

# D5.3: Citizen Science Champions Web Page

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## 1. Executive Summary

The Citizen Science Champions Web Page (<https://www.crops-cs.eu/champions>) has been developed to showcase the most groundbreaking stories and personalities of identified “Champions” of citizen science for each EU Mission theme.

The selection, podcast recording and development of the profiles and page, has been led by OutBe in collaboration with all consortium partners, whose inputs have been essential in finding inspiring personalities in different domains of interest.

The webpage hosts all profiles and recorded interviews of the selected Citizen Science Champions, collated into the Citizen Science Champions Podcast, available on Spotify and via the webpage itself.





## 2. Introduction

Citizen Science (CS) is considered a powerful tool, that acquires data and involves different kinds of people in the co-creation of scientific knowledge, yet too often it lies at a crossroads of unresolved challenges, many linked to the fragmentation of not only research efforts, but especially stakeholders' involvement (Earp & Liconti, 2020). At the same time, the concept of CS is often limited by narratives very close to science, yet far away from citizens, weakening the public representation of CS (Roche et al, 2020). In this task CS 'champions' in public authorities, policy, civil societies, research, SMEs and industries were recruited to 'connect the dots' between different services and institutions, and to raise awareness on the successful stories of CS and its potential at the European Research Area (ERA) scale. To 'humanise' the champions, and concretely bring to the public the many stories of people who are elevating CS across EU, a podcast was chosen as the most informal yet powerful dissemination tool.

The identification of suitable CS champions stemmed from the project research currently in action by T2.1 (Review existing citizen science projects and initiatives, M1-M12), grew via literature research and the consortium expertise, and flowered through recorded interviews now available through the "[Citizen Science Champions Podcast](#)" available on Spotify. All recorded interviews and champion profiles are now available in the hereby outlined CROPS Citizen Science Champions Web Page (<https://www.crops-cs.eu/champions>) of D5.3.

## 3. Development process

### 3.1. EU Missions CS Champions Selection

The selection of the CS Champions took place between M1 and M5 (January to May 2024), led by OutBe, and supported by all partners, particularly those involved in the WP2 project selection task. During the first kick-off meeting of CROPS in February and the following months, the consortium was invited to share successful stories and personalities demonstrating the potential of upscaling CS in Europe, in relation with the five EU Missions: Restore Our Oceans and Waters, Adaptations to Climate Change, 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, A Soil Deal for Europe and Cancer<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, OutBe's team researched through web, literature, and press sources the most groundbreaking stories of potential "Champions" of CS, aiming to find volunteers, policymakers, scientists, athletes and others who have elevated public participation in science across Europe.

A total list of 39 potential champions were identified, before contacting them via

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<sup>1</sup>5 EU Missions in Horizon Europe: [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe_en)



email, LinkedIn or through the project information email, and 15 replies were received.

CS Champions were then chosen based on their biography and the demonstrable impact carried out in Europe in the CS industry.

At the end of the selection period, a total of 11 CS Champions were identified, as shown in Table 1. Each champion displays a specific, successful profile related to one of the EU Missions.

*Table 1. The selected CS champions, role, country of origine and affiliation per EU Mission featured in the CS Champions Web Page.*

