



CoCreAid Kit 4.0

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PR3 CoCreAid

AID KIT Validation

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Introduction

Validation activity

The validation activity of the CoCreAid 4.0 Kit played a crucial role within the CoCreAid project. It represented a key opportunity to **assess the effectiveness of the CoCreAid 4.0 Kit**, which focuses on promoting digital co-creation between higher education institutions and rural non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in order to foster local and social development and enhance the third mission of higher education institutions (HEIs).

Through this validation phase, we aimed to obtain direct feedback from the users, who are the core of the collaborations between HEIs and NGOs. It is **through their participation and sharing of experiences** that we were able to gain a comprehensive and detailed insight into the use of the CoCreAid 4.0 Kit and how to improve it.

The primary objective of this activity was to **make targeted improvements to the kit so that it can effectively respond to user needs and maximise the success of digital co-creation**. The aim was to ensure that the interface of the Kit is intuitive and easy to use for all users involved in digital co-creation projects. In addition, we wanted to identify those features of the kit that are particularly useful and appreciated, so as to further enhance them, as well as to identify any critical points or shortcomings that need optimal solutions.

The validation of the CoCreAid 4.0 Kit have also provided us with the opportunity to **discover new user needs in digital co-creation**. By listening to the voices of the kit users, we were able to adapt the CoCreAid project to respond more effectively to these needs, providing tailor-made solutions and enhancing the kit with new targeted functionalities.

Furthermore, through user feedback, we intended to **assess the level of overall satisfaction with the Kit and its ability to improve collaboration between HEIs and NGOs in joint initiatives**. User satisfaction is a key factor determining continuous use of the CoCreAid 4.0 Kit, that is a priority to ensure long-term impact of the project.

Therefore, the main objectives of validation were:

- **Optimisation of usability:** The interface of the CoCreAid 4.0 Kit plays a crucial role in promoting collaboration between HEIs and NGOs. Through validation, we aimed to assess the usability of the user interface, ensuring that it is intuitive, easily understandable and easy to navigate. A well-

designed and user-friendly interface can make the user experience more enjoyable and increase active participation in digital co-creation projects.

- **Functionality improvement:** By collecting feedback from users, we could have identified kit features that are particularly useful and appreciated during digital co-creation. This allowed us to focus our efforts on enhancing these functionalities, making the CoCreAid 4.0 Kit even more effective and adaptable to users' needs. At the same time, identifying functionalities that may require improvement has helped us to identify possible bottlenecks and work on optimal solutions for the kit.
- **Identification of new needs:** Validation was a valuable opportunity to discover new user needs in digital co-creation. Each feedback and response received in the survey has provided us with valuable information on the specific challenges faced by users when collaborating with NGOs. Identifying new needs allowed us to adapt the CoCreAid 4.0 Kit to better address these challenges, improving the ability of the kit to provide solutions targeted to the needs of our users.
- **Maximisation of user satisfaction:** User satisfaction was a key indicator to assess the effectiveness of the CoCreAid 4.0 Kit. Through validation, we've collected the overall level of user satisfaction with the kit and its ability to improve collaboration between HEIs and NGOs. Increased user satisfaction indicated the success of the kit in achieving its objectives, while any reports of dissatisfaction allowed us to focus on areas that require improvement to provide an even more positive digital co-creation experience.

Pilot testing

In order to optimise project results, partners have pilot tested the digital CoCreAid Kit with target audience. For that needs the **GUI with the integrated digital co-creation tools have been used in collaborating initiatives between NGOs and HEIs**. Validations was produced in the form of a report. This validation was used for further improvement of the CoCreAid Kit.

Pilot test was used to reflect on the digital CoCreAid Kit and to address user-specific issues. Specifically, **the pilot testing process have focused on the ability of the CoCreAid Kit to:**

- Facilitate learning new solutions
- Speed up finding adequate tools
- Enhance understanding on how to use the tools

The validation have followed the principle of agile software development, thereby presenting an innovative approach to developing digital co-creation tools. In contrast to a linear development, **pilot test was implemented in simultaneous project settings**. This non-linear, but agile, approach allowed an iterative

improvement of the GUI and gathering a continuous feedback from the different stakeholder groups into the development process. Ultimately, this flexible approach facilitated implementation of early-stage prototypes in a real-world setting, which is most appropriate in highly uncertain environment.

