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Editorial



Dear EurSafe Members,

This issue of EurSafe News focuses on the use of ‘tools’ in agricultural and food ethics. Within this issue information is provided on a new EU FP7 project which is mapping and examining technology assessment tools and the possibilities for wider integration of assessment processes. In addition to this article, a EurSafe member reflects on the latest development of a new framework that is intended to assist policy-making.

In the guest section, Dr Ellen-Marie Forsberg presents her new EU project and highlights the role that a technology assessment framework of a more integrated nature might play. She points out that the FP7 project will examine the ‘placement’ of an integrated framework and how a tool may be affected by internationalisation, market politics, as well as any public-private partnerships arrangements. In the second contribution, Tassos Michalopoulos discusses the role of the E.CH.O. framework, the “Ethical Characterisation and Optimisation” of production, that focuses on public perspectives of technology. In addition to these feature articles, a new on-line ethics short course is announced by the Department of Philosophy at Michigan State University. This highlights the changing nature of teaching and learning and the way in which providers of ethics training can develop new on-line tools and short courses to accommodate changing student needs and learning styles.

The standard sections of the Newsletter are, as ever, included; an update from the EurSafe Board on the forthcoming EurSafe 2012 Conference (details of the programme are now available), and the latest information on conferences and calls for EU funding can be found after the feature articles.

The next issue will be edited by Stef Aerts (stef.aerts@kahosl.be). Please send all contributions by 15 May 2012.

Wishing you sunshine and a flourishing Spring!
Kate Millar, Issue-editor

Thematic Section 'Tools' in agricultural and food ethics

*Dr Ellen-Marie Forsberg,
Oslo and Akershus
University College of Applied
Sciences, Norway*

Examining integrated assessment of new technologies:

EST-Frame: A new European project

It is increasingly felt that more needs to be done to integrate technology policy and the processes that are used to assess technological innovation. Responding to this need, a new European (FP7) research project started on 1 January 2012 which will focus on the topic of integrated assessment of new technologies. The project will appraise current assessment methods for evaluating emerging science and technology with the objectives of mapping their strengths and weaknesses and determining their appropriate application domains. The project team will also examine the current policy context for emerging science and technology (EST) policy advice and intends to identify future trends and needs that should also be considered in these processes.

The project will use four case studies of EST to determine how current frameworks are applied to assess social impacts in these fields, these are: (1) nanotechnology in food production, (2) synthetic biology, (3) biofuels and (4) security in emerging ICTs. Drawing on the case study work, the project will focus on producing policy relevant outcomes which will be fed back to a number of EC policy bodies.

The project will also identify to what extent – and in what contexts – a framework of a more integrated nature can be applied, and it will examine the appropriate position that such an integrated framework can operate in, within a context characterised by internationalisation, market politics, and new forms of public-private partnerships in technology governance.

Based on these results the project will develop and propose a flexible, integrated framework that is intended to facilitate holistic societal dialogue and reflection, as well informing policy on emerging science and technologies. It is intended that this integrated framework will be suitable for use by a number of actors who are involved in the process of conducting analyses and coordinating policy deliberations on a broad range of scientific and technological developments.

The project will be based on extensive user involvement, especially in workshops related to the selected case technologies. The project will run for 3 years from 2012 to 2014.

Project coordination and research activities are provided by Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (N), Ellen-Marie Forsberg.

The four other partners are:

- * Wageningen University and Research Center (NL), Erik de Bakker
- * University of Nottingham (UK), Kate Millar
- * Danish Board of Technology (DK), Lars Klüver
- * Fraunhofer ISI (G), Thomas Reiss.

Tassos Michalopoulos

Updates on the project work will be provided through the designated project website (www.estframe.net). If you wish to receive further information, or are interested in being involved in the case study and 'integrated framework' workshops, please contact the coordinator at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Ellen-Marie Forsberg at Ellenmarie.Forsberg@hioa.no.

