



Engage SDGs

Participatory Methods & Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

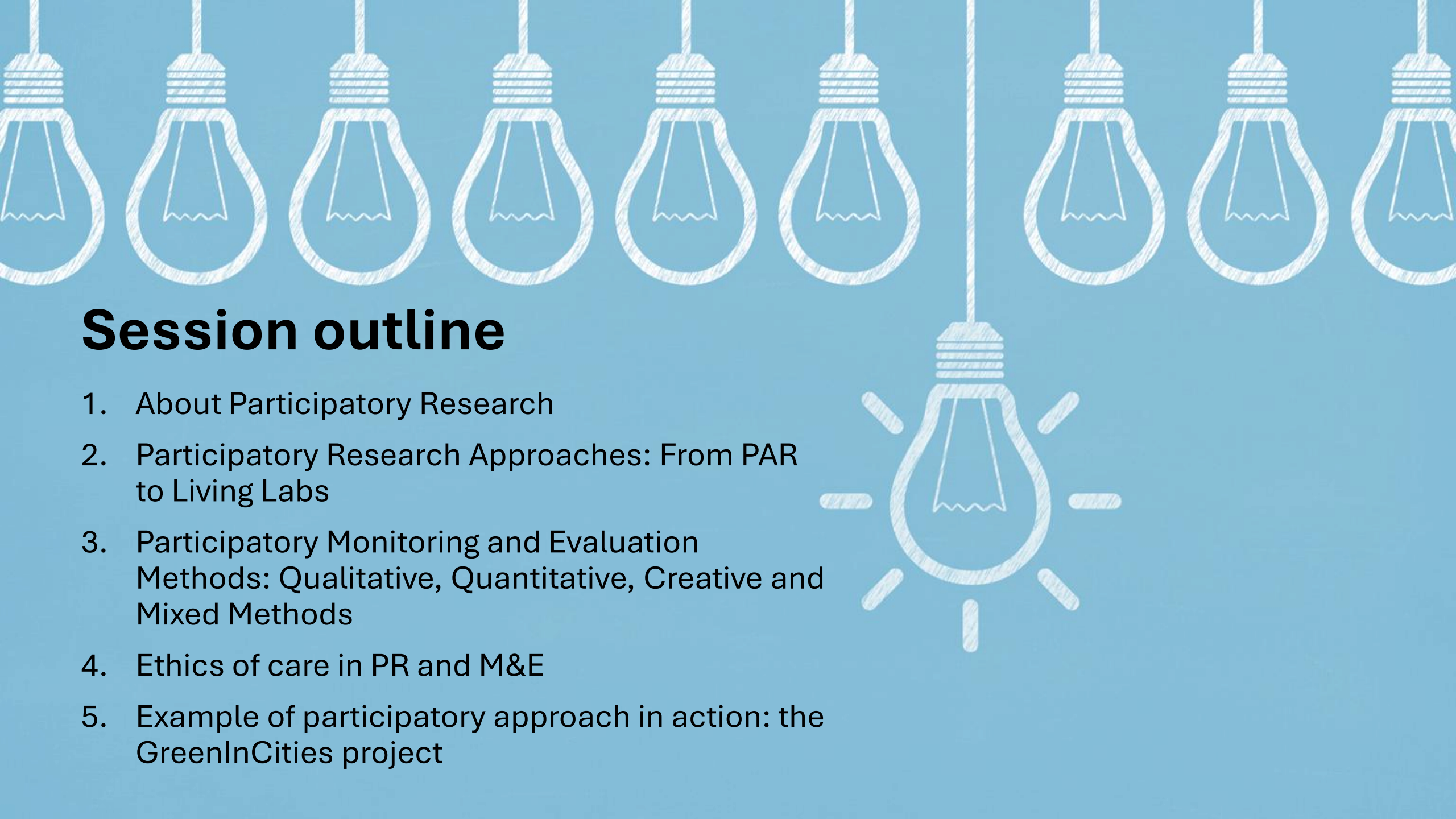
Associate Professor Dr Siobhan O'Sullivan

Research Fellow Dr Elizabeth Folan O'Connor

School of Applied Social Studies | Collective Social Futures

University College Cork (UCC) Ireland





Session outline

1. About Participatory Research
2. Participatory Research Approaches: From PAR to Living Labs
3. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
Methods: Qualitative, Quantitative, Creative and Mixed Methods
4. Ethics of care in PR and M&E
5. Example of participatory approach in action: the GreenInCities project

Participatory Research (PR) is a research approach where researchers work collaboratively with communities and groups “to establish and implement interventions” that lead to sustainable “change, development and improvement” to the life of the community and its residents (Cohen et al. 2018: 56)



Emerged in response for research approaches that study the world from the perspective of the communities often excluded or hidden, in particular marginalised communities.

