

Ethics Assessment of R&I in SSH: Findings of the SATORI Project

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* presenting findings by the SATORI project consortium

About the project

SATORI: Stakeholders Acting Together On the ethical impact assessment of Research and Innovation

SATORI is a 45-month project on ethics assessment of research and innovation (R&I) supported by the European Commission through its FP7 funding scheme. The project comprises 17 partners from 12 countries, including UNESCO, and is co-ordinated by the University of Twente in the Netherlands.

SATORI aims to develop a common framework of ethical principles and practical approaches so as to strengthen shared understanding among actors involved in the design and implementation of research ethics.

Research

1. Ethical assessment of R&I: a comparative analysis

A thorough comparative analysis and annexed studies of ethics assessment in different:

- countries (9 European countries, USA and China)
- scientific fields and disciplines (including SSH)
- types of organisations (research ethics committees, national ethics committees, universities, science academies, research funders, NGOs ...)
- ethical principles, issues and assessment methods

2. Reports on international differences in research cultures, ethical standards and legal frameworks and on the impact of globalisation on research agendas and assessment procedures.

3. Handbook of Participatory Processes
A report on stakeholder participation and empirical insights into the landscape of existing Mutual Mobilisation and Learning (MML) projects.

Reports on ethics assessment in SSH

Ethical guidance and standard setting in SSH is largely in the domain of national and international professional associations, although a number of countries have already implemented a national approach across the disciplines (Norway, UK).

Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing trend towards the institutionalisation of ethics assessment in the social sciences. In this process, ethical review procedures, developed in biomedicine, were applied to research involving human participants in other fields. This has often been contested among SSH researchers. While basic principles and issues – such as informed consent, confidentiality, etc. – are equally as important in social sciences as they are in biomedicine, the nature of risks and ways of addressing them are significantly different due to different objects and methods of research. Today, the number of field-specific ethical committees is increasing.

The SATORI ethics assessment framework attempts to develop an approach that would emphasise common principles while at the same time pay attention to differences between scientific fields and disciplines.

Outcomes of the project

Outline of a Common Ethics Assessment Framework

- a flowchart of common ethical issues and principles, applied to specific research contexts
- procedures for ethics assessment and ethical impact assessment of R&I
- recommendations for different types of institutions

- proposals for the institutional structure of ethics assessment in the European Union and its constituent countries

Ethical issues and principles for research involving significant aspects of human society and culture

From the Outline of a Common Ethics Assessment Framework

- 1. Freedom and independence of research**
 - Avoid ideological bias and resist political pressures.
- 2. Scientific integrity**
 - Respect rival theoretical or methodological approaches.
- 3. Respect biodiversity and cultural diversity**
 - Recognise the value of cultural diversity and biodiversity and the means for preserving them when conducting research.
- 4. Protection of communities**
 - Consider risks and benefits of research for participants from vulnerable groups and communities and use appropriate means of obtaining and maintaining voluntary and informed consent at all stages of research
 - Recognise the practices of traditional communities and knowledge and avoid their exploitation.
- 5. Responsible treatment of cultural heritage**
 - Protect and promote the cultural heritage of past generation for the future.