CSI-COP

Citizen Scientists Investigating Cookies and App GDPR compliance

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Deliverable D3.2 [D14]

Trained Citizen Scientists

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Summary

The initial societal impact from the CSI-COP project included change in consortium partner behaviour as they used the internet. Modification arose from CSI-COP partners' self-management of personal data. This conversion followed attendance in the coordinating partner's first online workshop delivering the 'Your Right to Privacy Online' course content. Subsequently, partners organised their own workshops as part of work package 3 (WP3). This deliverable reports on the nature, number and limitations of the workshops establishing trained citizen scientists investigating compliance of the general data protection (GDPR) in websites and apps. Future work is presented with ambitions to collaborate with organisations striving for a less intrusive online experience.

Keywords: citizen science; citizen science engagement; data protection; general public, online privacy

Introduction

CSI-COP's first societal impact report (D1.6) introduced workshops in work package 3 (WP3) planned in the project (Shah, 2022). In CSI-COP proposal, WP3 involved recruiting and engaging citizen scientists (task T3.1, see D3.1: Shah et al. 2022a), and take-up free informal data protection training (task T3.2). The design of this activity entailed organising six workshops across Europe and in Israel, by most of the university partners in the original CSI-COP consortium. The purpose of the free workshops was to deliver '*human right to privacy online*' informal education course. The original six workshop organisers in CSI-COP were:

1. Coventry University, UK
2. University of Patras, Greece
3. Tilburg University, The Netherlands
4. University of Oulu, Finland
5. Bar Ilan University, Israel
6. Czech Technical University, Czech Republic

Once the free course was created (and renamed following suggestion in Period 1 review by the EU's appointed External Reviewer), '**Your Right to Privacy Online**' was launched from CSI-COP project website and EU-Citizen.Science Moodle platform (see deliverable D3.1; Shah et al., 2022a). During dissemination of the course's availability in early summer 2021 (see deliverable D6.7: Shah et al., 2021), an issue arose within the consortium. Along with the ongoing effects of COVID-19 affecting recruitment and limiting engagement in the project, an Amendment was sought to CSI-COP grant agreement. With a twelve-month extension to the project requested (project-end extension to 30 June 2023), and agreement of redistribution of work following one partner termination, plans were adapted to informally educate the public around COVID-19 restrictions. Two CSI-COP partners (NaTE; IB) took on the workshops of the terminated partner.

This deliverable, D3.2 present the workshops and follows on from the first WP3 deliverable explaining CSI-COP's citizen science recruitment (D3.1 Shah et al., 2022a). A second data management plan (DMP2) reported on the ethical design of data collection for workshop attendance (see D1.9: Shah et al., 2022b). DMP2 ensures the responsible training of the general public in WP3 becoming citizen scientists investigating compliance of the general data protection (GDPR) in websites and apps. The earlier tasks and deliverables set the scene for implementing the revised workshop plans. It involved organising more than the six originally planned workshops deploying different formats (online; when possible: hybrid, or in-person).

Disadvantages of CSI-COP's approach is explained. Constraining the use of social media platforms permitted the project to follow online data protection principles. The trade-off has been a reduction in the possible number of engaged members of the general public in the project. Nonetheless, future plans featuring more collaboration with external organisations are expected to expand the reach of CSI-COP's important work, including assisting the EU with monitoring compliance of the GDPR in websites and apps.

CSI-COP Training Workshops

CSI-COP workshops aimed to deliver original and relevant content created to informally educate the general public about online data protection. This is through the free '**Your Right to Privacy Online**' course (MOOC 2021). The knowledge gained from the free course is required before tracking cookie investigations are undertaken on websites and apps. Completion of the course would indicate to CSI-COP whether a learner was motivated to join the team as a volunteer online privacy investigator joining the project as a citizen scientist. Here we explain the process from raising awareness of CSI-COP project's objectives and engaging the general public to seize the opportunity of taking CSI-COP's free MOOC.

