

GSNMunich

About Citizens, Science & Cheese



At the beginning of June, 44 PhD students from both sciences and humanities, selected from universities across Europe, participated in the LERU summer school “Citizen Science – nexus between research and public engagement” organised by the University of Zurich (UZH) – and I was one of the lucky nominees of LMU Munich. I must admit that before attending the summer school I didn’t know all too much about the topic. Within a week however, I had not only learned about the scope of citizen science projects, but I had even created one with other participants during the “Citizen Science Hack Day”! Therefore, I want to share my experiences and some of my newfound knowledge of citizen science. I will elaborate on whether you can use citizen science for your purposes (spoiler: you probably can), and I will also include some tips on what to do Zürich (spoiler: it involves cheese).

The first full day of the summer school was dedicated to exploring on what citizen science actually is. When I looked up definitions of citizen science, it seemed clear to me that it is about actively involving lay people in research. However, during the summer school I learnt that the definition is actually more fuzzy (which made me feel better about not knowing much about the topic beforehand). Prof. Bruno Strasser from the University of Geneva, for example, told us about various forms of citizen science. A lot of citizen science projects aim at helping researchers gathering and /or analysing large amounts of data, but the type of participation by citizens can

range from passive to active. On the passive side of the scale, non-experts are simply acting as “calculators” (for example by donating some of your PC’s processing power to science). On the active side of the scale non-experts ask research questions, and collect and analyse data themselves. An interesting point was also that citizen science is a rather booming field: the University of Geneva and UCL both have dedicated research groups, and ETH and UZH in Zürich have recently established a Citizen Science Center together.

Prof. Effy Vayena, who is involved with the aforementioned Citizen Science Center in Zürich, made us aware of the ethical implementations of citizen science. In traditional experiments with human participants, ethical approval needs to be requested. But what about citizen science projects? And what exactly is it that distinguishes citizen science from “classical” experiments where participants are asked to provide data? There were no clear answers, but through interesting discussions it once more became clear that the term citizen science can be interpreted widely. In the end, we mostly agreed that citizen science is definitely more than public engagement (where an expert explains something and non-experts are just expected to listen) and that it probably should be more than non-experts simply providing data, without being involved in the research process.

In the evening we visited an exhibition presenting all citizen science projects initiated by researchers in Zürich– let me tell you, there are many! The most famous project presented there was probably “Galaxy Zoo”, an internet platform asking people to classify galaxies. On the topic of how future citizen science projects should be implemented, Prof. Kevin Schawinski, co-founder of Galaxy Zoo and Professor at the Institute of Astronomy, ETH Zurich, suggested that “the age of clicking is over” and that we need to think of new approaches to citizen science.



Sophie Papadopoulou

@sophehUK

Follow

Is it really the end of the era of clicking and the beginning of the era of training? @galaxyzoo by @kevinschawinski at #lerusummerschool

5:22 PM - Jul 10, 2017

2 1

The second day was dedicated to smaller workshops and I chose to participate in the “Crowdfunding” workshop by Dr. Luc Henry. I learned that there is, in principle, nothing wrong with funding a research project with a crowdfunding project, and many scientist have actually done so. The most famous example is probably David Nutt, who financed his research on the influence of LSD on the brain through crowdfunding. After learning about examples like this, we were asked to create the campaign for an invented citizen science project ourselves. The group I worked with developed a campaign for a project aimed at detecting and mapping asbestos in your neighbourhood. It was so much fun being part of that creative process, from finding a name (we decided on AsbeSTOP), to thinking about rewards for people who would decide to fund us. After the workshop, everyone reassembled and started exchanging ideas for a citizen science project which we would further develop the next day and present in front of a jury!

On the third day, the Citizen Science Hack Day took place, which was all about group work. Our group developed the project TAGnosis, which aimed at developing a platform where non-experts can tag and label medical images in an interactive way. During that day, Prof. Muki Haklay was also present and gave each group valuable feedback. Overall it was a great experience working on a project so intensely. I think it was this day which helped us to really grasp the advantages, but also difficulties of citizen science.



Mahsa Shabani

@Mahsashabani

Follow

hard at work in #citizenscience hack day #lerusummerschool @GraduateCampus . a very first nice experience!

6:32 PM - Jul 12, 2017

1 11



Sophie Papadopoulou
@sophehUK

Follow

After 24 hours of work, TAGnosis deserves a group photo with a beautiful background [#lerusummerschool](#)

4:46 PM - Jul 13, 2017

1 2 10



Muki Haklay
@mhaklay

Follow

The TAGnosis bring crowdsourcing of images & machine learning to medical research, strong opportunities for progression

#lerusummerschool

11:10 AM - Jul 13, 2017 · Zurich, Switzerland

2 3

The fourth day was spent on presenting our projects to a jury of experts in the field of citizen science. I was impressed by how all of the projects presented had their own personal twist. Although our project did not end up being one of the two winners of the 2,500 Frank seed-money prize, I was proud that AsbeSTOP received the audience prize. The jury prize was won by “LetsWakeApp”, an app for finding the perfect wake up signal – also very well deserved! Despite not being on one of the winning teams, I definitely learned a lot through the process of developing a citizen science project, so in the end we all won, right? Cheesy, I know ...



