Opening up 'citizen social science'
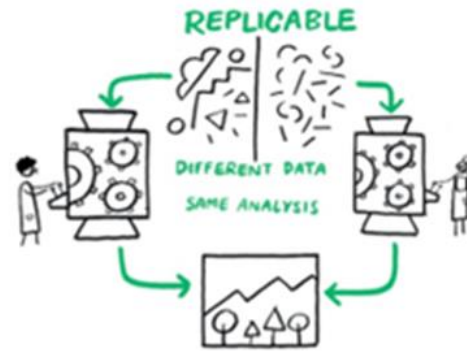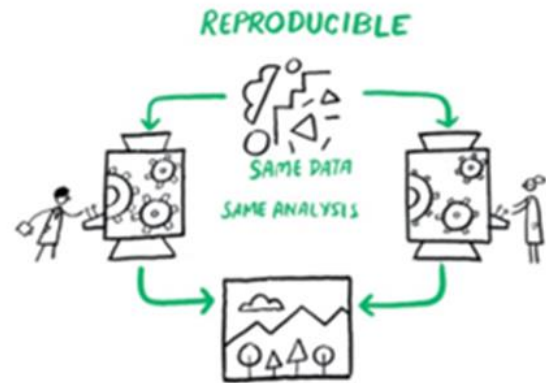
**Professor Denisa Kostovicova (European Institute, LSE)
and Patrick Dunleavy (LSE)**

7 November 2023

Part of *The Open Social Science Handbook* project

The four key ambitions for open social science

Most open science advocacy has focused only on opening up research to other researchers. But in the social sciences numerous different positions have advocated opening up also to our **research subjects**, the people who participate in or 'undergo' studies, who have their lives, views and behaviours interpreted and often changed.

Defining 'citizen social science' here

We use **citizen social science** to cover all efforts to bring out and involve fully into the undertaking of research

- the voices of non-professional stakeholders

- all research 'subjects' or participants or respondents

- especially studies seeking co-produccers of research

Some key uses of citizen social science

- Co-produced research in community development especially, seeking to involve communities in framing what is to be researched and what potential policy solutions developed or adopted

- Participatory research more generally, which seeks to give full express to autonomous voices of participants and to uncover and reveal their meanings, deliberative processes, strategies

- Research undertaken as part of a 'healing' process post-conflict, designed to help establish a common record of past events across divided and traumatized communities

- Deliberative democracy seeking for consensus agreements possible even when opinions on issues or policy alternatives are deeply divided – usually when

- There are sharp ethnic, religious, cultural or other politicized divisions between 'worldviews' (e.g. 'woke' and anti-woke) – i.e. situations where the 'problem' is contested and resolution is open-ended

- Or a specific policy brief is submitted to a consultative assembly or citizen jury, with expert information provided on choices and citizens using deliberation to seek maximally agreed approaches
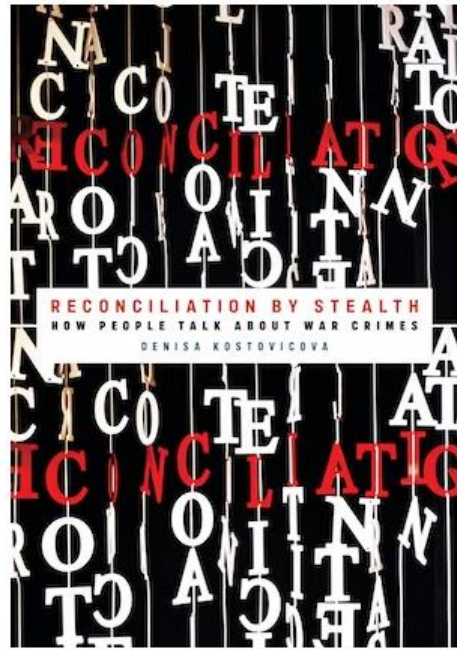
Citizens Open Science and
Opening Up Research

CIVICA Research Open Social Science Handbook Seminar

Dr Denisa Kostovicova

European Institute

London School of Economics and Political Science

7 November 2023

For more information on my work, see

RECONCILIATION BY STEALTH
HOW PEOPLE TALK ABOUT WAR CRIMES
DENISA KOSTOVICOVA

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What is citizen social science (CSS)? Some approaches

PD above**: 'Citizens social science':** all efforts to bring the voices of non-professional stakeholders and research 'subjects' fully into the undertaking of research

DK: CSS lies along the continuum of the research process: from identifying the research question, collaboration and co-participation in the research process, analysis, to formulation and sharing of the data and findings

DK: CSS entails recalibrating power in the research relationship: from extraction to co-production of knowledge

Why does 'citizen open science' matter? Relevance

Problem of misalignment between research, policy and subjects' own perspectives and priorities

"Together with improved regional cooperation, **further efforts towards reconciliation** are crucial to firmly anchor peace and ensure lasting stability in the region. The wounds of the 1990s still need time to heal. But 25 years on, it is time to address open issues with new vigour... before accession to the EU."

Cf. Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, Strasbourg, 2018.

