

Governing the Estonian Genome Project

The Estonian Genome Project (EGP), an ambitious population biobank project undertaken at the beginning of 2000s had multiple aims. It was to be a scientifically beneficial and sound project, economically lucrative enterprise, transformative of the public health sector as well as constitute a nationally significant initiative.

How was the coming into existence of EGP framed and regulated? What were perceived as risks, what concerns were chosen as 'problems' to be solved by regulation? How are these issues linked with Estonia's recent history in terms of explanation? On the analysis of the discursive level I will look into types of arguments used, focusing especially on the social and ethical ones – on ways in which the biobank as a 'sociotechnical system of use' was conceptualized as politically neutral, that is scientifically objective, artifact in a post-Soviet space where researchers are still respected as non-interested and trustworthy experts.

I will be applying Sheila Jasanoff's notion of political culture in analyzing the ways in which EGP was introduced and negotiated. By political culture she means the 'tacit, but nonetheless powerful routines by which collective knowledge is produced and validated'. Comparisons with the UK, German and US political cultures in 'domesticating' controversial technologies will be provided.

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