Selected CS Champions				
Name	Role	Country	Affiliation	EU Mission
<b>Eleonora De Sabata</b>	Journalist & Communication Manager	Italy	CleanSea LIFE & LIFE EU SHARKS	Restore our oceans and waters
<b>Cornelius Eich</b>	Head of Partnership & Sustainability	Germany	Sailing Team Malizia	Restore our oceans and waters
<b>Elena Vignerte</b>	Partnerships Manager	France	CURL, Initiative Oceans	Restore our oceans and waters
<b>Elizabete and Heliah Marchante</b>	Biologists and Founders	Portugal	<a href="http://Invasoras.pt">Invasoras.pt</a>	Adaptations to climate change
<b>Sofie Meeus and Quentin Groom</b>	Research Scientists	Germany	Meise Botanic Garden	Adaptations to climate change
<b>Frederik Gerits</b>	Bioscience Researcher	Belgium	ILVO	Adaptations to climate change
<b>Thomas Vanoppens &amp; Tim Guily</b>	Deputy Mayor and Advisor	Belgium	Leuven Smart City	100 Climate-neutral & smart cities
<b>Kris Vanherle</b>	Co-Founder	Belgium	Telraam	100 Climate-neutral & smart cities
<b>Jonas Lembrechts</b>	Assistant Professor	Belgium	CurieuzeNeuzen in de Tuin' ('Curious Noses in the Garden')	A soil deal for Europe
<b>Nadine Greenhalgh</b>	Biodiversity Partnerships Manager	UK	Basecamp Research	A soil deal for Europe
<b>Leonore Vander Donck</b>	PhD Researcher	Belgium	ISALA	Cancer



### 3.1.1 Restore our Oceans and Waters

CS champions connected to the restore our Oceans and Waters mission were chosen for their successful work in protecting and restoring the health of our ocean and waters through research and innovation, citizen engagement and blue investments. This area of CS was particularly rich of inspiring personalities and resulted in a total of 3 champions being selected.

#### **Eleonora De Sabata- From protecting sharks to denouncing marine litter: how CS impacts policy**

Eleonora De Sabata is an Italian journalist and photographer who has dedicated herself to the enhancement and conservation of the Mediterranean Sea. Her constant commitment to highlight the importance and multiple values of a better-managed marine ecosystem led to her great contributions to science and society. 'Osservatorio Mediterraneo', MEDSharks, the European LIFE projects 'Clean Sea' (completed) and 'European Sharks' (just started), MEDFever, Shark Alliance and more: her devotion to biodiversity and people caring for it stands as a concrete and lively example of the CS potential to influence the lives of many. Her work with SCUBA divers on sharks' conservation contributed to the designation of four Important Shark and Rays Areas, and her CS project on plastic pollution was key in establishing the first court case on marine litter in Italy.

#### **Cornelius Eich- Sailing at 38kts while collecting essential Ocean data: Citizen Science in and for professional offshore racing**

Cornelius Eich is Head of Partnerships and Sustainability of the Sailing Team Malizia, and his mission is to enhance and advance ocean culture through the contribution of passionate stakeholders. His 7 years of experience within the European Union's business offices (for example the current role as board member of the German 'UN Decade of Oceans Committee'), as well as his position within the German sailing team 'Malizia', make him the ideal ambassador of CS among the sailing community by promoting the benefits for both the sport/business experience and society as a whole. Gathering more and more crucial oceanographic data such as water temperature, salinity and density, as well as shifts in currents directions or microplastic abundance, Cornelius is helping the scientific community in obtaining that much needed data coming from extreme and hard-to-reach locations such as those cruised by boats competing in open waters, or those simply skipping from one harbour to the next.

#### **Elena Vignerte- Surfing while monitoring for water quality: a surfer point of view on marine CS**

Elena Vignerte is a passionate surfer from western France who in 2019 put her lengthy experience in volunteering, fundraising and sustainable finance at the service of Surfrider Foundation Europe, an NGO fighting for the protection of rivers,







lakes and oceans by involving so far more than 2000 volunteers in 50 local branches distributed in 12 countries. Clean-ups with quantification and categorisation of found waste, and scientific laboratories investigating the many yet little-considered artificial compounds that influence the chemistry of fresh and saltwater are the bread and butter of the company's initiatives. The protagonists of these actions can be families who want a relaxing but meaningful Sunday outing, as much as adrenalin-addicted surfers who want to give back to their favourite playground simply by wearing a sensor attached to their ankle and collecting pollution data while having fun. For Elena, it is the sense of community and purpose that this type of CS helps to build that makes her and her team so dedicated to improving water literacy, and we can witness this by looking at the annual environmental reports they share and have shared with policymakers directly connected to national and European institutions.

