



CIVIS Alliance – Open Lab Project Impact Assessment Report

01 – PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Title of the project Sensing Our Environment Together – Citizen Science for Climate and Air Quality

Project coordinator Christèle Aubry (Unil)

Universities involved Unil, AMU, PLUS, UT, SUR, ULB, UB, UofG, MAK

BRAL vzw (Belgique, Tim Cassiers), Les Chercheurs d'air (Belgique, Pierre Dornier),
Geneva Health Forum (Suisse, Eric Comte)

Hub theme Health; Cities, spaces and mobilities

Duration of activities Sep 2025 – Oct 2025

Place of the activities University of Lausanne (costs covered on other than CIVIS2-funds)

02 – PARTNERS/TARGET AUDIENCE

Number of internal and external stakeholders involved in and impacted by the project

INTERNAL (All CIVIS universities)				EXTERNAL (All CIVIS cities/regions)	
Academics	Researchers	Students	Admin personnel	Citizens	Other - please specify
4	7	4	2	0	3 NGOs (1 representative/NGOs)

Non-university associations and organisations that have been involved in the project

ASSOCIATIONS/ORGANISATIONS		
Name	Country	Description
BRAL vzw	Belgium	NGO - A Brussels-based urban movement/non-profit advocating for a more sustainable, healthy and environmentally friendly city, working with members and partners on mobility, urban planning, air quality, governance and citizen initiatives.
Les Chercheurs d'air	Belgium	NGO - A Swiss not-for-profit global health platform that convenes science, policy, civil society and field actors to exchange evidence, debate policy, and improve health and healthcare access worldwide, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

Geneva Health Forum	Switzerland	NGO - A Brussels-based clean-air advocacy organisation campaigning against air pollution, especially from road traffic, and pushing for zero-emission zones, more school streets, active mobility, shared transport and greener public spaces.
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03 – PROJECT IMPACT

Social dimension

The two day workshop supported the exchange of citizen-science methods and practical experience on climate and air-quality monitoring. It brought together 20 participants from diverse backgrounds, including academics, students and representatives of associations, all engaged in citizen science, climate and air quality issues. It strengthened knowledge exchange and collaboration by creating a structured dialogue between researchers and non-academic actors through five thematic workshops focused on citizen science for climate and air quality.

Through interactive formats such as presentation rounds, co-creation exercises, group work, World Café discussions, project pitches and feedback sessions, participants identified common challenges related to data quality, public engagement, communication, long-term participation and policy impact. These activities encouraged direct interaction, mutual learning and the co-development of solutions.

In terms of collaboration, the workshop acted as a prototype for future CIVIS Open Lab activities and helped build a transnational learning community linking European and African academic partners with societal stakeholders. The event strengthened operational connections and created opportunities for future joint activities, workshops and collaborative projects.

The inclusion dimension was explicitly addressed through discussions on diversity of participation. Participants identified barriers such as unequal access to time, resources and education, underrepresentation of working-class, migrant, elderly and non-digital users, language barriers, scientific jargon and the dominance of English. Proposed solutions included translation, visual and storytelling-based communication, adapted messages for different publics, recognition of experiential knowledge and inclusion checklists.

The workshop also promoted equal opportunities by recognising citizens not only as data collectors, but also as co-designers, local facilitators, communicators, trainers, ambassadors and contributors to data interpretation. No detailed demographic breakdown is available, so the quantitative assessment should be limited to verified figures, while the qualitative assessment shows clear progress in collaboration, inclusion and co-creation.

Cultural dimension

The activity enhanced knowledge by linking different areas and sectors: environmental science, public health, urban issues, civic engagement, data management, science communication, education and policy. Participants exchanged methodologies, compared citizen-science practices and discussed how citizen-generated data can become useful for public awareness, decision-making and community empowerment. The workshop also addressed how to transform scientific results into accessible messages through storytelling, visual communication, simplified language, policy briefs, journalistic formats and public-facing dissemination.

From a learning perspective, the workshop used several participatory formats: a presentation round, co-creation exercises, project pitches, group discussions, a World Café, thematic sessions and a final feedback session. These formats supported peer learning and helped participants co-design solutions rather than only receive information. The report also shows that a consultation process was carried out before the event to collect participants' expectations and needs, which helped shape the thematic sessions.

