

# Digital action at HEIs as a catalyst for social change in the COVID-19 crisis (HEIDI)

## Erasmus+ Project

We're very excited to announce the start of our new [ERASMUS+](#) project 'Digital action at HEIs as a catalyst for social change in the COVID-19 crisis' (or in short [HEIDI](#)) which will run from June 2021 to May 2023, and the Extreme Citizen Science group (UCL Department of Geography) as the project's coordinator.



### ***What is project HEIDI about?***

COVID-19 brought to the forefront societal challenges affecting all sectors of human activity. Numerous citizen initiatives strive to tackle these challenges through digitally enhanced, community-driven digital action (DA) initiatives (i.e. citizen science and the maker movement initiatives and hacktivism). These initiatives take place at the local, national and international level and highlight the dynamics and strengths of DA as a catalyst for social change in crises contexts. In this realm of DA in the fight against the pandemic, HEIDI aspires to reposition Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with respect to society to more effectively support bottom-up, community driven knowledge creation processes and actions.

In specific, HEIDI aims to offer HEIs a more central role in the ongoing debate about social change through the upskilling of HE staff and students as well as to situate HEIs as co-creators in solutions to the problems that surfaced during

the pandemic. HEIDI will create collaborative frameworks between HEIs, voluntary-sector and civic society organizations in five countries (UK, France, Malta, Greece and Cyprus) through the implementation of 90 events and the engagement of over 3,000 people to: better understand the drivers and barriers of HE engagement in DA (O1); create the conditions for DA co-creation between citizens and HE staff and students (O2); facilitate bottom-up innovation, driven by communities as a means of civic engagement and digital upskilling of HE students and staff (O3); develop the digital skills of HE students and staff with regard to responsiveness to crisis situations (O4); and address the needs and requirements for DA during COVID-19 with community groups and within HE systems (O5).

The Coordinator is University College London ([ExCiteS\\_group](#) in the Department of Geography; the Office for Open Science and Scholarship; the Evaluation Exchange and the Community Research Initiative for Students) and partners include: [University of Paris](#), [University of Malta](#), [Web2Learn](#) (SME in Greece) and [Citizens In Power](#) (C.I.P) (NGO in Cyprus). Further information about the project can be found [here](#).

## ***How can you help?***

We have prepared a **short survey** (takes no more than 7 minutes to complete) which aims to collect examples of digital action in which universities (as a whole but also academic staff or students acting independently) engaged during the pandemic. By digital action we refer to three main forms of activism, namely: a) citizen science in COVID-19 times, b) the maker movement (i.e. fabrication of medical equipment), and c) hacktivism (hackathons, datathons, open data sprints against COVID-19).

Results of this survey will be expanded by a desktop research the HEIDI consortium will carry out, and will be released in an open access format by late August 2021. The aim of this publication will be to identify forms of digital action in the current pandemic and highlight the role of HEIs in them.

**The survey can be accessed [here](#) and it will remain open until June 30, 2021.**

*Thank you for your time and feel free to share the survey link as well as our project news with your networks.*