### 3.1.2 Adaptations to Climate Change

The Adaptations to Climate Change EU Mission aims to enable Europe to prepare for unavoidable climate impacts and accelerate the transformation to a climate-resilient Europe. CS Champions related to this Mission working with exemplary project and case studies on climate change monitoring were numerous and resulted in a total of 3 champions being selected.

#### **Sofie Meeus and Quentin Groom- Bioblitz events to monitor biodiversity in face of climate change**

Sofie Meeus and Quentin Groom are Research Scientists from Meise Botanic Garden in Belgium with a passion for both plants and data informatics. Their investigations using the participatory event known as 'bioblitz' (i.e. the involvement of citizens for a certain period of time in the collection of photos that testify to the presence of as many organisms as possible at a given time in a given area), are producing many interesting results for the scientific community, helping to definitively dispel its scepticism towards this innovative data collection methodology and highlighting its strengths and many applications. The gamification involved in this approach to biodiversity is what makes bioblitzes so effective among citizens, who are often eager to proudly participate in making their favourite area known for its nature values. Additionally, these experiences help connect a wider section of society with nature, making them witness to potential or actual changes in the ecosystem in which they live. From previous national projects like 'Groene Pioniers' (Green Pioneers), to current international ones like TETTRIs (Transforming European Taxonomy through Training, Research and Innovations), there are many ramifications of Sophie and Quentin's work involving CS. Their work has highlighted different outcomes of public participation in mass-biodiversity monitoring and the application of the derived data for policy.





## **Elizabeta and Helia Marchante- Citizens' role and responsibility in detection and eradication of invasive plant species**

Two scientists, two twins, the same purpose: to engage people in monitoring alien and invasive plant species in Portugal, to complement their research on this pressing issue. This is a short description of one of the many occupations of the Marchante sisters, Elizabeth and Helia, a peculiar couple whose lives are intertwined by the love for life both below and above ground. Despite coming from different research fields, once they realised that their work could be complementary, they began dabbling in a scientific adventure that led them, in 2013, to build 'Invasoras.pt', Portugal's first CS project addressing specifically the many problems related to invasive plants, in which people are asked to collect and share the location of certain species. The project, now merged into iNaturalist (an app to collect observation and create CS projects, more information at <https://www.inaturalist.org/>), has since evolved through dedicated workshops, talks, field trips, species removal, bio-blitzes and engaging social media activity which together have helped to popularise nationwide a topic otherwise unknown to most. Fighting the so-called 'plant blindness', the phenomenon by which people tend to ignore diversity and changes in flora despite its ubiquitous presence in everyday life, Elizabeth and Helia are doing their part in stopping a phenomenon, the spread of invasive species in general, responsible for 60% of total extinctions and hundreds of millions of dollars in annual damage to the economy.

## **Frederik Gerits - Gardens as mini-laboratories for climate change: the use of CS to monitor agriculture in a changing environment**

Fredrik Gerits is a young bioscience researcher from Ghent University (Flanders) specialising in forestry systems who is particularly interested in the interactions between nature and agriculture at the landscape level. His work is focused on the ways agriculture can withstand the ever-changing climate and how to give interested stakeholders the suitable knowledge and tools to adapt and keep producing. To achieve his ambitious research goals, Fredrik has been implementing since 2018 a project on agroforestry systems based on a CS approach: by creating and replicating in dozens of different locations of 1m<sup>2</sup>-gardens predetermined crops, he is studying the interactions between those selected vegetables and external factors such as biodiversity, microclimate, extreme weather events, landscape pattern, farmer care and so on. His work so far has resulted in many important scientific outputs on agriculture adaptations to climate change, but the more interesting ones are probably those coming from the social component: he understood how crucial the experience and point of view of farmers and gardeners can be to scientists, and how these perspectives can change when they are involved deeply in research.





### 3.1.3 100 Climate Friendly & Smart Cities

CS Champions inside the 100 Climate Friendly and Smart Cities EU Mission are promoting and showcasing the use of CS in ensuring that these cities act as experimentation and innovation hubs to put all European cities in a position to become climate-neutral by 2050. Belgium has become the EU Country with the most active community of citizen scientists for traffic and smart monitoring in cities, with two champions highlighting the potential of these successful stories to be upscaled.