PR is an example of engaged “critical theory in research” *with* people and communities rather than research *about* them (Cohen et al. 2018: 56).

The goal is to promote inclusivity and democratic involvement of people in the creation of new knowledge.

Collaborative research gives voice to their lived experience through a research process that emphasises mutual respect and equality for the purposes of sustainable change and social justice.

Participatory Research (PR) is a flexible methodology that requires a systematic approach to research that includes members of the community, researchers, municipal staff, elected officials, local businesses, community organisations, outreach teams, NGOs and other community services in a structured way. (Wallerstein 2020)



PR is attentive to how the community views itself, its' values, what the community wants and needs, and embraces diverse voices



PR is flexible, iterative and robust by employing multiple research methods including peer and co-research



PR includes training peer researchers as co-researchers to co-design research approaches, collect data and/or co-analyse research findings for the wider community.



PR is particularly effective in youth reach, public health, community development and social justice issues (Cullinane & O'Sullivan 2020).

Participatory Research Methods



Participatory research is not prescriptive—different methodological approaches and methods can be used to guide the collection of data (often within the same study).



Participatory research often uses **qualitative methods** to explore the lived experience and perspectives of marginalised groups and communities.



Participatory research also uses **quantitative methods** to capture data (objective and subjective) through surveys.



Participatory research can also use **mixed** and **creative methods** to capture different dimensions of people's experiences and views.



Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh
University College Cork, Ireland

Join at:
vevox.app

ID:
104-672-488



What are the benefits of participatory research approaches?

Participatory Research Benefits



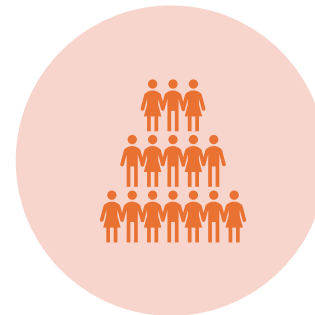
Participatory approaches bring community involvement and participants' everyday experiences and knowledge into research design and the research process.



This leads to a better understanding of complex social realities/issues/phenomena (Campus Engage 2017: 49).



Beneficial outcomes for participants and communities include capacity building, the development of new skills, knowledge, confidence, and a broader understanding of complex social issues (Banks et al. 2013: 264–265; Cullinane and O'Sullivan 2020: 53).



It helps ensure that research remains relevant to people's lives, reflects their experiences, and maintains its orientation to stimulating change in policy and practice (Goodson and Phillimore 2012: 11).

We also need to consider the limitations of PR in terms of expectation raising, power imbalances, extent of time commitment for all involved, remuneration for co-researchers, context of limited funding...

Monitoring and Evaluation

Formative/process evaluation

- Evaluating the process implementation of a programme.
- On-going and systematic monitoring to assess what is working well, what can be improved.
- Qualitative and mixed methods important.

Summative/outcome evaluation

- Evaluating the impact of a programme.
- Tracking change over time against baseline measures to assess were the objectives and goals achieved, if not, why not.
- Quantitative and mixed methods important.
- Can also use logic models and Theory of Change.



Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

- Involves “engagement in determining, designing and analysing research questions and approach” (Johnson et al., 2019: 17).
- Co-construction of the evaluation framework, methods, data collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination with the research participants.
- Can be formative and/or summative.
- Can involve multiple methods.



Participatory Research Approaches



Participatory
Action Research

Community-Based
Participatory
Research



Patient & Public
Involvement

Living Labs



Citizen Science

Participatory Action Research (PAR) Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

PAR is a dynamic research process that explores a social problem and empowers participants with methods and tools to overcome social challenges.

