

Abstract

Consumer evaluation of biotechnological innovations

Experiences of a focus group study on general biotechnology, cloning, xenotransplantation, genetically modified organisms

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Session: Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects of Human Genetics and Agricultural Biotechnology

Keywords: consumer study, consumer behavior, biotechnology, risk perception, gmo, cloning, xenotransplantation

In the second half of the 20th century debates focused on the socio-economic embedding of biotechnological innovations have been given an impetus in all developed countries. Their common statement is that any technological development may only be interpreted in its wider social relations. The appearance of the expression “democratic science” refers to that not only professionals are entitled to take a stand on certain issues of science and technology but also those who are affected by or represent the target group of the innovation. This process became a basic principle of ethical science and also serves the careful development of innovations.

In our qualitative study the following issues were examined: 1) level of knowledge on biotechnology, 2) perceived risks and potentials; 3) ethical evaluation. The following issues were subject to the examination: 1) Biotechnology in general; 2) Genetically modified organisms; 3) Xenotransplantation; 4) Cloning.

We have chosen the focus group methodology to get in-depth insight into consumer attitudes and behavioural patterns. It also helped to explain the results of our previous quantitative studies carried out in Hungary. While the statistical reliability of qualitative examinations fall behind that of the quantitative methods, the unusually high number of elements (12 groups, 64 participants) attempted to counterbalance this disadvantage.