

**CITIZEN SCIENCE
IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE**

EDITED BY DÓRA KALYDY

Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtár és Információs Központ
Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Budapest
2026

Edited by
Dóra Kalydy

Typography and layout
Melinda Danyi

ISBN 978-615-6792-25-9
ISSN 0133-8862

<https://doi.org/10.36820/MTAKIK.KOZL.2026.1>

This volume was published with the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
as part of the MTA200 programme of events marking the 200th anniversary
of the founding of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and its Library.

Publisher:
Director General of the Library and Information Centre
of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Printed and bound by GMN Colour



MTA 200 ÉVES
A MAGYAR
TUDOMÁNYOS
AKADÉMIA

CONTENT

ISTVÁN MONOK	
Citizen Science: an opportunity for libraries to thrive in the 21 st century: Introductory thoughts	7
TOMISLAV IVANJKO	
Citizen Science in the 21 st century	11
DÓRA KALYDY	
Why is it different in Central-Eastern Europe?	33
Case studies (Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, Slovenia)	
ALISA MARTEK	
Citizen-Enhanced Open Science in Southeastern Europe Higher Education Knowledge Hubs (CeOS_SE Project)	39
DOLORES MUMELAŠ, SANJA JURKOVIĆ	
Citizen Science in Croatia with the emphasis on Working Group for Citizen Science in Libraries	45
NATAŠA DAKIĆ, ALEKSANDRA TRTOVAC	
Citizen Science Integration in Serbia: The Role of Libraries	55
DÓRA KALYDY	
The role of Hungarian libraries in spreading citizen science	63
ÁGNES KOVÁCSNÉ KORENY	
Citizen Science in Public Libraries: The Ráday Mihály Memorial Project	67
MITJA V. ISKRIĆ	
Implementations and Examples of Citizen Science Projects and Network in Slovenia: The Central Role of Libraries	77
Interviews with participants in Citizen Science projects	
Mihály Ráday Memorial Project	87
Musical Intelligence in the Service of National Heritage	92
From the Library to the City 2.0: Changing Urban Spaces: Mlinska Street	94

CITIZEN SCIENCE IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES: THE RÁDAY MIHÁLY MEMORIAL PROJECT

Ágnes Kovácsné Koreny

koreny.agnes@fszek.hu

Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library (FSZEK), Budapest, Hungary

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5113-1807>

<https://doi.org/10.36820/MTAKIK.KOZL.2026.1.7>

Project name / acronym

Ráday Mihály Emlékprojekt / Mihály Ráday Memorial Project

Date or period when the project was done

November 2024 – September 2025 (project preparation phase)

September 2025 – February 2026 (project implementation phase)

Funding

The project is implemented within the regular operational framework of the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library. Funding is provided through institutional resources, including staff time, infrastructure, and existing digital services; no separate external project funding is allocated.

Coordinator / main organiser of the project

Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, Budapest (Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár, FSZEK)

Scientific field

Urban history, cultural heritage studies, library and information science (with citizen science methodology)

Why Is Citizen Science Relevant for Public Libraries?

In recent years, citizen science has become increasingly visible in academic and cultural heritage discourse. In the context of public libraries, however, it is still primarily understood as a practical question: in what ways, under what conditions, and with what added value can a library involve the public in research activities that meet scholarly standards. This question is particularly relevant for public libraries, which traditionally function simultaneously as knowledge intermediaries, community spaces, and locally embedded public institutions.

The application of citizen science in libraries is not a new phenomenon, even if the term *citizen science* itself has only become widely used over the past decade and a half, particularly since the 2010s, in scientific and cultural heritage contexts. Numerous earlier, civil-based initiatives can be identified – especially in the fields of local history, cultural heritage, and urban research – that may today be regarded as precursors of citizen science, even if their operational logic was closer to crowdsourcing.

One such example is the Hungarian *Fortepan*¹ project, where volunteers contribute collectively to the identification, description, and contextualisation of historical photographs, creating a widely used visual source base for urban and social history research. On an international level, similar principles underpin the *Queens Memory Project*² in New York, in which residents, under the professional guidance of a public library and university partners, collect interviews, photographs, and local historical documents to build a community archive. Comparable initiatives also include volunteer-based programmes for the processing of historical sources – such as the transcription of parish records, census data³, or ship logs⁴ – through which large numbers of citizens contribute to making archival and library collections searchable and usable.

While these initiatives share a reliance on community participation, local knowledge, and institutional support, it is important to distinguish clearly between crowdsourcing and citizen science. Crowdsourcing projects typically invite volunteers to carry out well-defined tasks – such as transcription, description, or data entry – whereas citizen science, in a stricter sense, involves more active participation in the research process itself, including the interpretation of research questions, the contextualisation of data, and, in some cases, the joint understanding of results. From a contemporary library perspective, citizen science does not represent a break with earlier practices, but rather their further development: a recognition that libraries provide an appropriate institutional framework for involving non-professional researchers, fostering source-critical thinking, and ensuring the long-term preservation and

1 Fortepan: <https://fortepan.hu/hu/> (Last caught: 27 December, 2025)

2 Queens Memory Project: <https://www.queenslibrary.org/programs-activities/arts-culture/queens-memory-project> (Last caught: 27 December, 2025)

3 FamilySearch Indexing: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/FamilySearch_Indexing (Last caught: 27 December, 2025)

4 Old Weather projekt: <https://www.oldweather.org/> (Last caught: 27 December, 2025)

accessibility of the knowledge produced. In this sense, the public library is not merely a location or infrastructure, but an active intermediary between the academic sphere, civil participants, and the wider public.