You should expect cheese when coming to Switzerland

... but speaking of cheese, during the course of the week we were also invited for a fondue dinner on the top of Uetliberg. If you ever happen to be in Zürich I can definitely recommend going there, the view over the city from up there is breathtaking!



After-fondue chatter on Uetliberg

And since we are at recommendations, you should definitely also visit Raumschiff in the outskirts of Zürich. Raumschiff is, in essence, a “maker space” where you can explore everything about astronomy. I was very impressed by the dedication of Hanna and André, who support and manage this space and not only promote astronomy, but scientific thinking in general. They organise science cafes, welcome children from the neighbourhood to explain everything about space to them, and encourage participation in citizen science projects. If all scientists were as committed to public engagement as these two, it would make the world a better place (I said there will be lots of cheese!).

**Katharina Heil**

@Ka_Heil

Follow

Are we the only ones in the universe? Learning about space
[#citizenscience](#) [#lerusummerschool](#) [@raumschiff_org](#)

12:29 PM - Jul 14, 2017

1 4

Overall, I think this summer school was very different to what neuroscience PhD students usually attend. It was not a scientific methods course in the classical sense. There were not many lectures and also not many experts telling us what to do. Most of the work was done in highly interdisciplinary and international groups, with people from all over the world, doing their PhDs in subjects as diverse as Art History, Philosophy and Astronomy. I must say, working with this highly heterogeneous group was most certainly a highlight of the whole week. It is astonishing how creative you become, and how much you can learn from people with a different academic backgrounds.

Of course I also learned a lot about citizen science. For one, I learned that the term citizen science is fuzzy and not clearly defined. Despite this, citizen science projects should ideally be involving lay people in science. This involvement should not be solely about gathering data and also should not just be about making people work for you for free. Rather, citizen science includes active engagement of the public, which may include formulating research questions and designing experiments. Furthermore, citizen science can be seen as a method, just like microscopy or fMRI – sometimes citizen science will fit your research questions and sometimes it will not. But, on the

other hand, I also learned that developing a citizen science project can even be fun – so if in doubt, you should probably just do it! The best start is probably to check out some previous citizen science projects, so here are a few resources to get you started:

Cool citizen science projects :

- Trace neurons in your free time with Mozak
- A collection of citizen projects on Zooniverse
- A platform of citizen science projects in Germany

Blogs from my colleagues & jury members about the summer school:

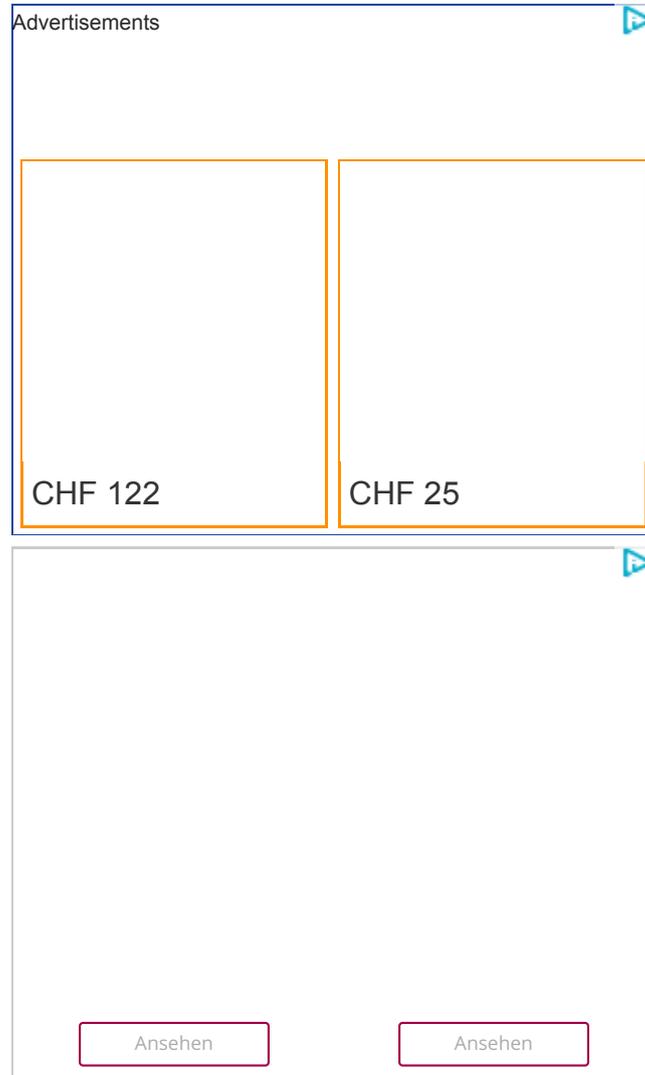
- A blog post about the summer school by my fellow TAGnosis group member Sophie
- Post by jury member Alice Sheppard from the UCL Extreme Citizen Science Group
- Blog post by summer school participant Victoria

The official press release from University of Zurich:

- <http://www.news.uzh.ch/de/articles/2017/Jahresveranstaltung-graduate-campus.html>

Thanks to Alex for editing!

Advertisements



CHF 122

CHF 25

Ansehen

Ansehen

Judita

Neuroscience PhD student. Literature, arts & music aficionada. Tea addict. Twitter: @juhuudi

August 9, 2017

Summer schools

CREATE A FREE WEBSITE OR BLOG AT WORDPRESS.COM.

UP ↑