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A necessary system to institutionalise the ethical management of research and innovation

by Elsa González-Esteban, Moral Philosophy Associate Professor (tenure) at the Universitat Jaume I (Spain) and ETHNA System Project Coordinator

The 21st century is a time of great progress and big changes in the fields of research and innovation. Scientific developments and technological applications uncover not only that their potentialities become real at a faster speed. They also show that the dizzying speed in which they do keeps us as a society from understanding them, participating and even getting close to their potential consequences in society as a whole, including economy, scientific developments and the professional careers of researchers.

R&D and Innovation spaces are highly complex and they are getting their scientific and technological progress to be in syntony with society. That is, getting them to practice science for society. It is a challenge which requires both a deep knowledge of their necessities and requests and managing the values that society identifies with minimums of justice. Occasionally, the results make research organisations and those who finance them feel pressured, which can lead to the imposition of frameworks that may cause a minor or major misconduct. For this very reason, nowadays it should be a moral imperative to favour R&D and Innovation spaces which are guaranteed to reflect on the best ethical standards, which promote them and think about social needs and how to add those to the process of research and innovation.

The ETHNA System proposal aims to face the challenge of institutionalizing a system which manages ethics in research and innovation. To promote an ethical governance in research centres and research finance institutions. A constant surveillance in order to simultaneously prevent inadequate behaviour and promote excellency.

[Read more](#)

Latest news



As part of the #EUflashlesson video series, project coordinator Elsa González Esteban explains the SwafS call for Horizon 2020 through the success story ETHNA System.

The #EUflashlesson series was launched by the European and International Projects Office of the Foundation Universitat Jaume I-Empresa. It comprises short videos with useful, practical and first-hand information about calls, programmes, entities, news and much more related to Europe.

[View the video](#)

Spotlight on... RRI

Responsible Research and Innovation is an emerging concept that proposes to change the science and technology system through more transparent, participatory and reflective processes and that calls for the co-responsibility of

participation, gender equality, science education and open access. At the academic level, the proposed dimensions include anticipation, reflexivity, inclusion, responsiveness, sustainability and social justice.



More about RRI

Update from the work packages



Laying the groundwork

The partners of **work package 2** led by the **Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)** are making headway on the report on the **state-of the-art and best practices in the governance of research and innovation (R&I)** in the area of RRI. In the ETHNA System project, the overarching quality criteria for good governance in the R&I sector are those of “ethical” and “effective”.

When searching for promising R&I governance practices examples, **experts** are a main source of insight. Marit Hovdal Moan, who is driving the work package, is using the snowballing method to come to a deep understanding of the subject matter: each

interviewee is asked to suggest other experts of relevance, either to uncover best practices or gain a better understanding of a given practice.

We need tailor-made solutions

Interviews with experts also shed light on the hopes and concerns of potentially affected stakeholders. A central question that has come up repeatedly in the interviews conducted so far is: "How realistic is it to aim for an integration of all aspects of RRI in all types of research and innovation projects, regardless". Most experts seem to agree that **there cannot be a single one-size-fits-all solution** for every application. Framework conditions will need to be taken into consideration. Different disciplines, even different projects, may have to be addressed individually. One take-home message from the interviews conducted so far seems to be that "we need to have a governance system that allows for differentiation", Marit summarises.

Opportunity or obstacle?

Another issue that is also recurring in the interviews is that of the **significance of the framework conditions** within which research and innovation is taking place, at national and global level. A key word here is the incentive systems, which are based on the premise that competition is beneficial to research and innovation, and which drives researchers to compete for publications, funding, and students. The opinion of the interviewees is divided: Some think that the current incentive system is a major hurdle to integrating RRI in R&I activities. Others consider it an opportunity: The significance of competition in R&I activities could be used to bring momentum to the advance of RRI practices.



4 Questions to Work Package 1



The team at Universitat Jaume I in Castelló (UJI), led by Elsa Gonzáles-Esteban

It has been almost one year since you have been working with the consortium partners in the different corners of Europe. Can you describe the experience of creating collaborations amongst such a wide variety of partners?

Our main role here is to know what to request so that the knowledge that each partner already has will be of service to our common goal: to develop and implement the ETHNA System. In the kick-off meeting of the project that took place at the beginning of the year, it was clear that we all had very different professional profiles and backgrounds. But, from that day to the present, what it is to be highlighted is the evident will to offer self-knowledge to the committee. And do it all in spite of the challenges of Covid, which limited the contact and communication of telematic resources.

On the other hand, working from different countries and institutions provides various perspectives and work methods, which enhances the process. Moreover, this is the first time we coordinate a European project of this nature and so far it has been a very interesting learning experience.

What do you consider the major milestones the project has achieved so far?

During these months we have made progress in every active work package, beginning with the one we lead from the UJI as coordinators: WP1. Regarding WP2, led by NTNU, has been progressed to place the state of the RRI, especially in the governance field: to analyze good practices and conduct interviews to get further information concerning specific experiences. EUREC leads WP3 and is currently delving into the stakeholders map in order to be able to provide a guide of how to map their own stakeholders in R&D and Innovation to those who will come after given that this is a project which seeks to last over time and have an impact beyond the implementations that will be made. In September the Zentrum für Soziale Innovation (ZSI) began WP4, the development of the conceptualization of the ETHNA system, which is the first step of the WP and the resulting work of the previous WPs. Furthermore, transversally speaking, the communication led by Biocom in WP7 has been crucial throughout the project. Accordingly, the synergies obtained due to communicating through social media and the ETHNA System website should be noted.

[Read the full interview](#)

Upcoming Events

Please note that due to the COVID-19 crisis, these events are subject to change. Please make sure to verify event dates and venues with the organisers!

Philosophy of Human-Technology Relations conference

4. November 2020 - 7. November 2020

+++ virtual +++

Path2Integrity Conference

25. February 2021 - 26. February 2021

Madrid, Spain

19th Annual STS Conference Graz 2020 "Critical Issues in Science, Technology and Society Studies"

3. May 2021 - 5. May 2021

Graz, Austria

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