This paper presents a concrete case study from a library-based initiative illustrating how citizen science can be implemented within a large metropolitan public library network. The project discussed is not an experimental pilot, but the result of deliberate institutional preparation, building simultaneously on historical precedents and contemporary library services. Its aim is not only to realise a specific research project, but to demonstrate how citizen science can become an integral and sustainable element of library practice.

Institutional Context

The Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library as a Citizen Science Environment

The Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library (FSZEK) operates as Budapest's public library network, comprising 47 branch libraries, while also fulfilling a national special library function in sociology. This dual role – combining broad public reach with research-level collections—creates a distinctive institutional environment for citizen science initiatives. The library possesses the infrastructure, professional expertise, and community connections required to implement such projects successfully.

Within FSZEK's strategic objectives for the period 2021–2027, innovative and sustainable service development, as well as the exploration and application of new methodologies, play a prominent role. Citizen science fits into this framework not as a standalone programme, but as an extension of existing library functions, including collection development, information services, education, and community engagement. In this sense, citizen science is not an "extra" activity, but a set of tools that strengthens the library's mediating role by involving new participants in the creation and interpretation of scholarly knowledge.

The library's institutional role in citizen science projects can be understood at several levels. First, the library provides an informational background by ensuring access to printed and digital sources, databases, and the methodological knowledge required to use them effectively. Second, it assumes an educational and facilitative role by preparing volunteers for data collection, source-critical

research, and the documentation of results. Third, it offers technical, legal, and organisational frameworks for the management, preservation, and public dissemination of the data produced.

In the case of FSZEK, this mediating function between academic researchers, civil volunteers, and local communities is particularly significant. The library operates as a neutral, safe, and legitimate space where different levels of knowledge and motivation can meet. This position enables citizen science to move beyond mere data collection and become a shared learning process and a form of community experience.

It was within this institutional context that the Ráday Mihály Memorial Project was launched, deliberately building on FSZEK's local history collections, digital infrastructure, and community networks. The project aims not only to address a specific research question, but also to demonstrate how a public library can integrate citizen science methods into its long-term operations in a sustainable way.

The Ráday Mihály Memorial Project

The Ráday Mihály Memorial Project is a citizen science initiative launched by the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, focusing on the urban history of Budapest's inner city through a renewed methodological framework. Its distinctive feature lies in the conscious integration of the legacy of an earlier, civil-based urban heritage survey with the contemporary infrastructural, educational, and data-management capacities provided by a public library.

The initiative originated in one of FSZEK's branch libraries, the Körúti Könyvtár (Boulevard Library), located along Budapest's Grand Boulevard, in close proximity to Király Street. This location is not merely a geographical detail but a defining contextual factor. The library operates in a dense urban environment where historical layers, everyday use, and intensive tourism coexist.

Király Street connects two markedly different inner-city districts. Inner Erzsébetváros, part of the historic Jewish Quarter, has become one of the city's most intensively used tourist and nightlife areas, characterised by hospitality venues, ruin bars, and cultural landmarks. In contrast, Inner Terézváros features a more elegant, bourgeois urban fabric linked to the UNESCO World Heritage environment of Andrassy Avenue and traditionally associated with

theatres and the arts. Király Street itself forms a transitional zone between these urban worlds, functioning both as an overloaded inner-city street and as a major commercial and transport axis.

In this complex and often tension-laden, yet culturally rich environment, it is particularly significant that the citizen science initiative emerged from a local public library. As a stable and trusted cultural institution, the Körúti Könyvtár provides a natural point of connection for local residents, interested volunteers, and urban historical research. The project thus does not approach the area from the outside but develops as an organic part of everyday urban life.

Historical Background and Point of Departure

The project's direct historical predecessor was a large-scale survey initiated in the early 1980s at the call of Mihály Ráday, a prominent urban historian and heritage activist. Hundreds of volunteers were mobilised to document the building stock of Budapest's inner districts through photographs, interviews, and descriptive records, resulting in influential books that remain key sources for urban history research.

Although this early initiative did not use the term citizen science, it fulfilled its essential criteria: it involved civil participants, operated under professional guidance, and aimed to produce knowledge of public interest. At the same time, the information environment and technical possibilities of the period inevitably limited the precision, verification, and long-term usability of the collected data.

Contemporary Library Reinterpretation

The Ráday Mihály Memorial Project, launched by FSZEK, consciously builds on this legacy while clearly differentiating itself in methodological and institutional terms. The project focuses on the section of Király Street between the Small and Grand Boulevards, examining approximately sixty buildings. Its dual objective is to document the current state and functions of these buildings and to enable systematic comparison with data recorded in the early 1980s.

