

## Research Ethics Guidelines

### Procedure

This “Research Ethics Guidelines” complement the Thesis Guidelines. The Guidelines also include the form “**Good research practice for research with participants**”, which should be filled out by the student in the case that their research includes human subjects or if their research might directly or indirectly impact vulnerable communities. This form should then be discussed by the student and the thesis supervisors as a part of the Thesis Portfolio assessment. The Good research practice form should be approved by the thesis supervisors as a part of the Thesis Portfolio evaluation.

### Good research practice guidelines

In line with the Euroculture MA Thesis Learning Outcomes, students should demonstrate ability to put theoretical knowledge into practice by offering guidance and workable and acceptable approaches with a high awareness of sensitivity of issues at stake. Accordingly, ethics of research and good research practice are seen as integrated elements of the MA thesis-writing process. Students’ ability to be sensitive to and reflect upon the ethics of their research and writing practices as well as the ability to conduct their research in line with the accepted research ethics standards is assessed as a part of the MA thesis evaluation.

These guidelines emphasize some of the key issues concerning ethics of research when using participants and the use of new technologies in research. The guidelines discuss issues such as informed consent, research involving vulnerable participants, privacy and confidentiality, inclusion and exclusion of participants and vulnerable communities, and data usage and storage. Broader questions related to research integrity are an integral part of the thesis writing process.

In relation to the Thesis Guidelines, students are invited to consider a) what are the ethical implications of their research design when including participants in their research, including the choice of their research focus and question, research methods and methodologies, and practices of research dissemination? b) what knowledge and training is needed to carry out the intended research project, and in the case that deficiencies can be identified, what are the strategies to acquire the needed knowledge and training? c) do the adopted research practices and the intended uses of research results meet the students’ responsibilities towards their research subjects, the academic community and/or the society?

These “Research Ethics Guidelines” are organized in two sections. The first section lists a number of principles related to good research and clarifies how these principles can be put to use in different research contexts. The second section is a “Good Research Practice Form”, which

should be filled out by the student and is there to help the student and their supervisory team translate good research principles into practice.

*Key principles of good research practices when using participants*

1. Respect for the autonomy of research subjects

a. Informed consent

- i. *What is informed consent?* Informed consent implies two related elements: participants in research need to first understand, and second voluntarily agree with their intended role in the research project.
- ii. *How to approach informed consent?* Informed consent should be understood as an ongoing process more than a one-time event. Informed consent is much more than a form to be filled out or a sentence to be recorded, it should be understood as an opportunity to initiate a discussion with research participants about the research project, their role in it, and all foreseeable consequences of the research project. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that research participants have access to and adequate apprehension of all information that is relevant to the research project and their participation in the research project including information about the foreseeable consequences of their participation in the research project. It is also the responsibility of the student to enable research participants to withdraw their consent at any research stage.
- iii. *How to understand autonomy in informed consent?* Consent should be intentional and research participants should not be coerced or manipulated to participate in research. All circumstances, practices or norms that implicitly or explicitly impede voluntary consent should be eliminated or minimized.
- iv. *What form/format should informed consent take?* The default position has been for the participants' consent to be recorded by for instance signing a form, returning a survey or giving consent in an audio or video material.
- v. *How to approach informed consent in a digital context?* Digital research complicates some of the established standards of good research practices as researchers encounter and have to process constant (often open) data flows in contexts where data production, editing, and sharing is carried out within complex networks. Students are asked to obtain informed consent where possible and particularly in the case where:
  1. Data are private more than public;
  2. Data are identifiable and traceable to an individual or a group;
  3. Data concern sensitive topics;
  4. Vulnerable research subjects are included.

(Adopted from McKee and Porter's (2009))

vi. Ambiguities

1. At times, considerable efforts are needed to obtain informed consent. For instance, communication can be hampered by linguistic or cultural differences between the researcher and research participants. This is why relevant information needs to be communicated clearly and in a way that is attentive to the needs and concerns of the involved participants
2. Informed consent via a written form is not always the most optimal option. Students are asked to seek the most suitable method to obtain informed consent, depending on the context. Cases where informed consent is not explicit, where consent cannot ensure the autonomy of participants, where research is conducted in exceptional circumstances, or where other ambiguities exist, need to be carefully reviewed by the student and the supervisory team, and where needed, by the Euroculture Exam Board.
3. Students should seek to obtain informed consent from all participants and representatives of local communities when collective concerns are at stake. Research that relies on informed consent by institutional gatekeepers, senior managers and/or guardians (only) should be consulted with the supervisory team and the Euroculture Exam Committee if needed. Research that involves children and vulnerable groups (see point 2) should be consulted with the supervisory team and the Euroculture Exam Board if needed.