The **pilot test have equiped HEI academics and NGO project leaders with the knowledge to start and successfully run collaborative initiatives using co-creation tools**. The pilot test ensured an iterative improvement of the GUI, thereby increasing the quality of the GUI.

Target groups

The validation activity was addressed to following target groups:

- **Academics:** The CoCreAid Kit 4.0 addresses academics regardless of their department. With the digital co-creation tools, the project aim was to achieve an increasing readiness to carry out distant co-creation projects. In addition, academics improve their digital competences and skills, through the usage of digital cocreation tools.
- **NGOs:** The CoCreAid Kit 4.0 aimed to support NGOs by facilitating their cooperation with HEIs and also their civic engagement. CroCreAid provides methods for co-creation and location-independent work on societal challenges between NGOs and HEIs.

Validation & pilot testing work plan

Co-Creation Aid Kit 4.0 was pilot tested in **20 co-creation projects between HEI and NGOs** (4 in each of the participating country).

Among the co-creation projects the wide European projects as well as short term collaboration were included. The projects were not necessarily projects externally funded, but these encompassed all the initiatives that – for any reason – include digital collaboration.

The GUI prototype was simultaneously applied by HEI and NGO project leaders.

While selecting the collaborative initiatives, partners have particularly considered projects falling into one of the categories:

- Entrepreneurship and innovation
- Community engagement
- Tourism and rural development
- Pedagogy and digital teaching

Aid Kit 4.0 was validated on the basis of **survey** and **focus groups** with the respective associated partners of the consortium partners across Europe. After applying directly the CoCreAid Kit in collaborating initiatives, people involved in

those initiatives were asked to fill in the validation survey, and some of them were additionally asked to share their deeper qualitative feedback at the focus group interview (FGI). One FGI was organised in every participating country.

Some of the examples of projects in which the CoCreAid Kit 4,0 was pilot tested included:

- E-Coop - The project aims to stimulate the creation of energy communities with a focus in rural areas for sustainable and inclusive development of the territory and communities. The project consortium includes universities and NGOs working in rural areas.
- VALMELA - The project 'Valorisation of the Limoncella apple and sustainable apple growing in the Monti Dauni rural areas' (VALMELA) aims to increase productivity and profitability in the agricultural sector of the Monti Dauni, focusing on the typicality and biodiversity of apple production.
- EU-Dare - The Eu-Dare project is aimed at activating virtuous processes in the agricultural sector. Specifically, it targets small farmers in rural areas to train them in agroecological practices to make them key players in the transition towards economically, socially and environmentally sustainable agriculture.
- Citizen Science NOW - NOW aims to explore potential futures in the broader engagement of citizens in Citizen Science (CS) and identify citizen competencies needed to achieve it. The findings are used to develop digital CS capacity-building resources for and with citizens.
- Creativity and Innovation - In Creativity and Innovation, social innovations for societal issues are developed using the Design Thinking approach, based on real case studies. Although we do not directly collaborate with NGOs, we have observed that the methods of the CoCreAid Kit can be effectively applied to projects with a social purpose.
- ENHANCER - ENHANCER is a 3-year Erasmus+ project that aims to foster social entrepreneurship competences through a gamified approach.
- WeRin - The project aims to make entrepreneurship education and support programmes more inclusive for women. WeRin is a forward-thinking European initiative with a team of partners who are passionate about increasing the share of female graduate entrepreneurs.
- IFIF - The project "Innovative Women in Focus" initiated by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research aims to enhance the visibility of women's scientific achievements and innovative ideas in society. Through a funding focus on strategies for gender equality in education and research, the project supports initiatives to improve opportunities, increase representation, and strengthen the visibility of women, fostering an inclusive innovation culture in Germany.
- Semesterproject with finanz informatik - The semester project is a co-creation initiative where students from FH Münster collaborate with the company finanz informatik to explore the potential of sports sponsorship.

While finanz informatik is not an NGO, the project is driven by a social objective.