#### **Kris Vanherle- Your window on local traffic: making a business out of CS for smart cities**

Kris Vanherle is a Belgian traffic engineer and now entrepreneur who has dedicated his life to studying and analysing traffic data to improve the liveability of cities. After training at the university of Leuven, and then gaining practical experience in a local enterprise related to urban mobility, Kris came up with the idea of implementing one of his greatest passions, CS, into entrepreneurship. That's how his co-founded project, Telraam, was born in 2019: the idea was to involve citizens in counting the quantity and quality of traffic in each city, through small, ready-to-use sensors that were easy to use and understand, simply by attaching them to windows facing the street. Understanding that the priorities of city administrators can often be condensed into a very few factors, such as urban safety, waste disposal and traffic management, Kris managed to make CS a winning key to his entrepreneurial venture: purchase after purchase, in 2023 he was able to improve the sensor to its current upgrade, and its use has since spread from Belgium to Europe and the world, improving life quality of many cities.

#### **Thomas Van Oppens and Tim Guily: Building smart cities of the future with CS- Leuven case study**

Thomas and Tim are, respectively, Deputy Mayor for Digitalization and Advisor for the Smart City of Leuven. Side by side, Thomas and Tim bring us the crucial yet rarely explored point of view of the policy makers behind CS since their focus is on using CS as a bottom-up approach in building a human-centred and transparent city. From the measurement of urban noise with hundreds of microphones to the acquisition of air quality data with specially designed sensors, Leuven has been involved in CS since 2017, long before Telraam's traffic monitoring technology was born, demonstrating how much of the city's DNA is focused on innovation. In this enviable context, our two champions operate with a clear understanding of how CS can move from ambitious words to concrete action: openness towards researchers' proposals, clear ideas from the outset on the use of data, constant information of citizens, and empowerment towards this knowledge transfer: these are the main ingredients for lasting CS. With this recipe, they have





succeeded in turning Leuven into a living laboratory, where better traffic plans, reduced urban noise and improved air quality have become a reality.

### **3.1.4 A Soil Deal for Europe**

The EU Mission A Soil Deal for Europe's main goal is to establish 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030. Both selected champions have really demonstrated the power of CS in being these living labs and highlighted the power of communities as a measure of upscaling.

#### **Jonas Lembrechts - Nosing around in gardens: citizen science to monitor soil in urban environment**

Jonas Lembrechts is a plant ecologist and assistant professor at the University of Utrecht, in the Netherlands, where he is currently working on innovative ways of scaling science to obtain some much-needed data, such as those related to hot topics like climate change, extreme weather events, soil health and, most importantly, how humans' behaviour can influence them. Relying on his creative mind, Jonas came up with the idea of engaging hundreds of citizens in a never-before-seen challenge: monitoring the rapidly changing climate at the backyard level, with the aim of understanding the influence of certain actions on the general local weather picture. In 2021 and 2022, he succeeded in realising 'CurieuzeNeuzen' (roughly translatable as 'curious noses'), a large-scale CS project that involved 5,000 Flanders citizens in collecting soil samples in their own backyard and maintaining a mini weather station for a period of six months. The results and feedback received over the two years have been outstanding, so much so that once the huge amount of data has been processed, it is guaranteed that its actions will serve as a model for scientists willing to engage citizens in building a more resilient future.