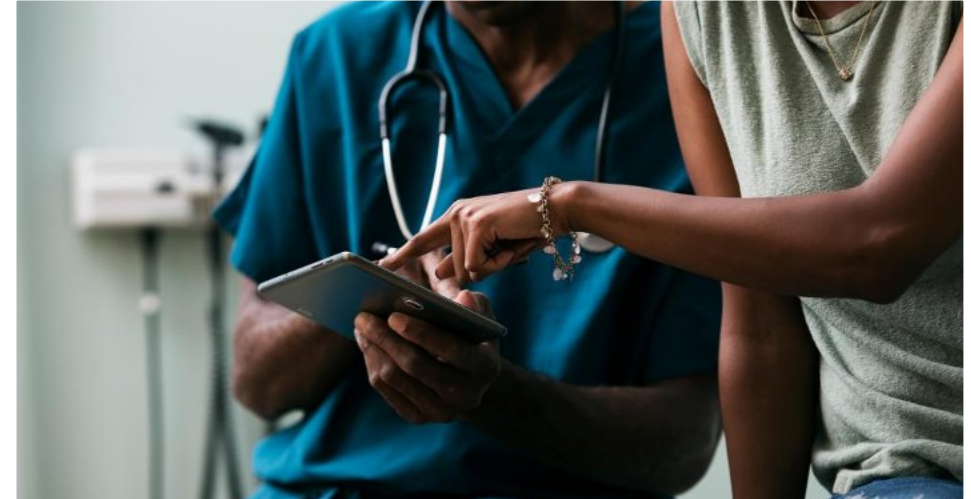
CBPR collaboratively seeks partnership with communities most affected by a social issue to engage in the research process from start to finish with a goal to understanding and resolving the issue.



Patient & Public Involvement (PPI) Citizen Science

Patient & Public Involvement (PPI) involves active collaboration between researchers & individuals to capture the lived experiences of current/past members of the public representing patients, target trial group, carers, and/or patient advocacy groups/charities that represent people with the condition.

Citizen Science (CS) refers to research that actively seeks engagement with the public to collect data for the generation of new knowledge (Santos-Tapia et al. 2024: 2).



Citizen Science Tools



Participatory
Survey &
Data
Gathering
Tools



Community
Mapping
Platforms

Citizen
Social
Science
Labs/Hubs



Digital
Participatory
Budgeting
Tools



Community
Sensing



Mobile
Report Apps
for Social
Issues

Co-Design &
Deliberation
Platforms



Participatory
Ethnography



Living Labs

Living Labs are experimental learning and innovation environments and platforms that share resources and create collaborative networks for stakeholders to take part in the process of identifying societal challenges, co-creating solutions to these problems, and ultimately implementing solutions locally (Leminen & Westerlund 2025).

Living Labs collaborate with diverse stakeholders across disciplinary/sectoral boundaries, trial and test ideas in real life settings, refine solutions, and share data and findings openly.





Join at:
vevox.app

ID:
179-027-113



0 / 1

Have you engaged in any of these Participatory Approaches?

Participatory Action Research



Community Based Participatory Research



PPI



Citizen Science



Living Labs



RE-OPEN



HAVE YOU ENGAGED IN
ANY OF THESE...

1/1



Participatory M&E can take a flexible, pragmatic, multi-method approach



Quantitative research
is an objective method
of data collection

Quantitative research
investigates objective
phenomena using
quantifiable,
categorical and/or
numerical data

Quantitative
research
examples



Surveys &
questionnaires



Observation



Experiments



Crowd
Sourcing

Qualitative research is a subjective approach to social inquiry that takes a flexible, person-centred approach to research design

The goal is to collect and analyse data that emphasises the essential role of the lived experience and views of participants in the research process.

Qualitative research studies social phenomena and uses verbal rather than statistical forms of data collection that can be thematised and analysed to reveal complex social processes.

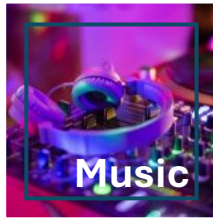
Qualitative research examples



Mixed Methods Research

One-to-one interviews help explore individual views more deeply

Music creation fosters creative expression



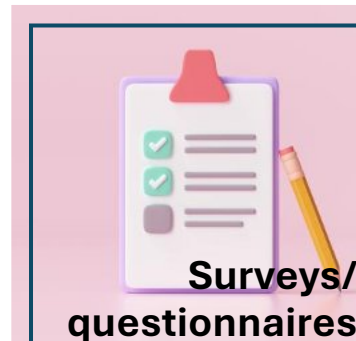
Creative methods introduce new ways to collect data



Workshops are highly interactive and hand-on, with participants' actively engaging with the process to build knowledge.



