



2019
REPORT

→ ENTRANCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CSO NEEDS STUDY: COLLABORATION WITH HEIS IN
COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH PROJECTS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current societal challenges and their growing complexity, make us realize that the expertise of civil society organizations (CSOs) research provides a solid basis to build solutions on, however, the lack of resources and (access to) research expertise often hinders CSOs to be involved. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can have an active role in helping CSOs to surpass these obstacles while engaging in relevant research and boosting key competencies in their students and staff. But what are the actual needs of CSOs in terms of societal research questions that could be answered by higher education students?

In order to gain more insight and better understand the current and desired collaboration between CSOs and HEIs in terms of research, CSOs needs study was

conducted in 5 countries (Belgium, Finland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal) within the European ENTRANCE project with the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The CSOs needs study was conducted using a mixed methods approach:

- Desk study focused on an overview of various official documents, review of reports and CSOs surveys, past research findings, and discussions.
- Field study consisted of CSO online survey (255) and interviews (40).

CSOS PROFILE

Total number of CSOs in 5 project countries is enormous – according to official statistics, it's near to 304 thousand (respectively 87302 in Belgium, 68500 in Finland, 32476 in Lithuania, 61268 in Portugal, 54291 in the Netherlands).

In the online survey of this project, CSOs were mainly represented by associations (58%) and NGOs (29%). Almost half of the respondents were very small organizations having less than 5 employees, however, the other half are larger organizations having more than 10 employees; the vast majority of CSOs are working with volunteers.





The respondents are mainly working in the fields of following societal challenges: Health, demographic change and wellbeing, Europe in a changing world - inclusive, innovative and reflective societies, Secure societies – protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens, Climate action, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials.¹

The respondents mainly carry out educational activities, support people and submit suggestions on regulatory documents or policies, but they rarely or never take judicial actions, protest or start debates. This would reflect that CSOs are very hands on within their own domains or fields and rather do the actual work than try to affect the circumstances behind the societal issues.

¹ European Commission.

(2014). Societal Challenges - Horizon 2020.

Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/societal-challenges> 02.12.2018

CSOS NEEDS FOR RESEARCH

68% of respondents answered they need to conduct research in order to address societal challenges. However, in different countries, we could observe different trends. In Belgium and Portugal, the vast majority of CSOs believe they need research for their work, whereas in Finland, Lithuania and the Netherlands only half of the respondents indicated they deal with research activities

addressing societal challenges. The same situation we observe by examining CSOs willingness to collaborate with HEIs in terms of research. 84,6% Belgian and 84,3% Portuguese respondents were very

enthusiastic regarding possible collaboration, whereas, in Lithuania, Finland and

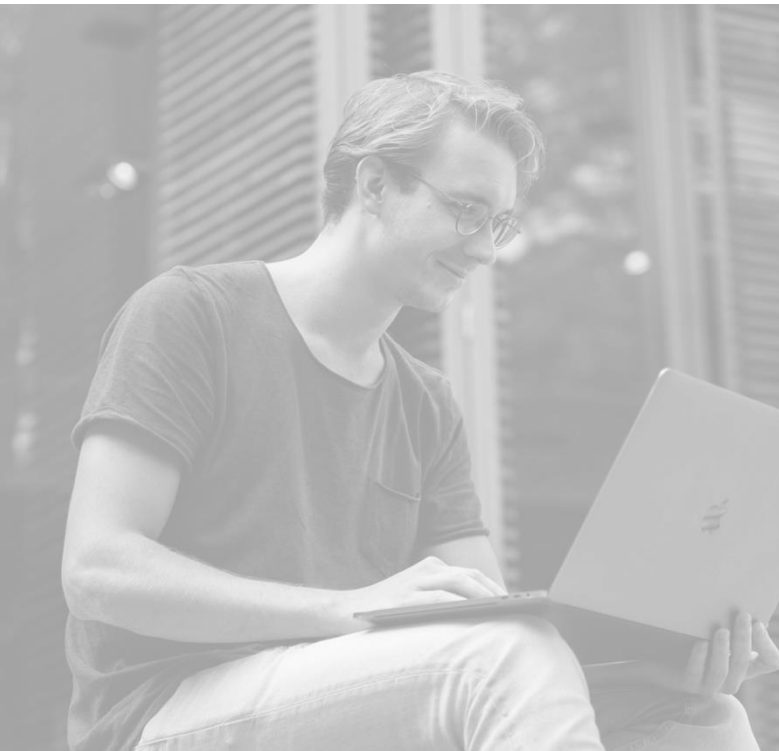
Netherlands near half of the respondents expressed their doubts about such collaboration. The reasons for doubting about collaboration vary from time management issues to past experiences and also not being sure if students could handle the issues in a sensitive and discreet manner.

The research problems that the CSOs usually face are mainly problems that require expertise in more than one academic disciplines. They are complex or complicated. There are some wicked problems (very ambiguous, requiring the blending of multiple expertise from various academic disciplines and practical insights from society) and simple problems as well, so the whole spectrum is represented.

Interviews revealed that the possible future trends of collaboration between CSOs and HEIs in terms of research are as follows: product/service development or design, knowledge sharing, measuring the impact of social intervention.

CSOs consider that 5 top skills in order to be able to tackle research problems are as following: collaboration, openness & transparency, action skills, skills to anticipate future, situational awareness².

² Tassone, Eppink. (2016). The EnRRICH tool for educators: (Re-)Designing curricula in higher education from a “Responsible Research and Innovation” perspective. Retrieved from: https://www.livingknowledge.org/fileadmin/Dateien-LivingKnowledge/Dokumente_Dateien/EnRRICH/D2.3_The_EnRRICH_Tool_for_Educators.pdf



RECOMMENDATIONS

CSOs are more likely to expect not only some research but rather a solution to some particular problem they face – suggestion for a new model, a creative solution etc. Thus HEIs could think about embedding of educational models allowing to combine research and action resulting in a solution of societal problems.

By approaching CSOs it is important to remember that they lack time due to the problems with human resources. So it would be important to be aware of the domain and activity of the particular CSO and apply tailor-made communication. For example, it would be beneficial to create targeted messages to the CSOs in different domains and ask them about their needs with some open-ended questions in order to find out their specific needs.

Due to a lack of previous collaboration experiences in the countries where Science Shop model is relatively new, it is less likely

that CSOs will ask HEIs for help, so HEIs should be proactive by establishing cooperation.

Some CSOs need help with the formulation of a good research question (starting from the concrete societal challenge they face): the lecturer or science shop mediator should help the CSO with this. In some cases, it could also help if HEI would not ask to identify a research problem, but would just observe organizations' daily activities, would have a conversation with CSOs representatives and then would „translate“ their findings into research problems.

In order to keep the process smooth and build trust, it is necessary to teach students how they should work with CSOs in terms of communication, ethics and time management. In this, it also helps to have one person in charge (e. g. science shop mediator) and communicate with the CSO in addition to the students conducting the research.

CSOs have mentioned it would be important to increase their general visibility in the society and proper communication of research findings could contribute to it. So it would be helpful to teach students how to efficiently introduce their research results to a broad public.