"When I saw 'reconciliation' in the EU strategy towards Bosnia, I felt sick" (Interviewee, personal communication, Sept. 2019)

*socially and policy relevant research

Why does 'citizen open science' matter?
Ownership of research

Problem of 'researchability' of significant issues (e.g. war and peace)

'In large part, the academic community does not understand what it can learn and has learnt very little. I must say, few exceptions notwithstanding, there are few of those who know how to interpret, really interpret on the basis of what they hear from people. […] That is a big problem. That's why people are desperate when they see academics; there's an avalanche of them.'

(*Serbian civil society* activist, *Belgrade, Serbia, 24 September 2014*).

* doing away with extractive research practices and ethics of research relationship

Who is 'citizen open science' by and for?

Problem of (a lack of) transparency and sharing knowledge

Responding to the findings of the reconciliatory nature of the regional justice-seeking, a research participant: 'That finding of yours is very important to me,' and motivates further engagement for justice for war crimes

(REKOM: XI Forum za tranzicionu pravdu u post-jugoslovenskim zemljama, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 28 and 29 January 2018)

'Researchers always use us to obtain information. They never invite us to share and discuss their findings.'

(JUSTINT Workshop with civil society in Western Balkans, Zagreb,

* Empowers both researchers and research collaborators ('subjects')

Is 'citizen open science' the same as participatory research? Terminology

According to Stuart and Maynard (2022, 16-17), participatory research includes:

- Participatory action research
- Community-based research
- User-led research
- Participatory rural appraisal
- Participatory organisational research
- Citizen science
- Participatory arts-based research
- Participatory evaluation
- Critical pedagogy
- Rights-based research

Is 'citizen open science' the same as participatory research? Rationale

People are the best 'knowers' of their own worlds and issues

Outsiders are limited in their ability to fully understand the issues of others, especially in cases involving cultural, social, political, and other differences

'Co-research produces "better questions, approaches and understandings" (Stuart and Maynard 2022, 14-15)

Emancipation is "not a just a *coincidental by-product*, but a *planned outcome* of the research process" (Schubotz 2020).

Dilemmas of 'citizen open science'

Empowerment for social/political/economic change & social justice, how to deal with regressive citizens?

Risks of transparency and data sharing, recognisability and harm in volatile contexts

'Silent' voices – bias skewed in favour of participants as opposed to non-participants

Value of introducing 'subjects' to new theoretical perspectives/ways of seeing their world (e.g. human security) (Kostovicova et al. 2012)

Technology, open science and the role of netizens: do subjects need to be authentic?

Dilemmas of 'citizen open science': Open questions

Restricted scope of questions appropriate for 'citizen open science' ?

Restricted scale of benefits of 'citizen open science' ?

'Citizen open science' and the degree of openness versus
     a purist understandings of participation ?

Consensual understandings of issues: is it achieved through agonism or deliberation?

Role of 'local' expert vs non-expert knowledge ?

CIVICA RESEARCH

- How can we maximize assurance and trust about inherently unrepeatable research events?

- How can records of these events be opened up? E.g deliberative democracy sessions may be permissioned OK, but other participatory research can be very sensitive for the individuals involved

- Can other researchers check or even properly understand data from inherently unique research events?

- Is enough information provided on processes followed and selection of participants to allow other researchers to undertake similar ('semi-replication') studies to check if the same results were obtained?

- Is any 'replicable' ambition achievable where participants co-define research designs, topics, framings or processes?

- How does the evidence from research events triangulate with other sources – especially interviews, case studies, reactive survey data, or patterns of objective behaviour

- For co-produced evidence and findings, how can we best triangulate with other sources – especially interviews, case studies, reactive survey data, or patterns of objective behaviour

- Is the analyst's interpretation legitimate and credible, given the other materials provided?

- Are there alternative interpretations of evidence from research events or that is co-produced? Why are they not feasible or credible for the situations covered?

Achieving greater openness with citizen social science 1

- **Don't just plough in at the beginning** without looking ahead to the whole task

- **Pre-register** your initial core expectations and questions (especially those arising from theory review/innovation, previous literature, already public interviews or materials, media/public debates, interpretations and controversies

- **Do an exploratory 'quick dive'** with your planned set of participants (research subjects) to surface preliminary concerns and autonomous concepts, vocabularies, respondent preferences and expectations of the research

- **Surface additional core questions** at exploratory stage – update your registered priors

- Do cascade approaches or waterfall methods

Achieving greater openness with citizen social science 2

CIVICA RESEARCH

- **Firm up your recording needs** – e.g. focus groups and group discussions need many (multiple) recording devices, but interviews maybe just two (always 1 for insurance).

- Are you planning **video or audio recording**. Etc. What's lost with using audio only? IS audio-only more safeguardable data?

- **Consider using remote video via Zoom or similar** etc can be very helpful for group-based events that are otherwise very hard to schedule, and for spatially separated respondents/participants. But Zoom strategies needs special planning.

- **Make sure what data your respondents have consented to** being recorded and stored – be legal, especially on personal data

- **Record personal data safely and store separately** from the data to be retained

Achieving greater openness with citizen social science 3

- **Choose explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria** for what material are ruled into or out of the study frame, and stick to them.

- **Archive near-miss/ tricky boundary cases records** either set initially or excluded in later re-analysis

- **Separately identify types of data excluded** – e.g. which boundaries were participants' decisions on exclusion and which are researchers' decisions?

- **Define a metadata structure** for salient records to be used in shaping the analysis, especially quotes (see our "Data management" seminar in this Civica series)

References

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Thanks for listening

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