Focus Groups are small in scale and explores in depth what people think

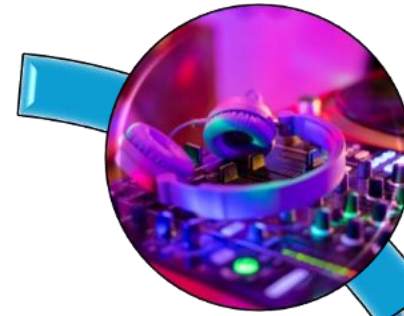


Larger in scale and reach
More objective
Concerned with numerical and statistical analysis

Creative methods in research provides “opportunities to explore meaning, ritual, symbolism, and the visceral, sensory, embodied, and affective elements of experience, as they represent valid ways of knowing.” (Ingram 2024: 175)

Creative methods are used to “explore meaning and engage participants in sustainability research, offering valid avenues for understanding diverse human experiences.” (Ingram 2024: 175)

Creative Methods examples



Musical engagement



Narrative storytelling, drama, video or audio piece

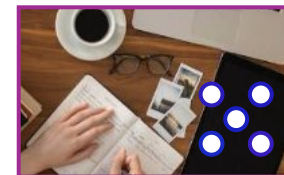


Vox Pops/quick interview



Reflective piece/poem/song

Creative Methods Include



○ Vox Pop /
Quick Query

○○ Walking
narrative

○○○ Arts-based
research

○○○ Music
Creation

○○○ Reflective Poetry/Prose,
blogs & vlogs



Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh
University College Cork, Ireland

Join at:
vevox.app

ID:
110-284-755



0 / 0

Rank which research method you would prioritise in a participatory evaluation.

Interviews (qualitative)

Surveys (quantitative)

Creative methods

A mix of methods

Focus groups (qualitative)

Models of Participatory M&E

- (i) Contributive Model - participants contribute to one aspect of the project only, e.g. data collection;
- (ii) Collaborative Model – participants are engaged in more than one phase, e.g. data analysis and interpretation; and
- (iii) Co-Created Project – participants define the research question and research design as well as their involvement in all stages of the process.
(adapted from Heiss & Matthes 2017: 22-23)

Kara (2018, 109) argues that researchers ‘have an ethical responsibility to know when and how to offer involvement or participation’.

Kara argues that in some cases ‘it may be more ethical to offer a flexible approach to participation, with options for participants to move through different levels of involvement at different times to suit their needs’ (ibid).

Structures such as Advisory Boards & Participatory Groups of co-researchers



Participatory Research Ethics: An ethics of care



Participatory research requires an ethics of care that is “relationship-based” and oriented towards “building relationships, generating trust and negotiating power” (Banks et al . 2013: 274). This requires:

Transparency: built by clear communication between the research team and partners.

Respect: built by recognition of roles, knowledge, insights, experiences, and contributions of all involved.

Empowerment: built by inclusion from the start of the process in the different aspects of research co-design.

Trust: built by consistent engagement and iterative review.

Flexibility: through ongoing monitoring and review to help identify any adjustments needed.

Collaboration: built throughout the research cycle by all stakeholders involved.

GreenInCities

EU Horizon interdisciplinary research project (2024-2027)



31 partners from 13 European countries collaborating to support human and non-human wellbeing and advance the SDGs by tackling biodiversity loss and the climate crisis in deprived urban areas.



Interdisciplinarity and a collaborative, inclusive participatory approach are central to the project, with nature and humans key stakeholders.



In the first two years (2024-25) Leader Cities collaborated on methods and tools for inclusive community engagement and Nature based Solutions (NbS).



In the final two years (2026-27) Follower Cities will be supported by the Leader Cities to co-design and localise NbS.

GreenInCities

EU Horizon interdisciplinary research project (2024-2027)



The School of Applied Social Studies and Collective Social Futures in UCC have a strong tradition of working with local communities through engaged participatory research.

