Can Social Science be Citizen Science?
“YouTest – Young People and Genetic Testing”

Objective

The project “YouTest – Young People and Genetic Testing” performed a technology assessment exercise on the topic of direct-to-consumer genetic testing. Its main goal was to support young people in critically reflecting a new technology and forming their opinion about this controversial subject by actively conducting research and generating social science data. Employing – as much as possible given the constraints of the school year structure – deep Citizen Science, the students participated in the whole research cycle.

Methods employed

- Workshop settings
- playDECIDE
- WebQuest (guided internet research)
- World Café
- Qualitative guideline-based expert interviews
- Qualitative thematic interview analysis
- Survey via questionnaire

Framework conditions

- Structure of the school year and school curriculum were framework conditions of the project
- DECIDE game and WebQuest helped students to get an overview of the topic
- Students developed their research questions within the given topic of DTC genetic testing and selected methods to address them in group work
- Researchers guided students in project design and collection of data
- Project team supported data collection and exemplary data analysis
- Reflexive research process
- peer-to-peer dissemination of results to other school classes in a final event

Project design

Workshops seemed to be most viable to fit into the school year structure and leave enough time for focused work:
- Kick-Off: introduction of project and topic, formulation of first research interests
- WS 1: development of research questions and selection of research method
- WS 2: methodological briefing and development of interview guidelines
- Data gathering phase: qualitative interviews, questionnaires, internet research
- WS 3: exemplary data analysis and interpretation
- Final WS: preparation of project results and peer-to-peer dissemination

Challenges

- Different preconditions in different school forms/classes/age groups
- Implementation within the constraints of a school curriculum and the realities of school requirements (exams, homework)
- Keeping up the motivation of students to dedicate time and effort across the whole school year
- Flexible adaption of project plan according to student’s needs and interests
- Need for motivated and supportive teachers
- Qualitative social science methods are time consuming

Suggestions

- Integration of the project into the school curriculum as mandatory part of subject(s)
- Alternatively, offer as voluntary elective course in order to have interested students
- Connection to prescientific paper that is part of graduation as incentive for participation

Project Team
Milena Wuketich, Erich Griessler, Alexander Lang (Institute for Advanced Studies), Brigitte Gschmeidler, Jochen Stadler (open science), Matthias Kopp (Democracy Centre Vienna)

Contact
Milena Wuketich
Institute for Advanced Studies