Accessibility was addressed mainly through communication and knowledge-transfer strategies. Participants discussed the need to avoid scientific jargon, translate results, use local languages, include visual tools and adapt messages to different audiences, including citizens, schools, communities, policymakers and vulnerable groups. The workshop also encouraged the use of trusted channels such as schools, community networks and local media, as well as accessible tools such as tutorials, helpdesks and even analogue alternatives for data collection.

The cultural output also included dissemination material. The CIVIS resource page presents the full workshop report as a downloadable document intended to support CIVIS partners, external stakeholders, educators and practitioners who want to replicate participatory research approaches and strengthen citizen science initiatives across Europe and beyond. The available sources do not report internships or formal student-led projects linked to this activity, but they do document student participation, hands-on learning, consultation before the event and a feedback session as tools for learning and evaluation.

Economic dimension

The economic relevance of the activity lies in knowledge transfer on how citizen-science projects can become financially sustainable. Participants discussed the need to develop cost-effective plans for scaling and maintaining projects, including possible models such as symbolic pricing or crowd-based funding strategies. They also highlighted the importance of public relations, strategic communication and networking with similar projects to share resources, amplify impact and sustain initiatives over time.

The workshop also addressed the reduction of economic barriers to participation. Discussions on air-quality sensors compared low-cost and high-cost technologies, showing that technical choices strongly influence both data quality and accessibility. For example, passive samplers were described as low-cost tools suitable for longer-term deployment, while high-end personal sensors such as aethalometers can cost around €8,000, limiting their wider use. This comparison helped participants reflect on more inclusive and financially realistic monitoring models.

Overall, the economic impact is best described as capacity-building rather than revenue generation. The activity created practical opportunities to reduce costs, share resources, design scalable citizen-science initiatives and remove barriers linked to expensive technologies, technical complexity and lack of funding.

Added value for the beneficiaries

For participants, the workshop generated significant added value in terms of learning, capacity-building and networking. Beneficiaries improved their understanding of citizen science methodologies, inclusive participation strategies, data interpretation and pathways from data to action.

The project promoted active participation and empowerment by encouraging participants to reflect on their own practices, share experiences and co-create context-specific solutions. Although no immediate economic innovation resulted from the workshop, it laid important foundations for future collaborative projects, improved practices and potential policy-oriented initiatives in the fields of climate and air quality.

Relevance to the context

At local level, the relevance lies in the focus on citizen-generated air-quality data, community needs, schools, neighbourhoods and local decision-making. The workshop discussed how citizens can participate in measuring air pollution in their everyday environments and how results can be translated into public awareness and policy action. It also stressed the importance of involving municipalities, schools, community networks and local media early in the process.

Internally, the activity supported institutional strategies aimed at civic engagement, co-creation and challenge-based collaboration. The workshop was explicitly designed as a prototype for future CIVIS Open Labs, with the objective of strengthening transnational cooperation and developing a shared learning community around climate and environmental challenges. A consultation process was organised before the event to collect participants' expectations and needs, and the workshop structure was adapted accordingly.

The activity also responded to inclusion and disadvantaged-context concerns. Participants identified barriers such as unequal access to time, resources, education, digital tools and language, as well as the underrepresentation of working-class, migrant, elderly and non-digital users. Proposed responses included adapted communication, translation, local languages, visual tools, storytelling, inclusion checklists and better alignment between project rhythms and community realities.

Explain how the project has fulfilled the CIVIS2 goals, especially the Stream1 objectives (as per your original project application):

The project contributed directly to the CIVIS2 Stream 1 objectives by serving as a pilot Open Lab workshop focused on citizen science, climate and air quality, and participatory research. It addressed concrete societal challenges through challenge-based discussions and collective problem-solving activities, actively engaging participants in the analysis of real-life obstacles and the co-creation of practical solutions. This approach reinforced civic engagement as both a learning and research process.

By bringing together students, academics, associations and NGOs, the workshop strengthened links between universities and civil society and fostered meaningful dialogue between academic and non-academic actors. Working in mixed thematic groups enabled knowledge co-creation across disciplines, institutions and territories. Dedicated funding supported the inclusion of local initiatives and international partners, including African stakeholders with limited access to transnational exchanges.

As a prototype Open Lab activity, the workshop demonstrated the relevance of short, intensive formats for civic engagement and transnational collaboration. It contributed to the emergence of a European community of practice and generated momentum for future CIVIS initiatives.

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