#### **Nadine Greenhalgh - How collecting samples of soil can be the next big thing for biotechnology**

Nadine is the biodiversity project manager for Basecamp, a UK based company partnering with biodiversity guardians around the world to discover novel microbes in soil and sediment through sample collection and DNA technologies. Basecamp Research is on the hunt for 'better medicines, better food and better products for the planet' and deals with analysing and enhancing commercially the dense, heterogeneous, yet mostly unknown biome contained in soil. Involved in the project since the company's inception, Nadine has helped establish research partnerships with 20 countries over the past three years, gaining access to unique soil samples from locations and citizens all over the world, and thus changing the traditional exclusive approach of biotechnology companies to the market and society. In this way, they are helping to accelerate the discovery of new proteins and enzymes contained in this soil biome, substances that are useful for a wide



variety of applications, such as the one implemented by the partner 'Protein Evolution' for the degradation of ubiquitous plastic waste. These beneficial collaborations with all levels of society, together with other practical acts such as the construction of regional DNA sequencing laboratories, are building concrete and replicable value chains, which are also fair and equitable for the sender of the samples, who can count on royalties for any patents, as well as up-to-date information on the development of the product in question.

### 3.1.5 Cancer

The EU Mission on Cancer focuses on improving the lives of more than 3 million people by 2030 through prevention, cure and for those affected by cancer, and resulted in being the most difficult area in which to find CS champions. Most of the contacted figures were among doctors, professors, founding agencies, foundations, trusts and patients themselves, but none resulted to be available, reachable or in target with the mission. Ultimately, we had to expand the span of our research to the potential of CS as a health measurement tools, useful for cancer prevention. This result highlights the large potential of CS in health and cancer monitoring.

#### **Leonore Vander Donck- Vaginal swabs to revolutionise women's health research: how citizen science helps to investigate the female microbiome**

Leonore is a doctoral student from University of Antwerp inside the Isala project, a large-scale citizen study of the vaginal microbiome in Belgium in which more than 3,000 women participated by taking simple vaginal swabs at home and answering numerous questions about their health and lifestyle. Isala steamed from the knowledge gap on this sensitive topic, in which case studies were often confined to gynaecological settings where only disease-carrying vaginas were found. By asking applicants to answer a simple online questionnaire on their website, and then sending them for free an accessible toolkit with an attached brochure, they have since enabled thousands of women to improve the big picture: on one hand, the project has raised volunteers' awareness of the topic, improving their ability to be somewhat independent of gynaecologists in assessing overall vaginal health; on the other, they have been able to collect a quantity of samples that has translated into premium data, paving the way for new research in an under-investigated topic. Isala now has numerous sister and daughter projects around the world, where thanks to citizen science women are putting themselves as protagonists of their own health. The link between the vaginal microbiome and related risks such as cancer, miscarriage, abortion, or types of pain is now being explored like never before, allowing women to finally take charge of their health and the women's scientific community to get the space it has always deserved.





### 3.2 Podcast Recording

Once the selected champions had accepted being interviewed, questions were sent beforehand at least one week before the interview, to give time to prepare. Questions were based upon the champion biography and online research on the affiliated project/s, with the overall aim to story-tell the CS project and the champion's role, showcase successful examples, highlight the link with the concerned EU Mission, share potential tips for similar practitioners and inspire the public to take action in CS projects.

All recorded interviews were conducted on Zencastr (<https://zencastr.com/>), an online podcast recording platform, where each of the champions was invited singularly. Each recording took between 20 and 60 minutes overall, including the initial briefing on the recording procedures. Once the recording had started, before proceeding, participants were asked verbally if they agreed on the recording and sharing on the interview, and all participants responded positively. After the interviews, edits and sound adjustments were conducted using Garage Band (<https://www.apple.com/mac/garageband/>), and scheduled for posting on Spotify for Podcasters (<https://podcasters.spotify.com/>), alongside a catchy title and a brief description. All set up, recording, editing and posting was carried out by OutBe.

### 3.3 Publication and webpage setup

All podcast episodes and champions profiles with their name, picture, biography and brief descriptions of the episode, were simultaneously posted on Spotify by OutBe, and also on the CS Champions Web Page inside the CROPS website by Earthwatch weekly between June and September 2024. Social media cards (Figure 1a), were produced and shared weekly in partnerships with the champions on social media (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, X and TikTok). In M8 (August 2024) the website page appears as shown in Figure 1b.





