



**Citizen Scientists Investigating
Cookies and App GDPR Compliance**



Newsletter #6: April-May 2022



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Project Purpose

CSI-COP project at its core aims to engage citizen scientists across Europe, and the world, to explore their own digital journeys recording the number, and type, of third-party tracking cookies they find across the web and in apps on their mobile devices. Frequently asked questions ([FAQs](#)) about [CSI-COP](#) have been translated into Greek, Hebrew and Hungarian and can be found here: <https://csi-cop.eu/faq/>

For further information please do contact CSI-COP's Co-Investigator and Director of Science: Dr. Huma Shah on ab7778@coventry.ac.uk

Free Informal education

CSI-COP's free informal education course (MOOC) '**Your Right to Privacy Online**', which you can complete in your own time, is now available to download as a document in twelve languages (**English, Catalan, Czech, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Romanian and Spanish**) from the project website here: <https://csi-cop.eu/informal-education-mooc/>

In five easy-to-follow steps, the course on '**Your Right to Privacy Online**' can be completed in under half-a-day. The course covers:

Step 1 - The concept of 'privacy'.

Step 2 - *What is 'personal data'?*

Step 3 - How are we tracked online?

Step 4 - What rights do we have to online data protection and privacy?

Step 5 - Free online tools to protect our data-privacy.

This MOOC is also available in English from the [EU-Citizen.Science](#) platform, from here: <https://moodle.eu-citizen.science/>





Partner updates

Colleagues in CSI-COP partner the Association of Hungarian Women in Science ([NaTE](#)), Dorottya Rigler and Maria Hinsenkamp delivered CSI-COP's free informal education course, 'Your Right to Privacy Online' in Hungarian language in a blended workshop on 31 March in Budapest, Hungary.



Dorottya Rigler



Maria Hinsenkamp

Dimitrios Tsolovos from CSI-COP partner [STELAR](#) has been reviewing website cookie banner notices for transparency on any tracking technologies. Dimitrios has also been evaluating privacy policies for simple explanations and website visitor ease of understanding. This investigation is part of CSI-COP's research into monitoring compliance of the EU's general data protection regulation (GDPR). It is envisaged that CSI-COP will propose standardisation of cookie notices and privacy policies to help Internet users have a clearer understanding of how their personal data might be collected, and what is done with it.

On 31 March 2022, Professor [Jordi Vallverdú](#), CSI-COP partner at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona delivered a TEDxUABarcelona talk entitled '*Deep learning... what's it to me? The revenge of the mathematicians*'. Jordi's talk covered data privacy.



Jordi Vallverdú





Project update: workshops

At the time of this Newsletter, CSI-COP workshops delivering '[Your Right to Privacy Online](#)' (YRPO) free informal education course continue across the partner countries. CSI-COP's Immer Besser (IB) delivered an online workshop in Romanian in March. University of Patras delivered a workshop as part of IEEE activities. Bar Ilan-Tel Aviv organised a workshop on 27 April. University of Oulu in Oulu-Finland, and Czech Technical University-Prague are organising workshops in May.

Coventry University delivered a hybrid session in their series of workshops based on the YRPO course in Coventry city library, UK on 12 April. A press release from Coventry University invites members of the public to join the CSI-COP team as citizen scientists:

<https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/about-us/research-news/2022/csi-cop-helping-track-internet-data/>

Coventry University-led project recruits citizen scientists to help internet data tracking

Thursday 07 April 2022

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In the next section CSI-COP are delighted to feature an interview of a citizen scientist: Alice Sheppard of University College London (UCL).