- Young İzikad Project Competetition - The aim of the project is to encourage young people to entrepreneurship and to strengthen their entrepreneurial skills and competencies. for this purpose, various trainings and mentoring support are provided to the teams that apply, and awards are given to the winners of the competition. Project partners include NGO representatives and academics from different universities.
- Biodesign Workshop - The theme of the workshop was determined as "Biodesign in Climate Change and Disaster Combat". The aim is to raise awareness about Biodesign, to create a productive and creative discussion environment with the participation of undergraduate and graduate students studying in different disciplines, and to guide young researchers interested in Biodesign. The Project consortium includes universities and NGOs
- PrizeCharger – the aim of the project is to create a mechanism for a competition for youth and organize knowledge challenge with the objective to both educate and appreciate young people. The project is nation-wide and involves several non-governmental organisations and HEIs representatives.

Validation results

Focus group validation results

All interviewed participants were positively surprised by the diversity, comprehensiveness and functionality of the CoCreAid Toolbox. Most people indicated that the proposed toolbox exceeded their expectations. In particular, satisfaction was expressed with:

- a wealth of content
- a filtering function, making it easy to quickly find information relevant to the recipient's needs,
- the variety of methods and tools,
- ready-made templates for the use of the tool – this is a great added value, as it reduces the time needed to prepare your own template or search for a template in external sources,
- the intuitiveness of the platform in technical and graphical terms,
- very user friendly platform – works quite well on a mobile phone or tablet,
- the categorisation of the tools, making it easier to quickly find the information required,
- extensive descriptions under each heading,
- the usability of the proposed tools,
- simplicity in terms of finding relevant information quickly and efficiently,

- the limited number of tools which allows for quicker browsing and selection of relevant options. It was noted that too many tools could make it difficult to choose, so the selectivity of the tools presented was appreciated.

Some people suggested expanding the tools available (e.g. mind mapping techniques).

It was also suggested to add comparative information between methods, which could make it even easier for users to choose the right technique. It was highlighted that such functionality could be useful for people looking for subtle differences between methods.

Members of the discussion groups pointed to various examples where the CoCreAid Toolbox had facilitated collaboration in their projects. In particular, they appreciated the following aspects of CoCreAid:

- File storage and communication – tools for efficient file storage and communication between team members to facilitate collaboration and work organisation.
- Ease of tool selection – The Toolbox helps to select the right tools for a particular stage of the project by categorising and presenting different options, making it easier to explore new possibilities.
- Ease of use – Users confirmed the lack of difficulty in using the platform and finding the content and sections they need, which contributes to effective collaboration.
- Gathering suggestions and needs of the community – The section "Digital co-creation platform" is useful to verify the community's involvement at the initial stage of the project, which helps to create an appropriate Local Development Strategy.
- Monitor project progress – The tool allows project progress to be monitored and outcomes to be measured at different phases, allowing project impact and future prospects to be tracked.
- Increase involvement of all project participants – The simplicity of the CoCreAid Toolbox can help increase involvement and collaboration in all aspects of the project, which can lead to success in the long term.
- Integration of different disciplines – The CoCreAid Toolbox supports the integration of different disciplines by enabling collaborative working and communication between different teams, which fosters an interdisciplinary approach in projects.
- Increase communication efficiency – The Toolbox allows information to be communicated and opinions to be exchanged quickly and efficiently between project participants, fostering better understanding and coordination.
- Facilitating time management – The Toolbox enables better time management by organising meetings, scheduling activities and monitoring progress, which contributes to the efficient use of time in the project.
- Support for project partners – The Toolbox supports project partners by providing tools for stakeholder analysis, assignment of activities and

monitoring of results, facilitating collaboration and joint achievement of project goals.

- Improving decision-making – The Toolbox enables faster decision-making through easier access to information, stakeholder analysis and the assignment of activities, which contributes to more effective project management.
- Fostering innovation – The Toolbox encourages experimentation with new solutions and methods by providing a variety of functions, which encourages innovation in projects and the development of new ideas.
- Increase transparency – With the CoCreAid Toolbox, it is possible to better monitor project progress, share information and ensure transparency of activities, which builds trust between project partners.
- Increased expert involvement – The Toolbox encourages the active participation of experts in the project by providing tools for analysis, planning and monitoring of activities, which increases the involvement and contribution of experts to the project.
- Supporting a variety of projects – The Toolbox is flexible and adaptable to a wide range of project types, allowing it to be used effectively in different contexts and industries.
- Improve the quality of project management – The Toolbox supports better project management by providing tools for planning, monitoring progress and analysing results.
- Promoting collaboration between partners – The Toolbox encourages collaboration between project partners by facilitating communication, resource sharing and joint planning of activities, thus fostering strong collaboration.