The ECHO framework for production optimisation from the perspective of the public

To optimize production in response to public concerns it is useful to know how well different production alternatives perform with regards to these concerns from the perspective of the public. This information enables socially responsible supply stakeholders, policy makers, civil society actors, voting citizens and shopping consumers to make decisions on alternative production and research options according to how well they perform for public concerns. However, ethical assessment tools today base the *subjective and decisive* terms of their assessments, the assessment criteria and their relative importance weights, either on compromises within groups of stakeholders (the so-termed 'stakeholder democracy' in which representatives of the public are merely a voice among many others), or on ideological mandates of certification bodies. Currently there is no integrated assessment framework dedicated by design to generate information on how well alternative production practices and technologies perform from the perspective of concerns of the broader public. This results in discrepancies between the technical meanings of vague assessment terms such as 'Sustainable', 'Planet', 'People', 'Biological', or 'Fair' together with the certification labels that they inform on the one hand, and the collective public understanding of the meaning of these terms and labels, on the other hand. Such discrepancies can be understood at best as efforts to lead the public, and at worst as attempts to deceive. Efforts to bridge that discrepancy generally aim to 'inform' and to 'educate' the public (Wynne 2006).

Contrary to that norm, the starting point of the ECHO framework is that the technical meanings of assessments meant to optimize ethical and societal aspects of production within a politically liberal democratic context must best reflect the evolving deliberated meaning of these issues for the public. Together with a functional combination of technical characteristics that are briefly discussed below, this public perspective is the innovative property of the presented "ECHO" product(ion) assessment framework. The issue-based E.CH.O. framework for the "Ethical Characterisation and Optimisation" of production from the perspective of the public includes the following parts:

- 1) A set of politically liberal and pragmatic (feasibility) constraints for the qualification of public concerns as assessment criteria. These are meant to restrict the application of the framework to 'reasonable' public concerns, as defined by John Rawls (Rawls, 1993), which are shared by a sizeable segment of the public.

- 2) Input information flows. The information flows introduce a sharp distinction in the role of stakeholders for the collection of assessment input. The definition of assessment criteria and relative importance weights anticipates the use of state-of-the-art tools like regularly

repeated representative citizen juries/workshops/conferences. In these, experts and stakeholders have strictly informative role, and the decision-making power to define 'what matters and how much' among worrisome aspects of production rests with the public. Their purpose is to "at least temporarily stabilise [the deliberated] collective meaning" of the ever-changing set of public concerns (Felt and Wynne 2007). Assessments of hypothetical future product scenarios must rely on considered expert judgment about feasible technological conjectures. Assessments can also be informed by established tools like the 'Ethical Matrix' for the creation of analytic inventories of issues to be later validated by the public, or tools like the 'Carbon Footprint' that measure specific aspects of production. About data collection, when existing products are non-traceable or when information is needed but not disclosed by relevant stakeholders, assessments of product performances for public concerns can rely on generally available statistical data such as national or production sector averages. Data collection may also rely on the economically rational assumption that products perform exactly at the (cost effective) legally allowed threshold for the issues at stake: e.g. that labour wages are the lowest, and environmental emissions are the highest allowed by law. These rational assumptions allow assessments to proceed without cooperation from supply stakeholders, and also make data improvement go with the grain of rational market actor behaviour (rational producer motivations, and consumer organization or NGO mission statements): Favourable data corrections and product traceability improvements for ethically superior products can be expected by supply chain stakeholders, and unfavourable data corrections can be expected by civil society actors and competitors.