Due to COVID-19 curtailing task progress and limiting face-to-face meetings continuing into year 2 of CSI-COP (in 2021), an amendment was prepared requesting an extension to the project from the EU. In Spring 2021 online workshop planning followed the release of the MOOC (month 16: April 2021). One partner termination became necessary in the middle of year 2, in the summer of 2021. A revised amendment included partner termination and agreement to redistribute work among the consortium partners. A twelve-month extension to the project was granted (from 30 June 2022 to 30 June 2023). Consortium partners NaTE and IB agreed to take on workshop organisation replacing the workshop expected from the terminating partner.

Coordinating partner, Coventry University, transformed the free MOOC 'Your Right to Privacy Online' they had created with sub-contractor, Privacy Matters, into an online interactive lesson, first in English. Coventry University's marketing team set-up a registration page on the university's website. Over forty individuals (49) registered to attend, including eleven team members from project partners.

Figure 1: Slide 1 PowerPoint slide of first WP3 training workshop

The first CSI-COP workshop leveraging the MOOC content was held online in MS Teams on 26 October 2021 (Fig 1). The workshop was delivered by the CU team (Dr. Huma Shah and Jaimz Winter, with Joe Askew updating on Twitter).

Interactive exercises during the online workshop deployed free online participatory tools. One activity asked the attendees to identify '**personal data**' from a list of names using the online free word-cloud tool: *AnswerGarden* (screenshot1). Live polling with **Mentimeter** (screenshot 2) engaged the attendees through questions placed at sub-topic junctions. This challenged attendees' assumptions and to consider their online behaviour: *were they putting **convenience** before relinquishing their data when **accepting cookies on websites** without really being **informed** what those cookies were for and who would use them?*

Screenshot 1: AnswerGarden	*Screenshot 2: Mentipoll*
Word-cloud for 'personal data' from list of names	Poll eliciting response on question of privacy

The 26 October 2021 workshop attendees included parents who are among CSI-COP targeted stakeholders. CSI-COP has specific parent-teacher roundtable tasks in work package 6 to raise awareness of third-party tracking in children's educational and games websites and apps. Actual attendance number in the first CSI-COP 'Your Right to Privacy Online' workshop in October 2021 organised by Coordinating partner, Coventry University was lower than the number who registered. From the **forty-nine registrants**, **twenty-eight individuals attended**. Just over half (**fifteen**) were **members of the public** including with these declared occupations:

➢ Cloud Solutions Architect
➢ Supply Teacher of Computing
➢ Policy Advisor (UK Department of Culture Media and Sports- DCMS)
➢ Company Secretary
➢ Solicitor
➢ Student
➢ Data Business Analyst
➢ Student
➢ Planning Analyst
➢ Enterprise Data Architect

Registrants who did not attend CSI-COP's first and online workshop were contacted and sent the English language 'Your Right to Privacy Online' MOOC document to complete in own their time. In keeping with the findings from CSI-COP first research report of "constant follow up" (deliverable D2.1: Ignat et al., 2020), an incentive was offered in communiqués with missing attendees. The impetus conveyed that privacy champions emerging from CSI-COP's informal education and practical investigations could be offered the chance to join the CSI-COP team members at the project's final event in Brussels, with travel and accommodation paid from CSI-COP. The purpose of this 'attraction' is to motivate individuals who are interested in producing new knowledge and technologies. The benefit to the project would be increasing scientific literacy among the general public who are not expert at web and app development, nor possess the knowledge of how algorithms work that underpin cookie functionality. For example, if you reject cookies on a website, does the underlying algorithm actually stop cookies from gathering data from your device? This sort of question would be presented to draw-in those wondering what cookies actually do.

Following the first CSI-COP workshop organised by the Coordinating partner in October 2021, partners began organising and hosting their own workshops. Partners adapted the interactions for their home audience while translating Coventry University's presentation slides based on the MOOC content. University of Patras (UPAT), as work package 3 (WP3) leader, hosted CSI-COP's first in-person workshop in Athens, Greece on 21 November 2021 (Photo1 courtesy of UPAT).

UPAT reported that members of the public who responded to this partner's communication campaign were "mostly educated women above their forties" (CSI-COP 4th Newsletter, 2021).

CSI-COP workshops have taken place in **public libraries**, in cafés and on partner university campuses.

