

Case Study

“Out of the box” – Participatory research with people from the region

Activity

“Out of the box – Participatory research with people from the region” is an interdisciplinary optional course for BA and MA students at the University of Vechta, Germany.

In this course, an examination of essential approaches and concepts such as transdisciplinarity, RRI as well as participatory research and action fields (science shops, CBR, etc.) takes place. The topics of participation and citizen science are processed in a way relevant to practice. The theoretical knowledge gained in relation to research processes is deepened in participatory student research projects, developed together with regional practice partners.



Methodology

The course is designed upon the philosophy of competence orientation, self-responsibility of the students, and learning and researching together with regional partners. The teachers act as learning guides and use a constructivist understanding of teaching and learning. Students work in interdisciplinary groups on research topics introduced by the partners. They have to develop their own research projects (research question, research design, data collection and analysis) together with partners, and the results are communicated via presentations as well as a written research reports.

Learning outcomes

Students gain knowledge of transdisciplinary research approaches, CBR, participatory research methods and science shop work. They can work in interdisciplinary groups with practice partners and can relate different perspectives to each other. They apply theoretical knowledge in practical problems and are able to reflect, analyse and solve arising problems, understand and recognise connections and deal with contradictions and uncertainty. The students communicate with the general public and various stakeholders, and are able to use different perspectives on solutions. They use integrative and interdisciplinary approaches and tools, and incorporate effects of current and future scientific practice and innovation into the process.



Conclusions

The participatory research projects with regional partners help students to get in touch with civil society and real societal issues. While researching, they improve skills such as communicating with different actors, problem-solving and collaborating in interdisciplinary teams. Doing research on a real societal problem with a partner interested in the results is very motivating for the students, who really appreciate the freedom in designing the research process and group work. The research results are very useful for the partners.

Trainers' and Learners' profiles

The course is open to all students of University of Vechta (BA and MA). Two teachers support the student groups, each group working on a different project with individual partners from practice. One of the teachers is from the Science Shop and works as mediator between all persons involved and contact point for CSOs.

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