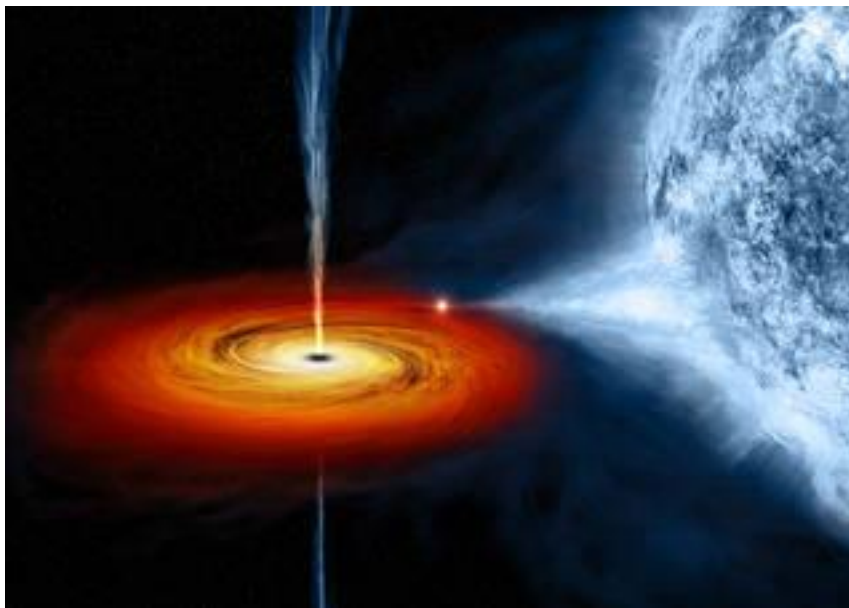
Interview with citizen scientist, Alice Sheppard of UCL

Following Alice's amazing talk in ECSA's 'International Woman and Girls in Science Day' in February 2022 (see CSI-COP [#5 Newsletter](#): page 4), CSI-COP's Director of Science, Dr. Huma Shah, invited Alice to deliver a guest lecture around *human and synthetic emotions* to first year undergraduate students taking 'Artificial Intelligence, Creativity and Ethics'. Alice's guest lecturer was so candid, human and insightful about the contributions of citizen scientists to science that Huma invited Alice to be interviewed in this edition of CSI-COP's newsletter. Alice's amazing story and work as a citizen scientist follows below.

1. Tell us about yourself

I'm a citizen scientist. Citizen science is when members of the public undertake scientific investigation that is not part of their job. I currently work at UCL Extreme Citizen Science as a researcher. I'm very fortunate and unusual in this, because I'm not academic at all; I didn't even do a PhD. The reason this happened is because the way we do science is changing.

As a child and teenager, I loved reading about science, but at school, I wasn't good at it (and worse at mathematics). It seemed that no matter what I did, I couldn't get the "right" answers, please the teachers, or receive the expected exam grades. School science and book science both gave tantalising hints of something fascinating, but they were totally different, and I kept hoping they'd converge in the end.



My favourite topic was astronomy - stars, black holes, exoplanets, relativity - but I was told not to study physics because of my poor maths. (I didn't only want to do science anyway - I also wanted to do history, as I was just as interested in people).

{Picture from NASA gallery:
<https://www.nasa.gov/>}

At university I chose Environmental Science, because I was worried about climate change and habitat destruction, and it was very interesting. But I also felt something was missing. Maybe I missed it, but environmental solutions and the involvement of everyday people never seemed to be mentioned. Plus, I still couldn't seem to do assignments in the "right" way - I remember being told scornfully, "This sounds as if it was written for New Scientist".





It was only when I was 25 and discovered citizen science that I really felt I finally had a grasp of what science was, that it was about investigation, and it was even more wonderful than I had thought. So although of course I did other jobs and studies, I stayed very interested in citizen science for many years and was asked to give public talks about it. I was very fortunate to have been placed in a leadership position in the online community - which I'll explain more about later - which gave me skills and insights that it turned out are useful academically. I'm very lucky that my boss, Muki Haklay, was willing to give me some work experience and then a job. I miss astronomy (though I still write for the Society for Popular Astronomy magazine) but I love working in research. I'm now seeing all the behind-the-scenes aspects of how citizen science projects are done, how best to do them, what we're learning from them. UCL ExCiteS does a mixture of geography, anthropology and computer science, and I've learned so much. I do a lot of "citizen science training" talks, some of which are enabling the general public to get more involved, some of which are training researchers in how to interact with and best meet the needs of non-scientists - the best are both at once, where everyone talks to each other

2. What do you love about astronomy?

The Universe is terrific!

