



Οι δράσεις του ERC από την πλευρά ενός αξιολογητή

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Ethics Review Experience

- Assistant professor at the Applied Informatics dpt, University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Greece
 - ICT academic background
 - Involved in Ethics Reviews for the last decade
 - Reviewed proposals from many different areas and instruments, such as eHealth, Food-bio, ICT, People, ERC grants etc.
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- *Disclaimer: This presentation reflects personal opinions based on experience and is not an official EU position, thus no “guarantee” is provided!*



Table of Contents

1. A broad perspective
2. Ethics in ERC proposals
3. Conclusions





Experience in ERC grants

- Presentation: example of “machine learning”
- Recently a computer won Go champion
- Go is extremely complex
- The computer was not programmed with Go rules
- But, it had studied 50 million games
- So, it “knew” what to do!
- Getting a ERC proposal is not trivial
- I have not studied ERC guidelines
- But, I have read many, many winning ERC proposals (not many from Greece)
- So, I have a personal opinion on what constitutes a successful proposal
- (this is not to substitute official guidelines)





Tips: Before starting

1. Your idea

- ERC is all about ideas; so, a bright idea is sufficient
- I think this is NOT correct
- Considerable planning and work is needed

2. Your Profile

- Showing that you know the relevant literature is not sufficient; you need to have already significant contribution to it
- You must be an expert in the area (or show potential to do so), driving its development (clearly at different scales for different grant categories)
- Advice: Highlight your contribution, which should be significant in the specific area under study; focus your work accordingly

3. Your overall plan

- It is hard to prepare a good ERC proposal in one week (or month)

Tips: Proposal – 1

1. Project Idea

- Select an area that is important (but not just to yourself!)
- Select an area that you have really contributed or one that your work is clearly relevant
- You need both a good idea and a relevant profile to support it
- The first 2 pages are very important to show that.
- Ground your idea to real-life problems and needs, if possible (e.g. health, ICT), or to the relevant literature (e.g. in maths)

2. Motivate the reader on the importance of the area

- Use quantitative data as much as possible
- Use references to indicate the importance
- E.g. not: decease A is important to Europe, but rather decease A causes X deaths and has Y Euros economic impact in Europe [Z].



Tips: Proposal – 2

3. Objectives

- State ambitious but also specific, measurable and achievable objectives

4. Literature Review

- Your literature review should be comprehensive and should include your own work

5. Methodology

- Your methodology should be detailed, specific and rigorous

6. Workplan

- Your plan should be highly ambitious but also realistic
- Good project management practice is a plus (but probably not critical)

7. Resources

- Should be sensible and appropriate for the work at hand



Table of Contents

1. A broad perspective
2. Ethics in ERC proposals
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Ethics areas

- Human embryos/foetus
- Humans
- Human cells/tissues
- Protection of personal data
- Animals
- Non EU countries
- Environmental protection and safety
- Dual use
- Misuse