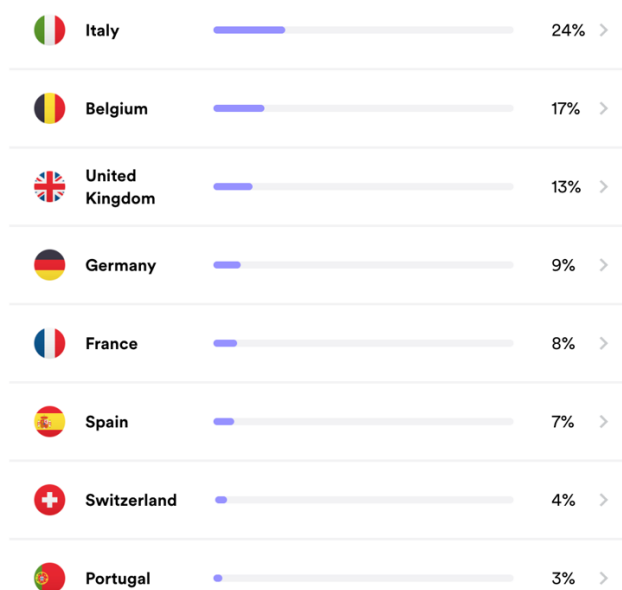
Figure 1: (a) On the left Social Media Graphics developed to share the CS champions, (b) on the right screenshot of the CS Champions Web Page on CROPS website.

## 4 Podcast results

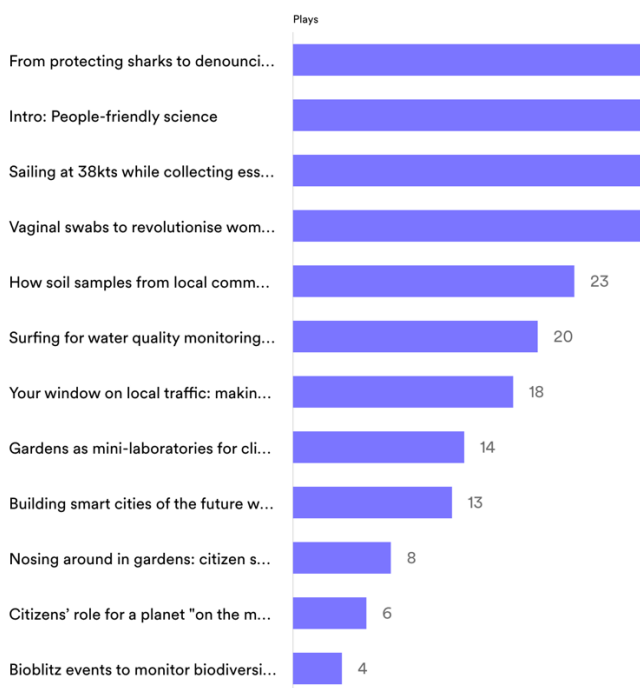
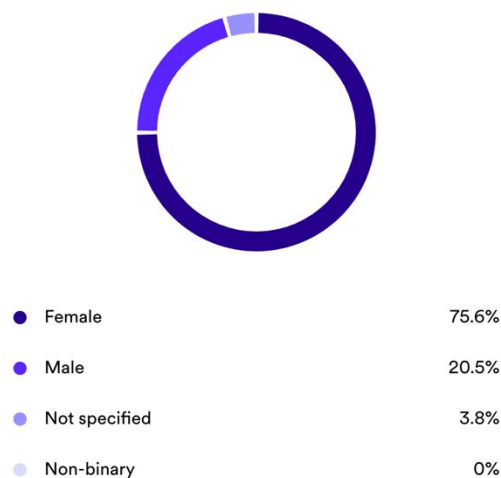
Between June-October 2024, a total of 3259 impressions and 262 full plays were recorded on Spotify for the Citizen Science Champions Podcast (last retrieved from Spotify for Podcasters Analytics at 11:00 CET on 14/10/24). Podcast audience are mainly from the EU, specifically Italy (24%), Belgium (17%), UK (13%), Germany (9%), France (8%), Spain (7%) and Switzerland (4%), with an age of between 28-44 years old (48,8%) (Figure 2). Gender appears to be leaning towards a majority of women (75.6%), which follows the objectives of the CROPS project, and impressions mainly come from the Spotify home page, meaning that the podcast landed often on the explorer page. The most successful episodes were the ones related to the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters (with a total of 105 plays): this was probably due to the more charismatic stories, yet also to a bias given to the proximity of most partners in the consortium with marine CS projects (Figure 2).