This includes deep research relationships in Knocknaheeny, Cork City where the GreenInCities project is being implemented, with strong connections to residents, statutory agencies and community groups.

We are working with Cork City Council, Knocknaheeny residents and stakeholders in supporting the co-creation of NbS and evaluating the project.

**GreenIn
Cities**

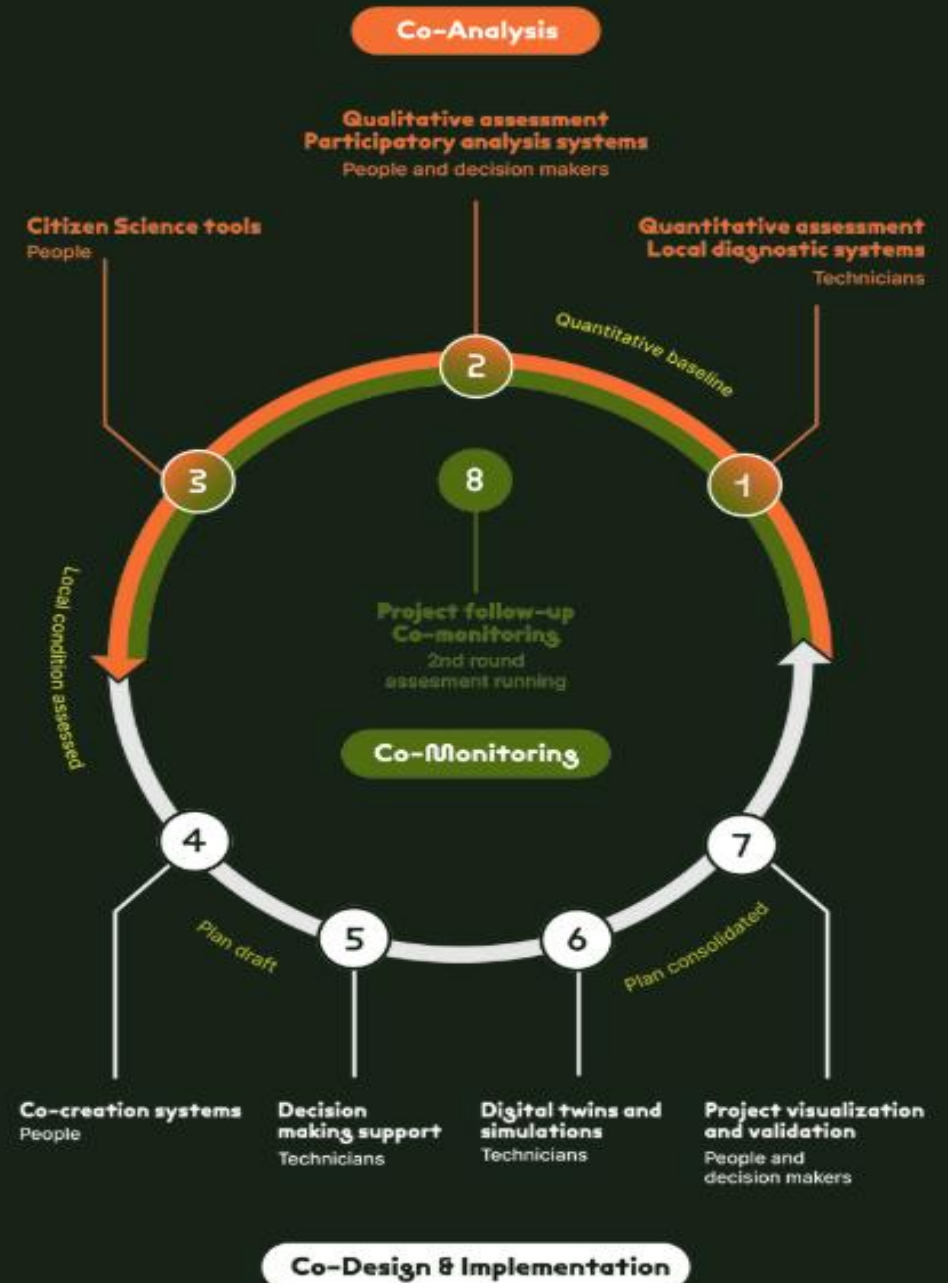


GreenInCities Methodology

1. Co-Analysis – quantitative and qualitative assessment and citizen science tools
2. Co-Design and Implementation – co-creation of NbS plans with communities, stakeholders, technicians, and decision-makers
3. Co-monitoring – second round of quantitative and qualitative assessment and citizen science tools

Summative evaluation of the project outcomes and impacts from the co-analysis and co-monitoring through the quantitative and qualitative assessments.