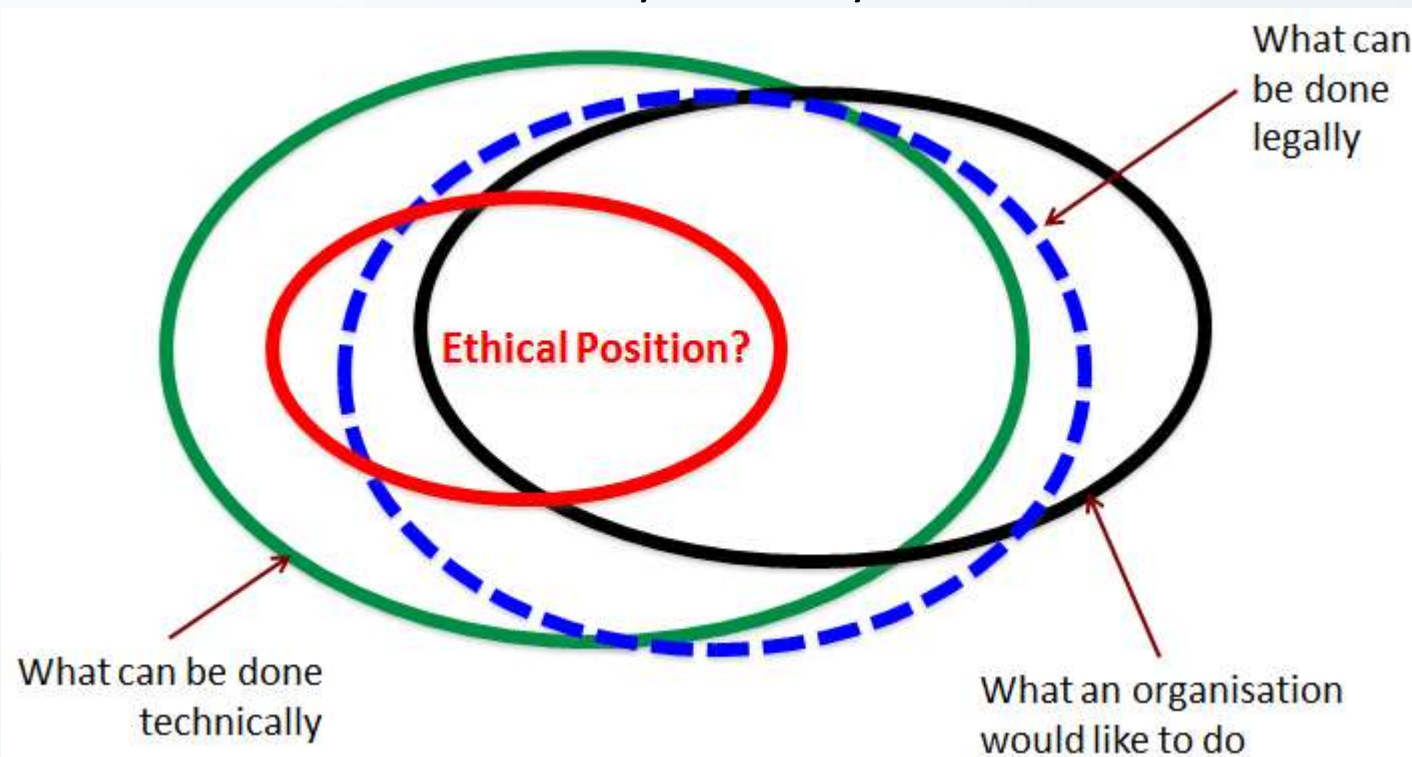
Research proposals and ethics

- Ethics reviewers are asked to evaluate whether proposals raise ethics issues in terms of:
 - Their **objectives**, i.e. are the objectives of the research benign?
 - Their **methodology**, i.e. are the methods used to reach these objectives ethical?
 - Their **impact**, i.e. are there ethics consideration with regards to the impact of the project's results once these are achieved?
- Ethics issues related to the methodology are the most common
- In general, these are also the easiest to address
- However, some research (particularly in ICT) may raise ethics issues related to their objectives (e.g. developing artificial intelligence and consciousness), or impact (e.g. profiling the health of people based on big data)



How ethics relates to everything else? Ethical position

- This figure has been proposed for organisations
- It can be also useful for researchers!
- ICT researchers are usually driven by what can be done technically!



Source: http://www.ibmbigdatahub.com/sites/default/files/whitepapers_reports_file/TCG%20Study%20Report%20-%20Ethics%20for%20BD%26A.pdf

(Some) Practical Advice

1. Determine whether your work (in terms of objectives, methodology, impact) raises ethics issues.
2. Get informed on relevant national and international ethics requirements, laws, regulations, good practices etc.
3. Prepare a plan to handle ethics issues.
4. Integrate this plan in your Description of Work.
5. If needed, properly manage work on ethics issues.



Table of Contents

1. A broad perspective
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Conclusions

- Think hard not only what you want to do but also how to present it in the context of ERC
 - Motivate the reader with evidence; prove that you are a leader in the field; state specific, measurable and ambitious objectives; be precise and rigorous in the methodology
 - Start early: not something you can write in a week (or month)!
 - Do not forget about ethics!
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- *Note: all views expressed in this presentation are based on personal experience; they are not the result of an academic investigation or other systematic method*





**Thank you very much for your attention!!
Best of luck in your proposals;
I hope I will soon come across them!**

