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Proposal of ethical guidelines for the European Research Infrastructure EPOS

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In the science and technology domain, common methods, procedures, and protocols (rules allowing to make science) guarantee the quality and reliability of scientists' and technicians' work. When those rules are adequately followed, there should not arise any problems in deciding what is the best action to take while carrying out research and technological activities. But this is not enough to ensure that activities are conducted ethically.

Ethics influences personal and collective conduct and thereby shapes relationships and resulting outcomes. Research institutions/networks/organizations and their operators have societal responsibilities since their activities may have an impact on stakeholders, partners, and general end users with consequential effects on the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life that goes way beyond a purely academic impact. Science, technology, and ethics are closely interconnected and they mutually influence the subject of their analyses and reflections. Thus, research and technological activities have to consider ethics to develop their full potential.

The mission of EPOS is "To establish and underpin a sustainable and long-term access to solid Earth science data and services integrating diverse European Research Infrastructures under a common federated framework." This mission encapsulates ethical aspects that must be considered by the EPOS community (scientists, technicians, and data providers, who have different roles and therewith responsibilities within the EPOS community) and that are reflected in EPOS' goals (<https://www.epos-eu.org/about-epos>).

In the EU H2020 EPOS-SP project, we developed first draft of the ethical guidelines for the EPOS community, that considers the following EPOS key-concepts:

- multidisciplinary research;
- integrated use of data, models, and facilities;
- appropriate legal solutions;
- common and shared data policy;
- open access policy;
- transparent use of data;
- mutual respect of intellectual property rights.

The ethical guidelines are essential for establishing an informal “contract” between all members of the EPOS community for managing the relationships within the research infrastructure and with partners by defining principles and values to be shared for building a community of purposes, that is a set of individual and institutional subjects who share an organization, a language, a mission, goals to be achieved, a working method and operational tools.

These guidelines shall ensure that the research conducted within EPOS and services operated in this context are done in an ethical way.

The ethical guidelines are an orienting document for the implementation of the EPOS ERIC’s (European Research Infrastructure Consortium) tasks towards its reference community and stakeholders and are preparatory to the drafting of the final version of the EPOS ERIC ethical guidelines on which to develop subsequent ethical codes for managing specific activities or issues concerning EPOS activities.