3) An independently developed and appropriately adjusted multiple-criteria method that synthesises this input to assess (to compare, index, rank) an unlimited number of alternative existing and hypothetical product(ion) options. Features of the selected method include:

- a. The generated results are gradual comparative product rankings (indices). Contrary to high-threshold binary rankings, i.e. either 'organic' or else 'not organic', gradient assessments can incentivize and reward relatively modest production improvements. Consequently they are better suited to catalyse the re-allocation of production resources, (so as to match better the actual distribution of relevant preferences among consumers,) which is especially relevant during periods of (e.g. environmental) restructuring of the production sector.
- b. The incommensurability of public concerns is considered during the interpretation of results, helping to identify products with high likelihood for public controversy. Also, the synthesis of product performances for different concerns into category indices does not require a monetarisation step. Performances are aggregated as normalised achievements of the best performances observed among available products.
- c. The interpretation of results can refer to dynamic (evolving) production averages as benchmarks. Quasi-normative claims as 'above average', 'average', and 'below average' can be supported without reference to fixed and usually controversial values-based acceptability thresholds. Targeted results can be incorporated as constraints into production optimisation models.

The ECHO framework can be useful to all those actors from across the supply chain that wish to optimize the ethical aspects of production (the economy) according to 'what matters and how much to the public'. Its functions include the support, differentiation, promotion, protection, criticism and defence of socially responsible production from the perspective of the public, and the identification of technological research priorities with higher public acceptability potential. It can contribute to improve the "Supplier of food – [Food label (sign)] –Receiver of food" semiotic relationship –see Coff, and to avoid a market where "bad money always drives out good money" – see v.d.Belt; both discussed at EurSafe News (13, 4. 2011) on ethical and political consumerism. A straightforward application is in product labelling. Precisely because it informs about product performance for public concerns, ECHO is probably the only available tool at the moment that can address public trust crises and can enable market optimisation for production aspects of public concern in consumer-driven markets. The dynamic nature of the interpretation benchmarks used (see 3.c above) means that the generated normative claims can incentivize a 'race-to-the-top' for production externalities of public concern: Demand for products that perform 'below-average' will be negatively affected, which incentivises below-average production to improve. This means that the 'average production' also improves, leaving behind a new set of products 'below average'. And so forth.

To fully exploit this much-needed potential for a market race-to-the-top, ECHO should be applied in an environment of mandatory product labelling for public concerns. Mandatory labelling exploits the empirically observed asymmetry in public reactions to 'bad' and 'good' product(ion) performances (Consumer aversion to 'bad' products appears much stronger than their attraction to 'good' products: one that rejects 'bad' production may settle with 'average' without going all the way to 'good'. However, the current institutional reality of voluntary labelling means that information on 'bad' performances is absent or scattered and sporadic, and vulnerable to manipulation from interest parties of all sorts). The implementation of this policy at national level can protect ethically-constrained (costlier) domestic production from unlevelled competition by imported products from countries that apply inferior ethical standards (e.g. greenhouse gasses emissions or cost-of-life-adjusted wages standards, etc.). It can partly explain price differences in ethical terms by making visible to consumers possible relevant relative ethical shortcomings in unobservable (credence) characteristics of imported products, and enables consumers to vote/reveal their preferences on these issues. The inter-subjectivity of public-concerns-based assessments within ECHO supports the case for mandatory availability of information in liberal democratic contexts, particularly about issues for which the state for whatever reason does not regulate the market (Figure 1). Especially if these concerns relate to values that are dear to the public, and if they are currently managed in ways that are exceedingly unsatisfactory in public opinion. In our days such can be environmental and profit distribution issues, among others. ECHO offers a market-based solution to urgent problems that agrees with the expected democratic commitments of international organisations and elected politicians. It also helps to approximate better the fundamental economic assumption of 'perfect information', which is necessary in order to justify the delegation of regulatory power about issues of public concern from the state to the market in democratic contexts. ECHO aims to create a market environment in which firms compete freely for reputation, transparently and on issues decided by the public.