There's so much going on in it. Beautiful galaxies - cities of stars in spiral or disk or rugby ball shapes, or merging together. The way stars form out of gas and dust clouds, under certain conditions, which involves some lovely physics and chemistry. These stars may end up as beautiful nebulae, or white dwarfs, or, if they're massive enough, as neutron stars or black holes which have a huge effect on the environment

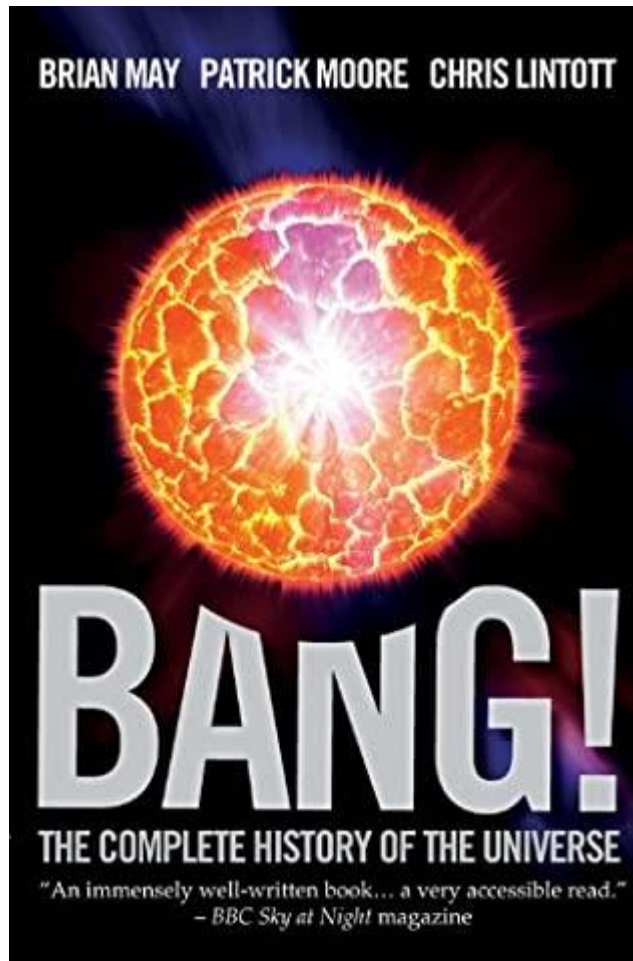
around them. The stories of how humans discovered the workings of atoms and stars are told beautifully in Marcus Chown's book "The Magic Furnace". And we're discovering more about the Universe all the time, it just keeps getting more complex and interesting. I don't feel we're especially small and insignificant; the Universe needs the very small stuff - things happening on the atomic, or sub-atomic level - for the big things to happen. I rather feel that it's not so much that we're small, as that the Universe is big - plus, also, we're part of it. I also like how no matter how much large-scale destruction happens in some places in space, such as around black holes, it's just because of physics - there's no cruelty or apathy, as is so often the case with large-scale destruction on Earth. {Picture from NASA gallery: <https://www.nasa.gov/>}





3. How did you get into and lead on citizen science?

Almost by accident. In 2006, I came across a book ([Bang](#)) written by (the late, Sir) [Patrick Moore](#) (Astronomer and presenter of BBC's '[The Sky at Night](#)') , [Brian May](#) (physicist and guitarist with



Queen) and Professor [Chris Lintott](#) - a glamorous trio - which had its own website inviting readers to ask questions. I asked about Hawking radiation and got a very kind answer from Chris, and it was my first time really feeling like I was talking to a scientist about matters I could grasp. It turned out that Chris was in the process of setting up Galaxy Zoo, with Kevin Schawinski. I travelled to attend a lecture about it and pestered Chris with questions, and he was very generous and encouraging and asked me to help run the online discussion forum as a moderator. My job was "just keep an eye out for swearing and spam", but I ended up organising the website, making sure all questions were answered, resolving arguments, arranging meet-ups, reporting progress or problems and recording who should receive credit for what work!

In Galaxy Zoo, people were asked to look at images of galaxies - and sometimes other objects such as individual stars or nebulae or asteroids - taken with a robotic telescope. We were asked to just click buttons to categorise the objects, but we took it a lot further - the robotic telescope's website revealed a lot of human-led investigation

available to do.