2. Privacy and confidentiality

- a. *What does it mean to protect privacy of research participants and confidentiality of research information?* To protect privacy of research participants means to maintain and ensure that the ability of research participants to control the information about oneself, ability to make important decisions about one's life, family and social relations is not compromised. To protect confidentiality of information means not to reveal information that research participants consider confidential and/or secret and do not wish to publicly disclose.
- b. *How to protect privacy and confidentiality of research participants and research information?* Researchers have adopted different strategies to protect privacy and confidentiality of research participants and research data ranging from the option of not recording names and personal data at all, removing names and identifying details in early stages of research, or ensuring the security of data storage. Datasets are to be anonymized before dissemination and publications of research

results should be stripped of any possible identifiers that allow a person's identity and/or various sensitive attributes to be recognized. Confidential and sensitive research data should be carefully stored and access to it should be restricted.

- c. *How to properly store data?* Where possible, your research data and results should be findable, verifiable, accessible, interoperable and reusable, while adhering to principles of confidentiality and privacy. Students should also think about how possible digital traces of their data storage can compromise confidentiality of the research project. Students should ensure adequate anonymity of data and minimize risks related to storing research data for future use. Students and supervisory teams, and the Euroculture Exam Board if needed, should think about a suitable data management and storage plan as an integrated element of the research project.
  - d. Ambiguities
    1. Private and confidential information can be (unintentionally) disclosed by people other than the primary researcher. In some cases, public appearances, research conducted in domestic or work spaces might undermine privacy or confidentiality. For that reason, students should make sure that research is conducted in a safe and controlled environment (where possible).
    2. Information that is considered to be a part of public record can still be seen as private/confidential, depending on the way it was disclosed, particularly if its disclosure could harm the research participants. The design and implementation of research, including the setting and the used methods and tools, should always be consulted with the supervisory team and, in the case that's of uncertainty, the Euroculture Exam Board.
3. Doing good and avoiding harm
- a. *What does it mean to avoid harm in the context of research?* Research should not cause harm to research participants, wider audiences, or the researcher. This includes, for instance, psychological distress, discomfort, social, economic or political disadvantage, invasion of privacy or infringement of rights. Students should refrain from imposing a risk of harm to others and themselves and they should adopt risk minimization strategies.
  - b. *How can risk related to research be minimized?*
    - i. Clear, honest and straightforward communication with research participants;
    - ii. Debrief involved participants to minimize the risk of manipulation or misinterpretation;

- iii. Incorporate members of the involved communities into the research design and research implementation.
- c. *What does the duty of beneficence mean and how far does it stretch?* By contributing to the general body of knowledge, research can also benefit the involved research participants and research subjects. At the same time, students can develop research designs and practices that benefit research participants and their communities directly. This way they can become more than data collectors whose research takes into account positions and needs of the subjects of their research.
- d. *How to develop effective strategies to support research participants and research subjects directly and what are potential concerns of such research practices?*
  - i. Each student should carefully reflect upon the potential risks and benefits of their research;
  - ii. Students can seek to provide benefits to the involved research participants and their communities, but they should be aware of the extent to which they have the needed resources and capacity to achieve meaningful change;
  - iii. Students should refrain from assuming what is best for vulnerable individuals or communities;
  - iv. If students decide to conduct different forms of emancipatory, activist research, this should be carefully discussed by the supervisory team and, where needed, the Euroculture Exam Board.
- e. *Ambiguities*
  - i. In the case that's where research participants are not, for instance, vulnerable groups but for instance individuals or groups in positions of power, it becomes unclear to what extent the duty of beneficence applies. In such research, the duty of beneficence should be discussed and established by the student with the support of the supervisory team, and the Euroculture Exam Board where needed;
  - ii. Research results might be critical of, or work to the disadvantage of research subjects or participants, also vulnerable groups. Such research should not necessarily be blocked through the use of cost/benefit analysis and should be carefully reflected upon and discussed by the student, the supervisory team, and where needed, the Euroculture Exam Board;
  - iii. Principles of “do no harm” and “do good” are complex; they require careful consideration and should not be subjected to a “simple” consequentialist cost-benefit reasoning;
  - iv. Researchers should be aware of and care for their own well-being. In this context, students can be particularly vulnerable because of their status, limited experiences, etc. It is the joint responsibility of the student and the

supervisory team, and the Euroculture Exam Committee where needed, not to expose the student to any harm and to prevent any risk of harm in connection to the conducted research.

#### 4. Relationships, integrity, and care

- a. Students have a duty to maintain research integrity when designing, implementing and disseminating their research. This (among others) implies that students will refrain from conducting the following practices:
  - i. Fabricate data or cases;
  - ii. Wilfully misinterpret or distort data or results of another research;
  - iii. Plagiarize;
  - iv. Failing to obtain informed consent where need;
  - v. Failing to admit that some data are incomplete or ignoring problematic/outliner research results;
  - vi. Failing to obtain adequate information about the existing state of research in order not to replicate research projects and results
- b. Students should attend to the relationship that they build with participants and supervisors throughout the research process and should approach others with care, compassion and willingness to listen.