Formative evaluation of the co-creative participatory approaches through participant evaluation surveys and facilitator logs.



Examples of participatory methods for GreenInCities in Cork City

Tools/Methods	Main Purpose	Stakeholder(s)	Related KPIs
Habitats/Biodiversity Co-mapping	Established baseline biodiversity at the site	Residents, Young people	Fauna and Flora Mapping Citizens involved
Place Standard tool Ireland - (Healthy Ireland Local Government) & Place Standard with a climate lens – (Public Health Scotland)	Establish baseline community perceptions and needs for the site	All stakeholders: Residents; Young People; Older People; & Non-resident Representatives	Citizen involvement

**Co-analysis
& co-monitoring**

Tools/Methods	Main Purpose	Stakeholder(s)	Related KPIs
Co-design public space workshop focusing on liveability and social cohesiveness (URBANA)	Link community needs to design output	All stakeholders: Residents; Young People; Older People; & Non-resident Representatives	Citizen involvement
Animal-oriented design workshop (LAND)	Ensure non-humans are included in the design	Residents; Young People; & Older People	Fauna and Flora Mapping & Citizens involvement
Co-Design validation Event	Create awareness in the community about tools/methods	All stakeholders: Residents; Young People; Older People; & Non-resident Representatives	Citizen involvement

Co-design

Reflections
and questions
are welcome

Discussion



Bibliography

Participatory Research

- Banks, S., Armstrong, A., Carter, K., Graham, H., Hayward, P., Henry, A., Holland, T., Holmes, C., Lee, A., McNulty, A., Moore, N., Nayling, N., Stokoe, A., & Strachan, A. (2013). Everyday ethics in community-based participatory research. *Contemporary Social Science*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 263-277.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Creswell, J.W. (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Fitzgerald, H. E. F., Bruns, K., Sonka, S.T., Furco, A. & Swanson, L. (2016) The Centrality of Engagement in Higher Education: Reflections and Future Directions. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 245–253.
- Horgan, D. (2017) Child participatory research methods: Attempts to go ‘deeper’. *Childhood (Copenhagen, Denmark)*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 245-259.
- Johnson, M. et al. (2019) Higher education outreach: Examining key challenges for academics. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 67(4), 469-491.
- Kara, H. (2018) Democratizing research in practice. In R. Iphofen, & M. Tolich (eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research ethics*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Martin, R. & Sanga, U. (2023) Participatory modelling: Participatory research methods for sustainability - toolkit #6. *Gaia (Heidelberg, Germany)*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 230-232.
- Matthews, B. & Ross, L. (2010) *Research Methods: A Practical Guide for the Social Sciences*. Essex: England: Pearson Education Ltd.
- O’Sullivan, S., Desmond, E. & Buckley, M. (2023) The Ethics of Engagement and Representation in Community-based Participatory Research. *Ethics & Social Welfare*, vol. 17, np. 2, pp. 159-174.
- Stanton, T.K., (2008) New times demand new scholarship: Opportunities and challenges for civic engagement at research universities. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, vol. 3, no. 1), pp. 19-42.

Bibliography

PAR and CBPR

- Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U., Delgado, J., Rua, M., de-Graft Aikins, A., & Hodgetts, D. (2023). Participatory action research. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers*, 3(1), 34. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-023-00214-1>
- Creswell, J.W. (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- González, E.R., Lejano, R.P., Vidales, G., Conner, R.F., Kidokoro, Y., Fazeli, B. & Cabrales, R. (2007) Participatory Action Research for Environmental Health: Encountering Freire in the Urban Barrio. *Journal of urban affairs*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 77-100.
- Goodson, L. & Phillimore, J. (2012) *Community Research for Participation: From theory to method*, 1st edn. Bristol: Policy Press.
- O'Sullivan, S., O'Connell, C., Cullinane, M., Kenny, L., Folan O'Connor, E., & Gaston, S. (2024). Regeneration in Vulnerable Communities: Resident and Stakeholder Perspectives. *Social Inclusion*, 12.

