allowing faster feedback on the interpretation of what was heard and making the several-hour training session more interactive.

The aim of the roadshow is to visit all 19 counties and disseminate the knowledge acquired. In Hungary, county libraries are also the methodological centres of the county library network, so county and university library staff can pass on information and help each other in setting up projects. As time goes by, there are already libraries where colleagues have teamed up with local researchers to create their own citizens science projects. The work and commitment of the Ervin Szabó Metropolitan Library is outstanding in this area. It is also the goal to help Hungarian colleagues involved in citizen science appear on the international stage. At the same time, LIBER member libraries are to be informed about the work being done in the country. Although the Central and Eastern European region lags behind Western European research libraries in many respects, one area of excellence is creativity. It has been demonstrated how results can be achieved even without budgetary support.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The past seven months have proven that citizen science projects have a place in Hungarian libraries. The most significant achievement is that library managers have recognized that citizen science projects can help them raise awareness of their services and activities. Participation

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in citizen science projects is a fundamental task for both public and university libraries. With the methodology of research support, value is simultaneously added and the local community is built. Following the Annual Conference of the Association of Hungarian Librarians, where concrete results were reported, several library managers expressed interest in hosting the team. The goal is to visit one location per month over the next year, followed by the organization of a professional day for the libraries and librarians who participated in a local training session. This program provides an opportunity to get to know each other and help each other move forward.

Roadshow organizers should also keep in mind what they tell their colleagues during training sessions: don't expect quick results, devote plenty of time to preparation and knowledge sharing.

And as a conclusion, it is appropriate to quote A. A. Milne from his book "Winnie-the-Pooh": "You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them ...".

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Караван грађанске науке у Мађарској

Сажетак

Грађанска наука, као интегрални стуб отворене науке, стиче све већу видљивост и признање у Западној Европи, али њено усвајање у Централној и Источној Европи суочило се са јединственим историјским, културним и социјално-економским изазовима. Овај рад представља мађарско искуство са грађанском науком у библиотекама, са фокусом на национални караван организован у периоду од новембра 2024. до јула 2025. под окриљем Удружења мађарских библиотекара. Рад истражује историјску позадину која је утицала на ангажовање волонтера у региону, специфичне стратегије потребне за подстицање учешћа, као и улогу библиотека као катализатора заједничког укључивања у истраживања. Структура, циљеви и први резултати каравана показују како библиотеке, упркос ограниченим ресурсима, могу ефикасно да спроводе иницијативе грађанске науке и подстичу сарадњу истраживача и заједница. Студија наглашава значај прилагођеног приступа, континуираног ангажовања јавности и креативног решавања проблема за напредак грађанске науке у Централној и Источној Европи.

Кључне речи: грађанска наука, библиотеке, отворена наука, ангажовање волонтера, Централна и Источна Европа, Мађарска