Photo 1: UPAT CSI-COP workshop, Athens 21.11.21

Since the first CSI-COP workshop in October 2021, the consortium partners have organised **over twenty** 'Your Right to Privacy Online' **workshops** across Europe and in Israel. These workshops have been delivered in English, Czech, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, and Romanian. CSI-COP workshops have been arranged over different formats: online, in-person, and hybrid (individuals attending in person and online at the same time).

The most recent hybrid workshop was delivered by partner Immer Besser (IB) as part of a regional event held in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The location for this workshop was the Regional Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries (Creative CREIC). CSI-COP's participation was facilitated by Professor Felix Arion of the Romanian Agro-cluster (Photo 2).

Photo 2: Professor Felix Arion (left), CSI-COP partner Immer Besser's Dr. Tiberius Ignat (right)

Updated MOOC

Research for teaching around the 'human right to privacy' by CSI-COP university academics teaching a variety of subjects (e.g., 'Artificial Intelligence, Creativity and Ethics'), led to CSI-COP workshop material adjustments. Data protection news, and big tech misdeeds drawing lawsuits, required frequent updates in CSI-COP's workshop PowerPoint slides. To ensure the MOOC remains as up-to-date, in May 2022 Coventry University updated the 'Your Right to Privacy Online' course document in English. The revised version has been translated in the Hungarian and Romanian MOOC documents. CSI-COP

partners are updating the other translations at the time of this report. It is expected that the MOOC will be revised and updated again before the end of the CSI-COP project ensuring the course remains relevant for at least another year beyond the end of the project in June 2023.

The Big Cookie Count

In addition to the workshops , one consortium combined online event '**The Big Cookie Count**' was organised across two days in May 2022 (30-31). This event was adapted from Greenpeace's environmental activity 'Big Plastic Count' that engaged the general public with investigating "household plastic waste" (Greenpeace 2022). CSI-COP's adapted 'Big Cookie Count' online event was arranged in Zoom by WP3 lead UPAT. Breakout areas were created as 'country rooms' to allow interested members of the public to pop-in and chat with the CSI-COP team members in the offered languages: English, Greek, Hungarian, Romanian, German, French, Turkish, Spanish, Italian, Finnish and Czech (Screenshot 3). The main room was in English, from there an attendee could select a 'country room' or 'special topic room' (cyber security, and data protection). The event was marketed as a conversational event for individuals to find out about CSI-COP by chatting with CSI-COP team members, learning what the project was all about, and how they could get involved. The English room ran a video by partner IB's's Dr. Tiberius Ignat realised from his interview in CSI-COP's 5th Newsletter (2022). In this Dr. Ignat explained the juxtaposition of a parent trying to make the wonders of the Internet available to their children, while trying to protect young people's data online (Screenshot 3).
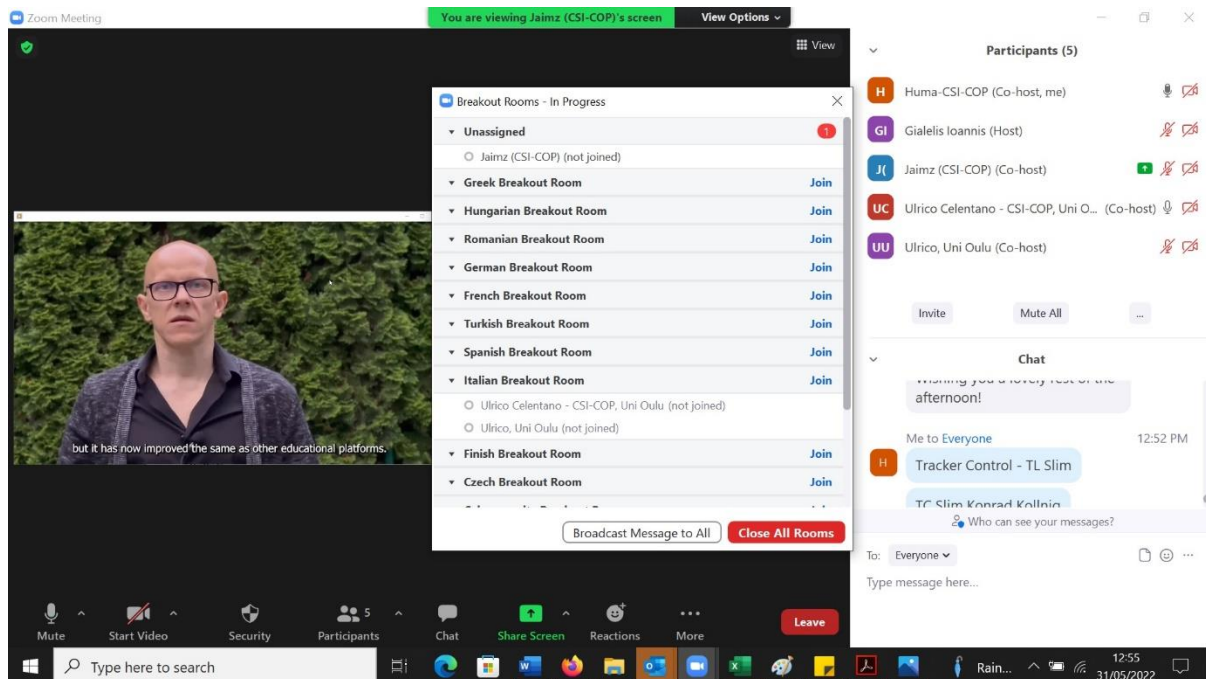
Screenshot 3: CSI-COP's Big Cookie Count.

