

Citizen Science Online Gaming: Work or Play?”
or
“Some of the Values in the Design of Web-based Citizen Science Games: The Case of Phylo”

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Abstract

This paper concerns citizen science. It investigates some of the values built into the design of web-based citizen science games, with a focus on a game called Phylo. Using methods from science communication studies and the interdisciplinary field of science and technology studies (STS), the paper offers a close reading and content analysis of a peer-reviewed scientific article written by Phylo’s creators. The article is entitled “Phylo: A Citizen Science Approach for Improving Multiple Sequence Alignment” (2012). In the article, the creators of Phylo explain how the game allows citizen scientists to assist with research in evolutionary biology under the guise of solving puzzles. Results of the content analysis suggest that Phylo’s creators have a negative view of wider gaming culture. The results also suggest that Phylo players are conceptualized as human resources. These findings will contribute to knowledge about citizen science game development. Understanding how the creators of citizen science games view gaming and gamers can help us understand the conceptual limits that exist for improving upon such games. This paper shows that some citizen science game developers view citizen science as a work formation.

Keywords: science, data, gaming, work, play education, history and philosophy of information, research methods, social and community informatics