### Geographic location



### Gender



### Age

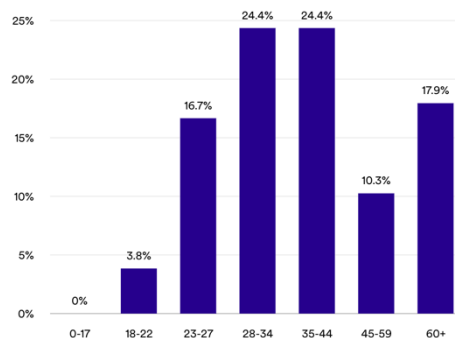


Figure 2: Analytics of the Citizen Science Champions Podcast from Spotify (retrieved on 14/10/24 at 11:00 CET)

## 5 Future development

All selected CS Champions will from now on be involved in other activities and networks on the project, especially with regards to T3.3 (Guidelines for stakeholder







engagement, including SMEs and industry), T4.5 (Ensuring broad societal involvement and ownership through an inclusive approach and responsible R&I) and of course inside the transnational CS communities to be developed and strengthened in T5.1 (Development of transnational CS communities with aligned EU mission goals).

Due to the very interesting stories and the successful results of this task, CS Champions will continue onwards, interviewing other inspiring personalities who have been suggested by the champions and partners as the project continues. We believe this to be an exciting opportunity to make the voice of CS heard outside of the walls of academia and towards the ears of every curious individual. Additionally, this appears to represent the first podcast series from a CSA Horizon Europe project, and we are proud of it remaining on Spotify to spread the word even after the completion of the project.

## 5.1 Targeting Younger Generations

To promote the power of citizen science among younger audiences and inspire youth engagement in citizen science initiatives, European Schoolnet (EUN) will ensure that the stories and achievements of the identified champions reach classrooms across Europe.

The podcasts will be added to the [Scientix® Resource Repository](#) and disseminated through the Scientix Digest, reaching thousands of teachers and their students. Besides, these podcasts will inspire the creation of Learning Scenarios and will be further disseminated in the CROPS MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) on citizen science, addressed to educators and students.

To strengthen these efforts, EUN has identified four dedicated teacher champions and Scientix Ambassadors<sup>2</sup>—Anita Šimac (Croatia), Elena Papadopoulou (Greece), Quique Vergara (Spain), and Achillefs Kapartzianis (Cyprus)—who are passionate about incorporating citizen science into their classrooms. Each champion will be aligned with a specific EU mission based on their expertise, supporting fellow teachers in leveraging the power of education to upscale citizen science initiatives.

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<sup>2</sup> [Scientix®](#), the community for science education in Europe, promotes and supports a Europe-wide collaboration among STEM teachers, education researchers, policymakers and other STEM education professionals. Scientix Ambassadors are educators that share Scientix activities at national level and play an active role in supporting innovation in STEM education in their countries. Their work is essential to expanding and consolidating a community whose core values are sharing good classroom practice in the STEM area and ensuring that students are equipped with the skills to pursue STEM careers. Scientix has more than 1,500 active Ambassadors in 56 countries.



## 5.2 Next steps

During the next months of the task, we will particularly focus on finding another champion in close relation with the EU Mission on Cancer, for which was particularly difficult to find available personalities. Additionally, we will focus on targeting younger generations in collaboration with EUN, now that T6.4 has started. The next planned interview will target teachers involved in the development of the MOOC (D6.3). Overall, we are very pleased with how participative, creative and followed this task has been, and we look forward to spreading the word and meeting new, inspiring champions.

## 6 Literature cited

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