Partners efforts and Coventry University marketing team's support of CSI-COP's 'Big Cookie Count' Zoom event organised at short notice gleaned positive feedback. Box 1 below shows one such message received after the event. This from a member of the public dialling in from Australia.

> Thank you Huma,
>
> It was very interesting and your enthusiasm has been fantastic.
>
> Unfortunately, my signal dropped out again at about 21:50 my time, !5:50 EU time.
>
> Many thanks again

Box 1: Feedback following attendance in 'The Big Cookie Count'

Following CSI-COP's 'Big Cookie Count' partners are in contact with attendees to encourage completion of the 'Your Right to Privacy Online' free informal education MOOC. Attendees are also being encouraged to join the project as citizen scientists.

Limitations

Social distancing and attendee health and safety was paramount once pandemic restrictions were lifted across partner countries. In practice this meant large venues were not chosen to host CSI-COP workshops, so limiting the attendance number. CSI-COP partner efforts have reached thousands of people across Europe and beyond, but not yet realised the thousands to take up the offer of the free informal education course 'Your Right to Privacy Online'. Dissemination actions, including press releases, approaching appropriate organisations, social media posts, direct messaging to the end of WP3 did not produce the interest envisaged at CSI-COP proposal stage. One workshop organised by Coventry University immediately after the Christmas/New Year holidays on Wednesday 12 January 2022 in Coventry city library did not realise any of the attendees who had registered. Variants of the COVID-19 were rife around this time in the UK. The weather was wintery and it being mid-week could have prevented attendance. Approaches to the registrants revealed that some had forgotten about the date, others found a more pressing engagement at the same time as the workshop. Some did not respond. For the next Coventry University workshops, a reminder was sent attaching the MOOC document before the date. In this way, if a registrant could not attend, they could complete the MOOC in their own time.