A key innovation lies in the structured methodological framework within which volunteer work is embedded. Under the professional leadership of local historian Judit N. Kósa, the library developed training materials covering source-critical research, the use of digital databases, and standardised documentation practices. These materials ensure that the data collected by volunteers are comparable, verifiable, and suitable for long-term research use.

Partnerships and Collaboration

The project is based on an extensive network of partners, including civil heritage organisations, the relevant district municipalities, higher education institutions (particularly architecture and history programmes), and other cultural heritage institutions. The group of volunteer researchers is highly diverse, comprising residents, amateur historians, university students, photographers, and librarians. This diversity represents both a challenge and a resource, managed through the library's facilitative role.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Library

FSZEK's role in the project is multifaceted. The library provides access to printed and digital sources – such as local history collections, databases, and archival guides – without which research would not be possible. It also supplies the technical infrastructure for data recording: photographs, interviews, descriptions, and metadata generated during the project are deposited in the library-operated digital repository and made publicly accessible after review.

Legal and ethical frameworks form another crucial component. The library manages volunteer agreements, data-protection declarations, and compliance with relevant regulations, thereby safeguarding both participants and the long-term usability of the resulting database.

Citizen Participation and Research Tasks

Volunteers undertake a wide range of tasks, including photographic documentation of buildings, interviews with residents, video recordings, and archival research into the history of selected buildings. Participation extends beyond mechanical data collection: volunteers engage with their own research questions and personal motivations, while shared methodological standards ensure coherence and comparability.

Outputs and Expected Results

The project's primary output is a structured, searchable urban history database integrating photographs, maps, descriptive texts, and interviews. Additional outputs include educational materials, methodological guidelines, and publications offering transferable models for other libraries. In the longer term, the project provides a foundation for theses, academic journals, and further urban historical research.

Heritage and Innovation

The Ráday Mihály Memorial Project represents both a tribute to a historic civil initiative and a contemporary library innovation. While the earlier survey relied primarily on civic commitment and local knowledge, the FSZEK project places library infrastructure, digital tools, and methodological awareness at its core. The two layers reinforce rather than negate each other: historical experience provides legitimacy, while current library practice offers a sustainable framework for citizen science.

Communication, Public Visibility, and Institutional Legitimacy

Throughout the project, communication was treated not as a supplementary activity but as a fundamental precondition of citizen science. From the preparatory phase onward, the library sought to ensure transparency regarding objectives, methods, and anticipated impacts.

FSZEK informed the two district municipalities affected by the project at an early stage, inviting feedback and institutional dialogue. The library also consulted recognised experts—architects, urban historians, and researchers—during the planning phase, strengthening methodological robustness and professional legitimacy.

Volunteer recruitment relied on a multi-channel communication strategy, including printed leaflets, the library’s website and event calendar, and coverage in local district newspapers. This approach ensured a diverse volunteer base extending beyond regular library users.

Public lectures by historian Judit N. Kósa on the history of Király Street and the project itself served both educational and motivational purposes, enabling dialogue and personal engagement. Communication continued during data collection through short videos presenting building histories and volunteers’ personal narratives, highlighting the human dimension of citizen science.

Structured presentations of individual buildings are published in the library’s digital repository, ensuring open access to results and reinforcing the principle of community knowledge.

Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Library Relevance

The project revealed challenges extending beyond a single research initiative, particularly regarding participation, methodological consistency, and institutional responsibility. These challenges underline that citizen science in a library context cannot function without clear frameworks, sustained support, and institutional commitment.

Key lessons include the necessity of structured training, ongoing coordination, and ethical safeguards. The library's role as a professional coordinator—rather than an authority imposing interpretations—proved essential.

From a library perspective, the project demonstrates that citizen science functions most effectively as an integrated practice linked to collections, educational roles, and digital services. Its *best practice* value lies in the balance between facilitation, methodological rigour, and community engagement.

Summary of Key Lessons

The experience of the Ráday Mihály Memorial Project indicates that citizen science in public libraries is most effective when:

- participation is guided by clear institutional goals and frameworks,
- volunteer training and support are integral components,
- the library maintains an active but non-dominant role,
- long-term preservation and accessibility of data are ensured.

These lessons offer guidance not only for FSZEK but for other public libraries seeking to integrate citizen science into sustainable practice.

Conclusions

The Ráday Mihály Memorial Project illustrates that citizen science represents not merely a methodological option for public libraries, but a question of institutional identity. It shows how libraries can function as mediating spaces where local knowledge, civic participation, and academically grounded research reinforce one another.

The project confirms that citizen science becomes sustainable in a library context only when it is embedded in existing collections, services, and infrastructures.

It also demonstrates that public libraries, when operating within clear ethical and methodological frameworks, can serve as credible and effective actors in citizen science, contributing simultaneously to scholarly quality, community engagement, and the responsible stewardship of cultural heritage.