

Ethics Board:

Findings and advice from assessment of years 1, 2, 3 for the EJP SOIL community

Mary Ritter and
Ethics Board members



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Our remit:

- **identify and monitor the ethics issues** for the overall EJP SOIL programme
- **provide feedback and guidance on compliance with H2020 ethics and research integrity standards**
- **assess the deliverables** in context of the ethical and legal framework, data protection and data management
- **draft annual reports**

Our Findings

- Overall the Ethics Board was satisfied with what it found and commends the EJP SOIL for what it has achieved
- The Ethics Board has made a series of 10 Conclusions and 15 Recommendations
- We summarise these in this presentation

Conclusions

Conclusions: Governance, Advisory Boards and Operations

- 1. The Governance structure is now well embedded**, with most Boards/committees working well, with good attendance and a high level of commitment. EJP SOIL is commended on the collegiate and professional functioning of the BPM, successfully lifting its level to take a strategic approach to decision-making, working closely with the ExComm.
- 2. There is a strong sense of ‘EJP SOIL Community’ across the whole programme and excellent team spirit in its operations work.** EJP SOIL, again, is commended on this. However, as in previous years, there is a very substantial amount of paperwork and heavy workload which reduces the time available for more strategic work.
- 3. The Budget Redistribution and Reallocation process is innovative and novel**, and enables the extension of work to follow emerging opportunities, providing potential added value to EJP SOIL projects.

Conclusions: Internal and External Calls, data management and harmonisation

- 4. The 3rd internal call process was very well organised and managed**, attentive to candidates and with a fair evaluation process. The 6 selected projects aim to contribute to science-to-policy interactions. They scored above average for research ethics and integrity, data management plans and protection of personal data.
- 5. The 2nd external call** brought together an increased range of European (non-project organisations) and international stakeholders, extending the scale and scope of research and increasing the impact and reach of EJP SOIL. As for the 1st call, the programme was run with excellent efficiency and attention to good research conduct.
- 6. The approach of WP6 to the harmonisation of data is mature and thoughtful.** The developed workflows and data should be documented transparently and published openly to make them available to a broader community.

Conclusions: Stakeholder involvement, Comms and Outreach

- 7. EJP Soil is to be commended on its partnership with the Soil Mission**, ensuring joined-up continuity of soil research.
- 8. The National Hubs are key to stakeholder engagement.** Many are very active and successful, although this is not visible from the website. Some internal projects have developed interactions with the National Hubs, while others focus particularly on the scientific community and integration of their results at a science-to-policy level.
- 9. The workshops organised by WP8 successfully engaged policy makers with the first results of EJP SOIL.** A good balance will be needed between broadcasting and collaborative work.
- 10. The 2022 findings and recommendations of the Ethics Board** were well disseminated through EJP SOIL and successfully implemented.

Recommendations

Recommendations: Governance of the project

- 1. Strategic Committee continuity.** A 2nd, online, SC meeting with update from management on output from EJP SOIL would provide valuable shared knowledge, cohesion and continuity without overloading the heavily committed SC members.
- 2. Advisory Board working groups.** The experiment to split the Advisory Board into 2 or more smaller working groups should be continued for at least 1 meeting/year to ensure focus, reduce reading load and increase engagement of the members. AB members could also be allocated to individual projects to further reduce the workload of papers to be read and to provide focus (particularly relevant as the number of projects reporting results increases).
- 3. Innovative practices.** EJP SOIL should codify the 'External Call programme' and the 'Reallocation and Redistribution of Funding' so others can learn and benefit from these innovative practices.

Recommendations: Research, ethics and integrity

- 4. Supporting research ethics and integrity.** It is suggested that there is a 'mid-term' meeting held jointly with all WP3 projects to discuss research ethics and integrity issues to complement the intentions outlined in initial applications and the reporting once the project has been completed.
- 5. Global synthesis of research output.** There should be a global synthesis of results across EJP SOIL WP3 and WP4 projects for impact and continuity e.g. in the Living Labs in the Soil Mission. This is also crucial for taking research through to policy.
- 6. Social and economic impact.** Specific attention should be paid to the potential social and economic impact of EJP Soil results on society – taking into consideration the large social and economic diversity of farmers, both within and between different European countries.

Recommendations: Protection of personal data and data management

- 7. The role of human participants in research projects should be discussed and clarified to avoid misunderstandings.** Involvement of human participants (such as stakeholders) is not limited to when data is gathered via experiments or from human tissues, but also via interviews with stakeholders and other forms of including external expertise.
- 8. The role of non-EU countries in EJP SOIL projects should be considered.** Their role should be clearly defined. (e.g are they associated countries in H2020/Horizon Europe, is (personal) data being exported to these partners, etc).
- 9. The wide range implementation of DMPs within the scope of EJP SOIL-funded projects provides a very solid foundation** on which further efforts, such as a widespread application of the FAIR principle can build upon. It is recommended to highlight to the whole Soil community (and beyond) the benefits of making data from EJP SOIL projects as easily and widely accessible as possible, by complying with these principles.

Recommendations: Stakeholder engagement

- 10. Direct interaction between EJP SOIL and policy makers.** This is essential to facilitate the transition from research output to policy. This is difficult for the members of the SC which is better placed to discuss the continuity of EJP SOIL work after the end of the funding period.
- 11. Work with and through the AB to engage a wide range of stakeholders.** This is particularly important now that results are coming through from the EJP SOIL research (WP3, WP4) projects.
- 12. Adjust Advisory Board membership.** Consider adding a new member to the AB with expertise in the area of stakeholder engagement to support this activity.

Recommendations: Communication and Dissemination

- 13. Research project communication.** There is large variability between projects. Content should be more consistent across projects (whether or not the project has a stand-alone website).
- 14. National webpages.** National webpages are highly variable in content between countries: some webpages are quite rich and regularly updated, while others are more “sleeping webpages”. There should be a specific effort to support of national hubs so that all countries present updated and enriched national webpages. National Hubs should be a key “transmission belt”, based on their fine knowledge of countries.
- 15. EJP SOIL website.** Dissemination and Outreach is crucial now that results are coming through. EJP SOIL will need to ‘up its game’ in this area (WP9) if it is to have the impact that its research output deserves.

Reflections

Reflections on progress following 2nd Ethics Board review

- Overall, EJP SOIL is to be congratulated on its efficient organisation, excellent community and research achievements.
- The 2022 findings and recommendations of the Ethics Board were well disseminated through EJP SOIL and successfully implemented. For example:
 - BPM is now working very professionally at a more strategic level;
 - Each Board/Committee has had one formal face-to-face meeting in year 3, supplemented by online meetings;
 - The actions taken by the EJP SOIL coordination team to raise awareness concerning Data Management have been fruitful. Proposals in the third internal call satisfyingly address Data Management issues, mainly via the implementation of Data Management Plans;
 - The 3rd internal call was strengthened towards economics and social sciences by extending the pool of reviewers;
 - There has been increasing participation of WIDENING countries in EJP SOIL actions.

Thank you for all your hard work since our two
previous assessments and reports
and
congratulations on all your achievements

We look forward to many more successes!