CSI-COP has also limited itself by attempting a **big tech platform avoidance strategy**. This is to make a point about the way people's data is scraped from the web, sometimes without their knowledge, let alone consent. Social media platforms cannot be avoided completely. Big tech are by no means the only 'data vampires'. According to free online webpage privacy monitor **webbkoll** (Screenshot 4), 'Weare8 – people's platform' (2022), contains third-party cookies (LinkedIn; PayPal) and third-party requests, including online trackers (e.g., Social, FingerprintingGeneral-Facebook; FingerprintingGeneral, Analytics-Google).
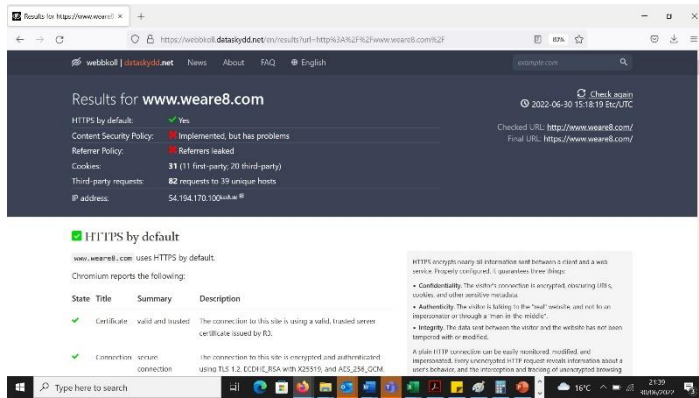
Screenshot 4: Webbkoll analysis of 'Weare8 – social media platform'. Third-party cookies and third-party tracking by big and small tech companies appears to be allowed on this 'people's platform'.

CSI-COP did need to use the internet to get its message out, so chose **Twitter**, then **LinkedIn** to expand its project web presence besides its innovative **privacy-by-design** and no-tracking website: https://csi-cop.eu/

One surprise is that so far CSI-COP have not been able to capture the attention of journalists reporting on education, the education technology market, online privacy, data protection, technology generally, human rights, and the internet eco-system. Press releases and direct approaches have not been successful, despite regular news items in print, online and radio media. The consortium will be evaluating its communication and dissemination strategy to improve on this effort spreading CSI-COP's objectives wider as detailed in the project proposal.

A further surprise is the minimal benefit of CSI-COP participation in 'sister citizen science' activities and conferences. CSI-COP are evaluating this collaboration to enhance cooperation.

Another limitation is the CSI-COP topic itself: extent of online tracking in websites and apps. While people are aware of cookies, comments such as "**I don't want to know**", or feedback "**this is scary stuff**", as well as individuals reporting they 'do not have the time to complete a course even if it is free', though the interest is there. Online fatigue from the COVID-19 situation necessitating people working from home using computers could be a disadvantage, with CSI-COP participation feeling more like 'work' rather than past-time enjoyment with social cohesion. This and other factors, such as more pressing priorities (cost of living crisis; providing safe haven to families fleeing from Ukraine) could be reasons for lower-than-expected engagement.

Regardless of these limitations, CSI-COP has **informally educated over 280 members of the public** (Shah et al., 2022a), as reported in deliverable D3.1 presenting information on CSI-COP's citizen science community. Currently **fifty-one** of those individuals consented to join **CSI-COP** as **citizen scientists**, were trained and are co-investigating the extent of online tracking through recording third-party tracking in websites and apps. The project's WP6 activities, with parent-teacher roundtables, and stakeholder cafés are opportunities for CSI-COP partners to spread the word further by the end of the project and after it concludes.

Further work

To conclude this deliverable, more than three times the planned six workshops were organised in WP3. This despite one partner termination. Extra work was collegially accepted and distributed among CSI-COP partners. An amendment to the grant agreement gained an approval for a twelve-month extension to the project due to COVID-19 effects. Overall, the consortium materialised **over twenty workshops** organised across the consortium, including 'The Big Cookie Count'. A number of factors, including the pandemic, led to lower-than-expected workshop attendance. Nonetheless, the motivation of the

recruited citizen scientists, and the passion of the project team, spur us on to increase participation. CSI-COP future tasks include more opportunities to engage members of the public across Europe and the world through parent-teacher roundtables and stakeholder cafés. This will increase awareness of the importance of the rights accorded in the GDPR. CSI-COP aims to foster a movement that extends beyond the lifetime of the project. To realise this CSI-COP are actively seeking out and collaborating with organisations that have a similar mission: protect people online. One such is '**HangUpThePhone**' (2022), performing outreach in schools to minimise the stress from time spent on social media platforms. Conducting more combined CSI-COP events, rather than individual partner actions, might improve the project's reach. Collaborating with other organisations, including how to benefit sister citizen science projects and gain value from participation, could also improve CSI-COP's reach and engagement with the general public with the important message: **we have a right to privacy online**.

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