

How much are researchers aware of the ethical and social implications of their activities? The example of the European Project ENVRI Plus

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Over the last years the attention to ethical and social aspects of scientific research has grown remarkably. Large scientific projects that refer to environment, resources, or natural hazards, assign great importance to the topics of big data and data management, environmental impact, science dissemination and education. These topics are also analyzed from an ethical and social perspective, recognizing the close relation to and evident repercussions on the life and activity of the human communities touched by those projects.

ENVRIplus is a Horizon2020 project in which ethics applied to geosciences features as a fundamental issue, at the base of scientific activities. It brings together Environmental and Earth System Research Infrastructures (RIs), projects, and networks, with technical specialist partners to create a more coherent, interdisciplinary and interoperable cluster of Environmental Research Infrastructures across Europe (<http://www.envriplus.eu/>).

In ENVRIplus, ethics applied to geosciences features as a fundamental issue at the base of scientific activities. Within the theme “Societal relevance and understanding”, an entire work package aims at developing an ethical framework for RIs. Its objectives are:

- increase the awareness of both the scientists and the public on the importance of ethical aspects in Earth and Environmental sciences;
- establish a shared ethical reference framework, to be adopted by RIs governing bodies;
- increase the awareness of RIs management and operational levels and of the individual involved scientists on their social role in conducting research activities and research work environment;
- assess the ethical and social aspects related to the results achieved and deliverables released within the project.

As one element of this work we created a questionnaire to investigate how each RI participating in ENVRI Plus faces ethical issues in relation to its activities, and so to understand the level of perception that researchers and technicians involved in the project have on the ethical implications of their scientific activities.

Here we present and discuss the results of this survey, together with the next steps towards the formulation of an ethical reference framework.