Case Researcher Reflections

As case researchers, we found it refreshing and inspiring to have so many Youth Citizen Scientists at the forefront of communicating YouCount. We also noted that many of our Youth Citizen Scientists felt great pride in their participation and joy in the opportunity to connect with others.

In preparation for the pre-meeting and the webinar, we discussed the questions and potential answers with the Youth Citizen Scientists in advance, as well as providing information on the structure of the webinar. The Youth Citizen Scientists shared in informal feedback that this helped them feel safer and more prepared because they had an idea of what was going to happen. We felt that letting them choose how to present was a great way to create a safe space. The importance of preparation was repeatedly highlighted, particularly in terms of what questions might be asked. For many researchers, the unknown nature of webinar questions can be quite intimidating, so it follows that this would be the case for Youth Citizen Scientists who are less experienced in these domains. A general sensitivity to the complexity and unique nature of the cases was very important to have, as this can affect how appropriate certain questions might be for different groups and will directly impact how comfortable the Youth Citizen Scientists are. A space like this webinar unites different cases but also highlights differences between the cases, so this can increase their awareness of successes and failures within their own case. Support from the local case researcher is therefore crucial to set the Youth Citizen Scientists' results in context.

The creation of a social arena for the Youth Citizen Scientists resulted in many sharing important insights into their motivations and engagements within their cases (see Webinar Structure (Content) above). However, this was a lot of information to take on board at once for the Youth Citizen Scientists and the attendees, and it meant some presenters subsequently shared with us that they felt rushed. This points towards something that was missing (for different reasons including but not limited to the COVID-19 global pandemic) throughout the project: more opportunities for interaction among the youth from different cases. Organising this would have required more resources than were available within the project, but everyone really valued the opportunities for connection between different countries and cultures.

Building on resources, two main obstacles became apparent: First, technical issues should not be underestimated. Whilst many Youth Citizen Scientists are very familiar with using the internet, they may not be familiar with webinar structures or have easy access to the necessary equipment. The pre-meeting addressed some of this, but we know that our Youth Citizen Scientists did not have equal access to technology. And second, language barriers limited full participation. Many case researchers reported this as the reason for some of their Youth Citizen Scientists not joining in the first place – either because they did not speak English very well, or because they felt insecure about their level of English. To mitigate this, automatic and human translators were investigated (also during the whole YouCount project, not just for the webinar), but the actual implementation was challenging. This is something to reflect upon in future cross-country projects.

We feel that we conveyed how empowering it was for everyone to be part of the project to the external audience, but it was hard to convey how specific interventions were linked to concrete lessons on how to do citizen social science with youth. This would have required a lot more preparatory work to seamlessly demonstrate how the individual stories complemented each other to create the overall YouCount story. The question of time is again an issue here, as we cannot attend infinite meetings. This also resonates with a more general conclusion from the project: doing research that is truly co-creative takes a lot of effort, there are several trade-offs, and difficult decisions must be made, particularly if you want to be inclusive. In that sense, the webinar was really co-creative and inclusive, even if, from the point of view of communicating the lessons from the project, a less co-creative approach might have covered more points.