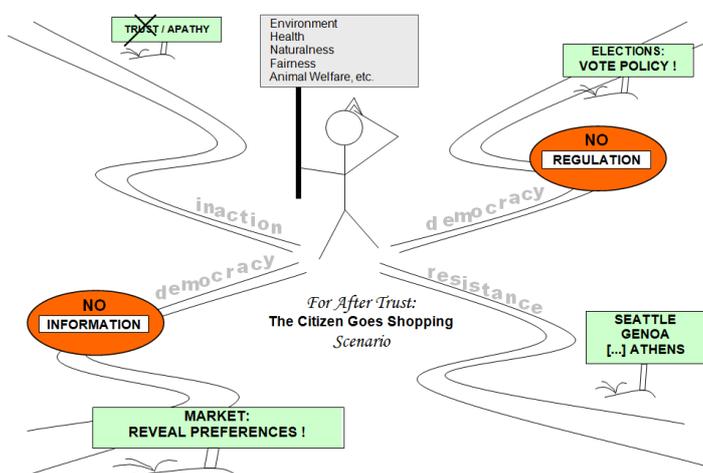


Figure 1. The politico-economic context assumed by ECHO. The depicted paths are not exclusive, with the exception of the ‘apathy’ option. Please note that if the concerned citizen chooses to fund a civil society organisation, then that organisation will also face the same action options. Results from civil society organisations still require that they can potentially mobilise the public either for political protest, market buy-cotts, or activism. (Michalopoulos, 2012b)

An ECHO-based comparative assessment of existing and hypothetical food product scenarios that include genomics technology applications for the categories Environmental Impact, Healthfulness, Naturalness and Fairness, is forthcoming at Michalopoulos et al (2012a). This work is part of the PhD dissertation ‘The Citizen Goes Shopping’ (Michalopoulos, 2012b). For further information please contact Tassos at: tassos.mic@gmail.com.

Felt, Ulrike, and B. Wynne. 2007. Taking European Knowledge Society Seriously : Report of the Expert Group on Science and Governance to the Science, Economy and Society Directorate, Directorate-General for Research, European Commission. [1st ed.]. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Michalopoulos T., Hogeveen H, Heuvelink E. and Oude Lansink A.G.J.M. Public multi-criteria product assessment for societal concerns: Plant genomics technology innovation scenarios and food production uses. Food Policy Journal. (2012a accepted)

Michalopoulos T. The Citizen Goes Shopping: E.CH.O., a decision - support framework for the assessment and optimization of production from the perspective of the public. Applied Philosophy and Business Economics, Wageningen University (2012b forthcoming)

Rawls, John. 1993. Political Liberalism. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wynne, B. 2006. “Public Engagement as a Means of Restoring Public Trust in Science - Hitting the Notes, but Missing the Music?” Community Genetics 9 (3): 211–220. doi:10.1159/000092659.

Michigan State University,
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Announcement of New Course

New non-credit on-line course: Ethics and Development

This course is about the ethical questions and issues that arise concerning development. Students will step back and analyze the process of development, the discourse of development and development work, analyze central concepts of the philosophy of development, and evaluate arguments given for a variety of positions. It will introduce ethical approaches to development thought, but also offer some tools in resolving ethical problems. The course will utilize both philosophical and interdisciplinary content in an effort to engage students with important global issues such as poverty, hunger and aid. The course aims to improve students' thinking about the nature and purpose of global development.

When: July 2 – August 17, 2012 (7 weeks)

Where: Anywhere you can get reliable broadband internet access

Who: Professionals and practitioners working in government and multilateral institutions, private sector, non-government organizations and community –based organizations.

Format: Recorded lectures, multimedia content, interactive discussions, traditional readings and writing assignments and a practical component.

Instructor: Anna Malavisi, currently in the doctoral program in philosophy, specialization in ethics and development. She has a Master of Health and International Development and has worked for 16 years in Bolivia in the NGO sector in areas of development practice and management.