It turned out that people like me, who hadn't necessarily done brilliantly at science in school, were unexpectedly good at it. We had a lot more time and pairs of hands than the professionals. We taught each other a lot too. People good at computers taught us how to search the telescope database, people good at chemistry wrote tutorials about spectra (these are basically like graphs or bar codes of different wavelengths of light, and they tell us about the chemistry going on), people who read about astronomy all the time helped explain phenomena we found, etc. Our different life skills and interests and backgrounds all contributed to the creation of a diverse, happy whole, and we discovered some new types of astronomical object. It was so successful that lots of scientists in other fields wanted to use similar methods, and so Galaxy Zoo became the [Zooniverse](#). The Zooniverse is now a huge citizen science platform hosting projects in many fields, from medicine to history to literature to ecology - and it's just one citizen science platform out of many! Science is changing and more and more people can get involved in it, and I think that's a wonderful thing.





4. Why do you think sustaining this 'pale blue dot' is important?

The "[Pale Blue Dot](#)" is the favourite book passage (also available on [YouTube](#)) of many astronomers - my husband and I chose it as the reading for our wedding.



[Carl Sagan](#) movingly described Earth as "a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam" as seen by the Voyager spacecraft a long way away, and pointed out that the whole of humanity's history takes place here. The passage reminds us that Earth is our only home; our technology is not ready for us to live elsewhere, so we must care for Earth. When I studied Environmental Science,

I learned of my lecturers' frustration that no matter how carefully they worked, no matter how much they warned policy makers and journalists about climate change, little was being done. We have the technology for renewable energy - what we lack is the political will (though that is improving!). Because some countries have coal, oil or gas reserves and others do not, political problems result: exploitation, funding for war, power imbalances, environmental degradation - possessing such reserves may be a blessing or a curse to a country, depending on how powerful it is. My personal bugbear is that generation after generation of adults tell children about climate change, passing the responsibility off onto powerless people. And then, when young people such as Greta Thunberg do hear and respond to the message, they are dismissed as "little brats"! Citizen science alone won't solve this, but it might help with the empowerment aspect, helping people assess the reliability of information and feel that science and technology are everybody's business. {Picture from NASA gallery: <https://www.nasa.gov/>}

5. Would you like to tell us anything else?

I got my UCL job aged 34, so I've had a lot of life experience outside academia. One of the most valuable was a book called "[Daughter of Persia](#)" by an Iranian lady named Sattareh Farman Farmaian. She wanted to do something about the poverty she saw in Tehran in the 1920s onwards, went away to study - which was unheard of for girls at the time - and learned of social work, which she brought back to Iran and taught there until the 1979 revolution. Her book truly explained the nature of power, oppression and empathy to me. As a child, she learned the 13th century poem "Bani Adam" by the very famous Persian writer Sa'adi, which is well worth Googling. It's about the need for empathy: to sense what others are feeling and to notice when something is wrong. Because my life has included episodes when I've had to work with people with very destructive values and was otherwise isolated, that meant a lot to me. If you want to study science, I recommend you talk with different people, read about lots of other subjects and affirm your values too! Lots of scientists I know do this, and are incredible people.



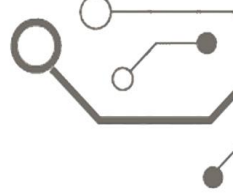


So it irks me now to see people good at science being portrayed as weird and lacking empathy, and, similarly, selfish behaviour being widely excused as long as some cool technology is involved. (I'm sure you can think of some examples.) Science is incredibly beautiful, but much more so when studied alongside other subjects to see all the connections. Just as it's vital that policy makers need an understanding of the science they are regulating, it's vital that a scientist or engineer whose work will affect others' lives has an understanding of - and willingness to accept feedback from - other people, especially those living in different circumstances to them. Science is for everyone. If we're going to have lots of robots and other technologies that will have wide-reaching, or intimate, effects, then we all need to have an informed say in what they are going to do.

My grateful thanks to Huma Shah for asking me to tell my life story to her students. It's prompted a lot of ideas for things I'd like to write about!

CSI-COP thanks Alice Sheppard for willing to share her amazing experience, her valuable contributions to astronomy and her message about our beautiful planet earth. Alice has shown that belief in oneself should not allow others to doubt you. Science is for all and benefits from being practiced by anyone who has interest in the way the world works and how the world came into being. Citizen scientists *can* and *do* advance knowledge and understanding about our world. We are better for the contribution of citizen scientists such as Alice Sheppard.





CSI-COP Partners



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