Methods highlighted in particular by the focus group participants include: "Stakeholder Saliency", which allows for the schematisation and analysis of project stakeholders in terms of their impact, which is particularly useful in the early stages of a project; the "Expectation matrix", which allows for the assignment of activities prior to project implementation, which facilitates the division of tasks between partners and provides clarity in activities; and co-creation methods - e.g. the Ambassador concept and the UTAUT Model, which help to monitor and measure the impact of a project, which is important for its success.

Among the most useful features of the platform for project implementation were listed:

- clear design and layout, which made navigation straightforward after a brief learning period,
- consistency and intuitiveness of the platform, which made it easy to navigate quickly,
- digital co-creation platform for collaborative brainstorming and real-time feedback,
- comprehensive range of tools for fostering innovation and collaboration,
- practical guidance next to each tool described,

- ability to filter content and quickly find specific information (filtering tools by categories, time frames, group sizes, and project stages),
- presentation of the advantages, disadvantages and limitations of each tool,
- plurality of information contained on the platform,
- structure of the platform allowing to quickly find the needed information and division into categories,
- clear presentation of the tools and the ability to quickly understand their use,
- the possibility to redirect to other resources through links,
- listing of tools that can be operated in different languages,
- modern design and ease of site navigation.

The clear and lucid descriptions provided next to each proposed method and platform were particularly appreciated. Additionally, users indicated that the presentation of the advantages, disadvantages and limitations of each tool was helpful in making an informed choice of tools for their project.

Participants in the focus group suggested considering the addition of several features that could increase the usability and effectiveness of the CoCreAid Toolbox in the context of collaboration between universities and NGOs. These included for instance adding images and templates to tools description, adding Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section, creating a user guide, which would make it easier to use the filters and discover new uses, increasing the number of success stories in the programmes, create a section with suggestions on how to best use the tools in different industries or fields, adding a forward and backward scrolling function for browsing methods, improving search functionality for finding specific tools quickly, simplifying tool selection process, adding more tools & methods.

In summary, all participants in the focus group survey expressed a **desire to continue using the CoCreAid Toolbox in their future projects**. They emphasise that the tools are increasingly blended into their daily work routine. Despite some limitations and drawbacks, participants recognise the great advantages of the CoCreAid Toolbox, which facilitates collaboration and creativity.

The expert feedback considered during the focus groups not only confirmed the achievement of the main objectives of the methodology and tools developed by the CoCreAid project, but also confirmed the validation of the platform and toolkit. The results were fully achieved and it was very interesting to see what impact the project would have in the future to further achieve the goal.

Survey validation results

Vast majority of the users was highly satisfied with the CoCreAid Kit 4.0. The specific opinions were expressed in open-ended questions and summarised below.

Many participants shared specific positive experiences, reporting how the CoCreAid Kit 4.0 had simplified and enriched the co-creation process. Some emphasised the ease of use of certain functions and the effectiveness of the interactive tools.

We received valuable suggestions on how to enhance the platform, including requests for **more detailed guides for existing features**, adding **real-world case studies**, and expanding the knowledge base to cover more co-creation scenarios.

A common theme among participants was the desire for **additional content**. This included requests for **practical examples**, **video tutorials** and **more resources for specific sectors**, which could facilitate the practical application of the kit in different contexts.

Some users mentioned specific challenges they encountered while using the kit. These included **technical barriers**, such as the **difficulty of integration with other software** or the need for additional functionality to support remote collaboration. Some feedback also highlighted the need for **more customisation** to adapt to different working cultures or specific project needs.

A minority of open responses indicated a need for more support while using the kit. This included suggestions for more **direct assistance** or **additional guidelines** that might facilitate the use of the kit for novices in digital co-creation.

