The role of environmental ethics and sustainability in research ethics for linguistics: What is currently available in terms of guidance and how might that be improved

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SFB 1252 PROMINENCE IN LANGUAGE

BACKGROUND

Revisions of ethics guidelines have always been responses to observed deficiencies, for example:

- **Nazi experiments** inspired the principles of **informed consent** and **non-maleficence**.
- **Unfair participant treatment in the Tuskegee syphilis study** led to **ethics review boards**.
- After **scandals in scientific misconduct** in 2007, **Open Science practices** and guidelines for responsible communication of scientific results were introduced.
- New **critical approaches to colonialization** resulted in guidelines for the **promotion of participatory research** principles and a community's language rights.

ENVIRONMENTAL GUIDANCE?

So far, observations about **climate change and environmental degradation** have not been reflected in ethics guidelines for linguistics.

Environmental guidance seems to relate only to studies that involve animals, toxic substances, directly harmful data collection processes or could produce results with negative environmental impacts.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Green Charter (EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions):

- **R**educe, **R**euse, **R**ecycle;
- promote green purchasing for project-related materials;
- ensure the sustainability of project events;
- use low-emission forms of transport;
- promote tele-conferencing whenever possible;
- use sustainable and renewable forms of energy;
- develop awareness on environmental sustainability;
- share ideas and examples of best practice.

OUR LITERATURE REVIEW: TRAVEL AND EVENTS

1. Travel produces above-average emissions for academics.
2. Environmental concerns of individual academics do not simply translate into (flight) behavior change.
3. The main motivation for travel is the unsubstantiated belief that it is crucial for career progression.
4. The popularity of conference locations is not related to travel distance and availability of direct flights.
5. Hub-models for hybrid conferences reduce long-distance and connecting flights and widen access.
6. Reducing the amount of animal products can reduce the environmental impact of conference meals.
7. Many conferences produce unnecessary waste (handbooks, food, giveaways, merch, plastics).
8. Third-party sustainability certifications for event venues/hotels assess their environmental impact.

OUR LITERATURE REVIEW: LABS AND OFFICES

1. Linguistics laboratories and data centers use more energy and produce more waste than offices.
2. Sharing equipment and facilities can reduce the environmental impact of research labs.
3. Academic paper use is high and results in delivery travel.
4. Energy-efficient equipment and default settings save energy savings and make research more accessible.
5. Open Science can save energy and other resources, but it is often difficult to find ("dark") data / materials.
6. Third-party sustainability certifications for labs and office products can reduce the environmental impact.
7. Environmental concerns are not routinely considered in institutional procedures (e.g. procurement, ethics review, funding).
8. Some measures require a whole-institution approach.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE GUIDELINES: ACADEMIC TRAVEL AND EVENTS

Individual Researchers or Projects

1. Take fewer trips but maximize collaboration and results.
2. Reduce the environmental impact of each trip.
3. Raise awareness of the impact of travel/events.

Academic Institutions, Funders, Event Organizers

1. Incentivize networking and Open Science, not travel.
2. Incentivize/offer environmentally friendly travel options.
3. Consider locations and conference formats for events.
4. Lower the environmental impact of meals (leftovers, vegetarian/vegan/local food, no single-use plastic).
5. Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rot (=compost).
6. Inform others about the environmental impact of events.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE GUIDELINES: LABS AND OFFICES

1. Buy sustainable products whenever possible.
2. Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rot (= compost).
3. Conduct internal sustainability surveys for lab(s) and offices.
4. Obtain third-party sustainability certifications for labs.
5. Practice Open Science.
6. Raise awareness of the environmental impact of academic labs and offices.
7. Establish sustainable procurement.
8. Establish a whole-institution approach to sustainable development,

References for the literature review and further resources:
https://www.sprache-spiel-natur.de/2024/04/16/umweltfreundliche-forschung/

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