Cost: US\$500 for those living in countries of the “north” (eg. U.S., European countries, Australia) and US\$350 for those living in the global “south” (eg. Most African countries, Latin America and South East Asia)

For more information about the module or registration please go to: <http://www.philosophy.msu.edu/courses/non--credit/> or send an email to: phl@msu.edu

EurSafe Executive Committee Update

Welcome to the 2012 Spring issue of the EurSafe Newsletter. This is again an exciting time of year for the Society as the 10th Congress of the European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EurSafe) being held in Tübingen, Germany, is only two months away (30th May – 2nd June 2012).

As you are already aware, the congress is hosted by PD Dr. Thomas Potthast, Simon Meisch and the team at Tübingen and the Congress theme is “Climate Change and Sustainable Development: Ethical Perspectives on Land Use and Food Production”.

Thomas points out “Climate change is one of the major framing conditions for a sustainable development of agriculture and food production.

This is connected to ongoing changes in and of land-use practices which are related to local, regional and global scales, often dubbed as 'glocal' situations. That characterisation also applies to the closely related land and waters use domains of forestry and fisheries". The 10th Congress at Tübingen will examine these issues through invited plenary speakers and some 70 papers which will be presented in a series of parallel sessions over the three days.

The full programme is now available on-line (<http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/einrichtungen/internationales-zentrum-fuer-ethik-in-den-wissenschaften/aktuelles/eursafe-2012.html>). Further details regarding the Congress, including travel and accommodation advice, can be obtained via the Congress website at: www.eursafe2012.eu, a link is also available on the EurSafe website: www.eursafe.org. As at the previous Congresses proceedings will be published by Wageningen Academic Publishers (WAP) and will be made available at the time of Congress registration.

We hope you all have a sunny Spring session and we are very much looking forward to seeing you in Germany in May. In the meantime, we also wish you enjoyable April holidays with your friends and families!

Kate Millar on behalf of the Executive Board
April 2012.

Conferences 2012

May 30 – June 2

EurSafe 2012
Tübingen, Germany
www.eursafe2012.eu

July 1-7

Minding Animals Conference
Utrecht University, The Netherlands
www.mindinganimals.com

July 13-20

International Conference on Mass Data Analysis of Images and Signals
Berlin, Germany
<http://www.mda-signals.de>

August 2-5

ICSA VII. World Congress: Brave New World? Genetic Engineering & Human Dignity
Pasadena, California, United States
<http://www.JIS3.org/icsavii.htm>

September 20-21

Kantian Ethics and Moral Life
Antwerp, Belgium
<http://ugent.academia.edu/StijnVanImpe/Blog/16809/International-conference-KANTIAN-ETHICS-AND-MORAL-LIFE>

Funding: FP7 Calls

IDEAS

Call for proposals for ERC Proof of Concept

Specific Programme(s): IDEAS. Theme(s): ERC

Identifier: ERC-2012-PoC

Final Deadline: 03 October 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time).

Intermediate Deadline(s): 03 May 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/ideas?callIdentifier=ERC-2012-PoC>

PEOPLE

MARIE CURIE CAREER INTEGRATION GRANTS (CIG)

Theme(s): Marie-Curie Actions. Specific Programme(s): PEOPLE

Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-CIG

Final Deadline: 18 September 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time).

Intermediate Deadline(s): 06 March 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-CIG>

MARIE CURIE INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA PARTNERSHIPS AND PATHWAYS (IAPP)

Theme(s): Marie-Curie Actions . Specific Programme(s): PEOPLE

Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IAPP

Deadline: 19 April 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IAPP>

Trans-national Collaboration among EURAXESS members on topics related to the Innovation Union

Theme(s): Marie-Curie Actions. Specific Programme(s): PEOPLE

Identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-2012-EURAXESS-IU

Deadline: 18 April 2012 at 17:00:00 (Brussels local time)

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/page/people?callIdentifier=FP7-PEOPLE-2012-EURAXESS-IU>

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News

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Next Issue Editors

June 2012 Stef Aerts

Deadline for the next issue: May 15, 2012

You are kindly invited to send any relevant contributions, conference calls, publication reviews, etc. to the editors.