#### 5. Vulnerable research participants and data

- a. Who are vulnerable research participants? We consider vulnerable participants those that are in a particular risk of harm in the specific context of the conducted research. This may include research participants who may lack competence to and/or are unable to protect their own interest by for instance choosing to give or withhold consent. It also concerns individuals or groups that are due to their age, disability, illness, socioeconomic, political or legal status, sexuality, past experiences especially liable to harm. Groups that are considered vulnerable may include, but are not limited to:
  - i. Children under 16;
  - ii. Refugees, internally displaced people, people in forced migration;
  - iii. Sex workers;
  - iv. Dissidents;
  - v. People with disabilities;
  - vi. Traumatized people at risk of re-traumatization (victims of crime, victims of violence, people from conflict areas);
  - vii. People in a dependent relationship with the researcher.
- b. *What is meant by the vulnerability of data?* Vulnerabilities of data include but are not limited to sensitive personal data, the gathering of large quantities of personal data, the way it is collected and stored, the source of data (such as data that has

been obtained through leaked documents, breaches of personal privacy, or in other potentially contentious manners).

c. *How can vulnerable participants and/or data be safeguarded?*

- i. Students should refrain from duplicating other research, particularly if this implies conducting research with individuals or groups that have been involved in other research projects. Students should always consider if their research is necessary and what are the benefits of their research project for the involved individuals/communities.
- ii. In principle, students should refrain from directly working with vulnerable participants and/or vulnerable data. Only in exceptional cases where this is absolutely necessary and no suitable alternative is available, students can discuss with the supervisory team – and the Euroculture Exam Committee if needed – if and how to include vulnerable participants. Students should have suitable training and such research should be a part of more advanced rather than regular course work (e.g., MA Thesis).
- iii. In principle, students should not conduct research at research sites that expose themselves and/or their research participants to any form of harm and/or risk of harm. This includes, but is not limited to, conflict regions and sites where the economic, political, environmental or health conditions may pose risk.
- iv. In principle, students should avoid field work around topics that could cause harm or risk of harm to themselves and/or research participants. This includes, but it is not limited to, inquiries about illegal/illicit or sensitive political activities of research participants, experiences of violence, abuse or exploitation. Only in exceptional cases where this is absolutely necessary and no suitable alternative is available, students can discuss with the supervisory team – and the Euroculture Exam Committee if needed – if and how to include vulnerable participants in such research. Students should have suitable training and such research should be a part of more advanced rather than regular course work (e.g., MA Thesis).
- v. In principle, students should not use methodologies and methods that include deception, covert observation, invasive methods, web-crawling, etc.
- vi. Students should aim at improving the quality of a consent by attending to the reasons why particular participants are vulnerable and adjusting the nature and form of the informed consent to the needs, demands and experiences of vulnerable participants.
- vii. If there is a risk of re-traumatisation, stigmatisation, or physical or psychological harm, such risk should be eliminated/minimalized.

- viii. Students should always be aware of the power relations between researchers and research participants and should reflect upon how their position vis-à-vis the research participant (socioeconomic, level of education, race, religion, national origin) affect people's willingness to take part in the research and the research process and results as such.
- ix. Students should reflect upon how certain privileges that are not necessarily accessible to research participants affect their relations with research participants, the research process and research results.
- x. Students should always respect human dignity and justice, and students and supervisory teams should consider carefully if the research involving vulnerable subjects is necessary, appropriate, and attentive of power relations and privilege.



## Form

### “Good research practice when using participants”:

NOTE: this form should be completed by the student if conducting research with participants (individuals, communities, or organisations) and reviewed by the supervisor prior to carrying out the research

#### A. About the study

1. What is the research question?
2. Is this study funded? If yes, who is/are the funder(s)?
3. Will your research / study involve any of the following?
  - a. Human participants (e.g., for interviews, focus groups, observations, etc.)
  - b. The collection or use of any personal data/identifiable information (e.g., names, email addresses, IP addresses, social media data, visual material, etc.)
  - c. Any other information that could identify (or potentially lead to the identification of) a living individual.
  - d. The potential that findings/conclusions may have negative repercussions for any individuals or group.
  - e. Is there any other reason why your research might raise ethical issues?
  - f. Will the research involve accessing sensitive material, such as material related to terrorism, violent extremism of any kind?

#### B. Data Collection

1. Briefly describe the data collection method(s) to be used (Max.150 words)
2. When do you expect to begin data collection? (Approximate date/month is fine)
3. What is the approximate duration of your data collection?
4. In which country will the study be carried out?
  - a. In one other country, namely ....
  - b. In more than one country, namely ....Depending on the research site, what are the local procedures for gaining ethical approval?
5. Where will your study be done?
  - a. In a research room
  - b. In the participant's home
  - c. Online
  - d. Other, namely ....Depending on the research site, what are the necessary procedures for carrying out your research with particular focus on the minimalization of risk?

