

## PRESS RELEASE

### **HECSOs - Higher Education institutions and Civil Society Organisations together for community engagement (2022-2025)**

***Financial Agreement no. 2020-1-ES01-KA203-081978***

The HECSOs Project is a three-year project that began in January 2022, funded by the European Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency within ERASMUS+ program.

The project aims at improving Universities' capacities to cooperate with CSOs systematically and continuously on community engagement as an innovative and impactful way for socio-economic inclusion of people in need. The project consortium will establish a trans-disciplinary and collaborative research group and develop international and research based learning approaches to develop and disseminate innovative and evidence-based models of intervention and related implementation tools.

The project consortium will also identify relevant professional roles that make community engagement approaches more effective and impactful, it will co-design corresponding skills and competency frameworks and develop related training (up-skilling) curricula and courses for students and CSOs professionals. Finally, the project partners will develop, through jointly-organised local policy multi-stakeholders workshops, guidelines and policy recommendations to enable environments that favour community engagement approaches. Partners strongly believe that the mission of universities nowadays should include responding to societal challenges and that this mission should be carried out by engaging systematically with local communities. Higher education contributes in various ways to making people more resilient and able to face various challenges. According to the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings which assess universities on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) universities score highly for their Partnership approach in working towards the goals (SDG 17), for helping to improve Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) and for contributing to Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11).

#### ***Specific Objectives:***

**SO1:** To develop innovative and evidence based models (and related implementing tools) for impactful community engagement interventions by setting up a transdisciplinary and continuous collaboration between Universities and CSOs, analysing existing innovative practices on the ground all over Europe and adopting collaborative and research-based learning methodologies.

**SO2:** To widen the academic offer of Universities by identifying specific professional roles that make community engagement approaches more effective and impactful, by generating skills and competency frameworks related to these professional roles, by developing corresponding training courses curricula and implementing a first experimental course addressed to master's students.

**SO3:** Fostering civic engagement through jointly-organized (Universities and CSOs) multi-stakeholder policy workshops at local levels to brainstorm with local stakeholders and citizens on how to design more effective and inclusive initiatives in their territories and to develop local policy recommendations to enable and support community engagement approaches at local, national and European levels.

#### ***Results***

The first project result (PR1) entails the development of a set of 6 Toolkits, structured as interactive digital "how to do" guides based on models of different successful typologies of action for community engagement (CE) in different areas/target groups. Preliminarily, the main areas/target groups where to focus the collection of practices eventually analysed and modelled are: EU citizenship, migrants integration, environmental action, gender empowerment, economic integration of NEETS, management of common resources.

The toolkits will be made available to CSOs involved, but possibly also beyond to the wider public, in order to support cooperation at the local level in planning and adapting models of interventions in other contexts to promote the inclusion of people in need through CE, multi-stakeholder and regenerative approaches. The toolkits, as well as a database of best practices, the modelling and other relevant outreach materials, will be made available to the wider public thanks to the digital e-learning platform S-nodi Education ([www.edu.s-nodi.org](http://www.edu.s-nodi.org)), an already existing and fully functional digital infrastructure provided by S-nodi. S-nodi Education is a digital platform addressed to people and organizations working in the social field wishing to improve the management of resources in a sustainable and smart way.

The platform is accessible by every device and it provides the space and infrastructure to set up and allow user-friendly navigation of different tools such as interactive toolkits and repositories. The related transversal outcome is the creation of synergic cooperation between CSOs involved in community engagement and universities doing analyses and modelling promising practices of community engagement.

Another outcome is an increased academic offer through the design and development of new courses curricula on community engagement (PR2). Based on the analyses of practices and identification of models of interventions, key professional roles that make community engagement initiatives effective and impactful will be identified and new skills and competency frameworks will be developed for the corresponding professional roles ("Community Engagement Competence Framework").

The PR2 will consist of two methodological tools: a "Curriculum/Courseware Development Framework" will provide the methodological basis to design: (i) a module for master degree programs and (ii) a course for in-service competence development (training) of CSOs' staff. A LTTA (Community Engagement Summer School) for 30 students will be also organised in this framework and a "Mentoring Capacity building Guide" will be produced, mainly addressing the needs of Universities' faculty members, who will be tutoring and driving flagship projects for both the university students and the CSOs' staff who will be joining the aforementioned courses.

The third result (PR3) is the production of policy recommendations. Project and associated partners will organise 2 multi-stakeholder Policy workshops per country (Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania, Spain). The first workshop will aim at testing the toolkits and models of interventions and brainstorming on how to adapt the toolkits to the local context. The first workshop findings, obtained through interactive exercises, will aim to develop policy recommendations that will be structured and better defined during the second workshop addressed to the same participants. The policy recommendations gathered in the 6 countries will be translated into a set of recommendations on the synthesis of processes used in community engagement for European policy makers' audiences. The recommendations will be presented, together with the other results, in the final multiplier event (conference) in Brussels.

### **Partnership**

The project will be implemented by 8 partners (4 Universities and 4 CSOs) from 6 EU countries (Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Italia, Romania, Spain), with the support of a European CSOs network, 2 Universities and 2 CSOs as associated partners.

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