Overall, the open responses revealed a high regard for the CoCreAid Kit 4.0, with many participants expressing appreciation for its positive impact on digital co-creation. However, the feedback also provided clear guidance on how the kit can evolve to become even more inclusive, intuitive and comprehensive. It will be important to take these suggestions into account as we continue to develop and refine the tools available to our users.

In summary, the analysis of the closed responses shows that the CoCreAid Kit 4.0 was **generally well received by its users**. A significant aspect is the strong participation and positive feedback from affiliates of higher education institutions, which might indicate a particular alignment of the Kit with the academic context. The high overall satisfaction rate and the wide use of its different sections reveal that the Kit effectively serves the objectives of digital co-creation. However, **the need for minor improvements and the demand for additional content suggested that there is still room for further refinement of the platform**.

The user-friendliness of the interface and the clarity of the instructions, while receiving a positive response, could benefit from further improvements to increase intuitiveness and reduce navigation difficulties for all users. In addition, although the knowledge base was considered adequate by most users, the **7.4 per cent who want additional content** emphasised the importance of continued development and enrichment of the materials offered.

The CoCreAid Kit 4.0 seems to align well with the project objectives, as evidenced by the support and use of its different sections. **The positive feedback on the effectiveness of the proposed solutions and overall satisfaction indicates that the kit is meeting the objectives of providing valuable support in the context of digital co-creation**. However, the continued exploration of feedback,

particularly that requesting improvements or additional support, is crucial to ensure that the kit develops in line with the growing and changing needs of users.

Obvious strengths include the completeness of the information, the usefulness of the practical sections of the kit and the overall effectiveness of the solutions provided. Emerging areas for improvement include **customising the interface for greater intuitiveness, expanding the knowledge base** with additional specific content, and **improving support** for the use of the kit.

While the CoCreAid Kit 4.0 is already establishing itself as an effective tool in the field of digital co-creation, feedback indicates that there is a constant opportunity for improvement. With the focus on customisation, integration and expansion of educational resources, the CoCreAid Kit can continue to develop in direct response to user needs and expectations, ensuring that it remains an innovative and adaptable reference in its field.

Conclusions and recommendations

Summary of the key findings:

- The CoCreAid Kit 4.0 has been **widely used and appreciated** in digital co-creation contexts, especially by academic affiliates.
- The platform was praised for its **intuitiveness and ease of use**, and **modern design**
- Users were positively surprised by the **diversity, comprehensiveness** and **functionality** of the CoCreAid Toolbox
- Most useful features of the platform as perceived by users are: consistency and intuitiveness, practical guidance on the tools, ability to filter content, presentation of the advantages, disadvantages and limitations of each tool, possibility to redirect to other resources through links
- Most users found the **knowledge base comprehensive**, indicated that the proposed toolbox exceeded their expectations, but there is **demand for more specific content and resources**.
- **The sections on practical tools and methods were the most popular**, suggesting a preference for **features that encourage direct application in co-creation**.

Main recommendations for further development:

- **Customisation and Usability** - Continue to improve the interface of the kit to make it more customisable to user preferences and to further enhance the user experience through reduced complexity in navigation.
- **Content Expansion** - Integrate real case studies, practical examples and video tutorials, expanding the range of available resources and providing specific application examples for different sectors and co-creation contexts; add comparative information between methods, which could make it even easier for users to choose the right technique.

- **Deeper methods explanation** - the need to clearly define the level of sophistication of the tool and the digital competences expected of users in order to facilitate effective use of the tool; the need to supplement digital competences through training or other activities, in order to operate the tools more effectively.
- **Support and Guidance** - Implement an improved help section, with **detailed guidelines, FAQs** and direct support, to facilitate less experienced users and those encountering technical or contextual challenges.
- **Continuous Feedback** - Incorporate a continuous feedback mechanism to allow users to suggest improvements and report problems in real time, ensuring that the kit is constantly updated and in step with user needs.
- **Response to Specific Needs** - Further analyse user feedback requesting additional support or expanded content to identify and respond to specific needs not yet fully met by the current Kit.

Several users suggestions exceeded the scope of the project. They expressed their interest in having access to similar Toolbox relevant for specific industries, fields and groups. Especially there is a concern about tools serving institutions and educators dealing with socially important issues, including data management, e.g. big data, data mapping, crowdsourcing platforms.

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