6. What is the type of the study?
  - a. Questionnaire
  - b. Interview (specify type) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Observation
  - d. Experiment
  - e. Other, namely ....

Does the study aim to use any research methods and/or tools that could cause the researcher, research participants or third parties any harm or risk of harm?

7. Are you working with interpreters/translators/third parties?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

Please explain how they are recruited and what their role is. How will you ensure that confidentiality is safeguarded by the translator/third party? Are there any concerns for the safety/security of the translator?

8. Briefly outline your data management strategy, how will you store data while protecting confidentiality of information and privacy and anonymity of research participants (max 150 words)

### **C. Research participants**

9. Does the research involve vulnerable participants? (See section "Key principles" for explanation)
  - a. Yes, please continue with the questionnaire
  - a. No, please skip questions 9 – 23.

10. Briefly outline how you aim to explain aims, purpose, methods and implications of the research for the research participants (max 150 words)

11. Briefly outline how you will explain that participation is voluntary, how you will communicate the right to withdraw consent (max 150 words)

12. Briefly outline how you will explain benefits and risks related to the participation in research (max 150 words)

13. How will you identify and first approach participants? (Max 150 words)

14. If you need to recruit participants via a gatekeeper, please give details. (Might this raise issues of whether participants' involvement is truly voluntary? Might the gatekeeper influence potential participants in some other way?)
15. Are participants recruited because of specific characteristics? (e.g., living in a particular region, having a specific cultural background, having been affected by specific circumstances)
  - a. No
  - b. Yes; Please specify the exact nature and the reason why this is relevant for the study
16. What will a participant have to do? (Please, provide a clear description) (max 150 words)
17. Can the study have negative consequences for the participants, or does the research involve discomfort for the participants?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes. Please, explain the nature of the discomfort, the reason why this is considered to be necessary and steps that will be taken to minimize discomfort or negative consequences
18. To what age group do the participants belong?
  - a. Underage adolescent: 16-17
    - i. Has permission been received from both the adolescent and the parents/caretakers/guardian?
    - ii. Adult: 18 years and older
    - iii. Please note that research that includes minors under 16 should be avoided where possible and other proxy approaches should be considered. If absolutely necessary, research with minors under 16 should be consulted carefully with the supervisory team.
19. Are the participants in a dependent or subordinate position to the investigator outside the context of the study?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes; Please, briefly explain (max 150 words)
20. Are the participants directly dependent on another person or institution outside the context of the study (such as reliant on a caregiver, living in assisted living or care homes, living in refugee provision, etc?)
  - a. No

b. Yes; Please, briefly explain (max 150 words).

21. Will the research involve discussion of sensitive topics? (See section "Key principles" for explanation)
22. Does the study involve any use of deception, and/or will participants not be fully informed the start as to what the study is about)?
23. In the case that you will be conducting participant observation or ethnography that will not include obtaining informed consent, please give details and motivate your reasons (Max. 150 words)

**D. Training and safeguards**

24. Do you have the necessary knowledge and training to carry out this project as proposed? Briefly explain. (Max. 150 words)
25. How do you intend to address deficiencies in knowledge/training?
26. Do you have any previous experience and/or ethics training that is relevant to your research? If yes, please explain. (Max. 150 words)
27. What potential ethical concerns does your research raise and how do you plan to address these concerns? Which safeguard measures have you put in place? (Max. 150 words).

Good Research Practice Guidelines are based on the following literature:

Atkinson, Paul. *For ethnography*. Sage, 2014.

Denscombe, Martyn. *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK), 2014

Denzin, Norman K., and Michael D. Giardina, eds. *Ethical futures in qualitative research: Decolonizing the politics of knowledge*. Routledge, 2016.

“Ethics in Social Science and Humanities.” *European Commission* (2018)

“LSE Research Ethics Review Form”

Israel, Mark, and Iain Hay. *Research ethics for social scientists*. Sage, 2006.

Krause, Ulrike. "Researching forced migration: critical reflections on research ethics during fieldwork." Refugee Studies Centre. Working Paper Series 123 (2017).

Markham, Annette, and Elizabeth Buchanan. "Research ethics in context: Decision-making in digital research." (2017): 201-209.

McKee, Heidi A., and James E. Porter. *The ethics of internet research: A rhetorical, case-based process*. Vol. 59. Peter Lang, 2009.

Reed, Holly. *Research ethics in complex humanitarian emergencies*. National Research Council, 2002.

Sieber, Joan E., and Martin B. Tolich. *Planning ethically responsible research*. Vol. 31. Sage Publications, 2012.