Creative Research

- Byrne, L., O'Connell, C., & O'Sullivan, S. (2020). Rap and Political Participation: Using Rap as a Creative Method in Research with Children and Young People. *YOUNG*, 28(1), 50-68.
- Ingram, M. (2024) Arts-based research: Participatory research methods for sustainability - toolkit #9. *Gaia (Heidelberg, Germany)*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 175-177.
- Kara, H. (2015) *Creative Research Methods in the Social Sciences: A practical guide*. Bristol: UK and Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bibliography

PPI

- Luna Puerta, L. & Smith, H.E. (2020) The “PPI Hawker”: an innovative method for patient and public involvement (PPI) in health research. *Research involvement and engagement*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 31-12.
- Nissen, S., Karlsson, A.W. & Nørgaard, B. (2026) Evaluation Tools for Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) in Health Research: A Scoping Review: Patient and Public Involvement in Health Research. *The patient : patient-centered outcomes research*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 21-49.
- Rustage, K., Crawshaw, A., Majeed-Hajaj, S., Deal, A., Nellums, L., Ciftci, Y., Fuller, S.S., Goldsmith, L., Friedland, J.S. & Hargreaves, S. (2021) Participatory approaches in the development of health interventions for migrants: a systematic review. *BMJ open*, vol. 11, no. 10, pp. e053678.

Citizen Science

- Frazer, M.T., Creaser, A., Tatterton, M.J., Daly-Smith, A. & Hall, J. (2024) Exploring children and young people’s experience of participating in citizen science—A qualitative evidence synthesis. *PloS one*, vol. 19, no. 7, pp. e0304976.
- Heiss, R. & Matthes, J. (2017) Citizen Science in the Social Sciences: A Call for More Evidence. *Gaia (Heidelberg, Germany)*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 22-26.
- Kullenberg, C. & Kasperowski, D. (2016) What Is Citizen Science? – A Scientometric Meta-Analysis. *PloS one*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. e0147152.
- Santos-Tapia, C., Verderau, M., Borràs, S., Flórez-Santasusana, M., Flórez, F., Morales, J.J., Moli, P., Borràs, A., Cirach, M. & Ubalde-López, M. (2024) Citizen science and social innovation as citizen empowerment tools to address urban health challenges: The case of the urban health citizen laboratory in Barcelona, Spain. *PloS one*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. e0298749.

Bibliography

Living Labs

- European Network of Living Labs (ENOLL) (n.d.) Global Community of Changemakers [website] Available at: <<https://enoll.org/>> [Accessed 09.04.26].
- Joore, P., Overdiek, A., Smeenk, W. & van Turnhout, K. (2025) *Applied Design Research in Living Labs and Other Experimental Learning and Innovation Environments*, 1st edn. CRC Press.
- Leminen, S. & Westerlund, M. (2025) Future Research Avenue for Living Labs and Collaborative Innovation: [Special Issue on Living Labs and Collaborative Innovation]. *Journal of innovation management (Porto)*, vol. 13, no. 1.
- Taylor, L. (2021) Exploitation as innovation: research ethics and the governance of experimentation in the urban living lab. *Regional studies*, vol. 55, no. 12, pp. 1902-1912.
- UCC (2026) Centre for City Futures [website] Available at: <<https://www.ucc.ie/en/unic/centre-for-city-futures/>> [Accessed 09.04.26].
- UCC Civic & Community Engagement (2026) European University Living Labs—Driving Innovation Ecosystems [website] Available at: <<https://www.ucc.ie/en/civic/ellh/>> [Accessed 09.04.26].
- UCC (2025) What is a Living Lab Project? [website] Available at: <<https://www.ucc.ie/en/sustainability-climate-action/livinglab/#what-is-a-living-lab-project>> [Accessed 09.04.26].



Associate Professor Dr. Siobhan O'Sullivan
Senior Research Fellow Dr. Elizabeth Folan O'Connor

School of Applied Social Studies | Collective Social Futures

University College Cork (UCC), Ireland