

BIO-CHASE

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BIO-CHASE is a roll-and-move board game about biotechnological progress. In a board with 2 ends (“heavens”), players encounter fictitious biotechnological developments, are asked to choose sides and to literally influence the direction of the game (indicated by a global arrow). Amidst a constant flipping of directions, BIO-CHASE subverts the notion of “forward” to challenge the notion of progress: What do we think of biotechnology as a means to progress, what do we consider a beneficial development and what is progress in the wider picture? The game promotes a playful and yet critical reflection on biotechnology's promises and on one's own opinions and attitudes regarding biotechnology and can be used as an introduction or ice-breaker in science and technology related courses. Pedagogically, the game corresponds with our views on an embodied, hands-on approach to learning and to obtaining critical thinking skills.

BIO-CHASE responds to a need to discuss and reflect upon the ambiguity and complexity of biotechnological solutions in a non-confronting manner. The game was developed by the coordinator of the Leiden University honours class “*Who owns life*” [1] for the “*LIVING COUTURE*” event [2], a series of activities (presentations, debates, art exhibits, workshops) about biotechnology as a means to a more sustainable textile industry [3, 4]. In this context, BIO-CHASE was developed as an exhibit that playfully confronts visitors with our hopes and fears regarding biotechnology and its promises for a better, greener and more prosperous future. Influential to the game's concept was the notion of biotechnology as a technological fix [5, 6]. Many of the game's topics were derived from our experiences and expertise from several editions of “*Who owns life*”. Desk research, especially on news archives, supported the writing of fictive text fragments. The game art was influenced by landmarks of both biotechnology (e.g. Herman, first transgenic bovine [7]) and bioart (e.g. GFP bunny [8]). By appropriating a known game concept, the game also relates to a practice of board games and mods for critical play [9].

BIO-CHASE has been played with visitors at two exhibition settings (*LIVING COUTURE* and *Nacht van Kunst and Kennis* [10]) and with students of the course “*Entrepreneurship for society*” [11], an interdisciplinary minor of Leiden University. Most players are quick to observe that the game forces upon them one-sided, over-the-top or oversimplified views that are hard to endorse. In response, they tend to articulate their personal opinions to better clarify a decision they do not fully support. Others quickly endorse the most beneficial (for their game position) option, which may raise objections from the rest. Players also regularly comment that the frequent flipping of directions makes both “heavens” feel unreachable and thus unrealistic, even utopian, and further contemplate about a middle ground. Overall, while much can be done to improve the gameplay and repertoire of topics, BIO-CHASE demonstrates a great potential in exposing the complexities of biotechnological debates and in stimulating conversation around opinions that are frequently implicit (i.e. based on “gut” feelings) or unarticulated.

References

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