Ethics Review & Research Ethics in Indigenous territories under the Do Not Significant Harm (DNSH) principle

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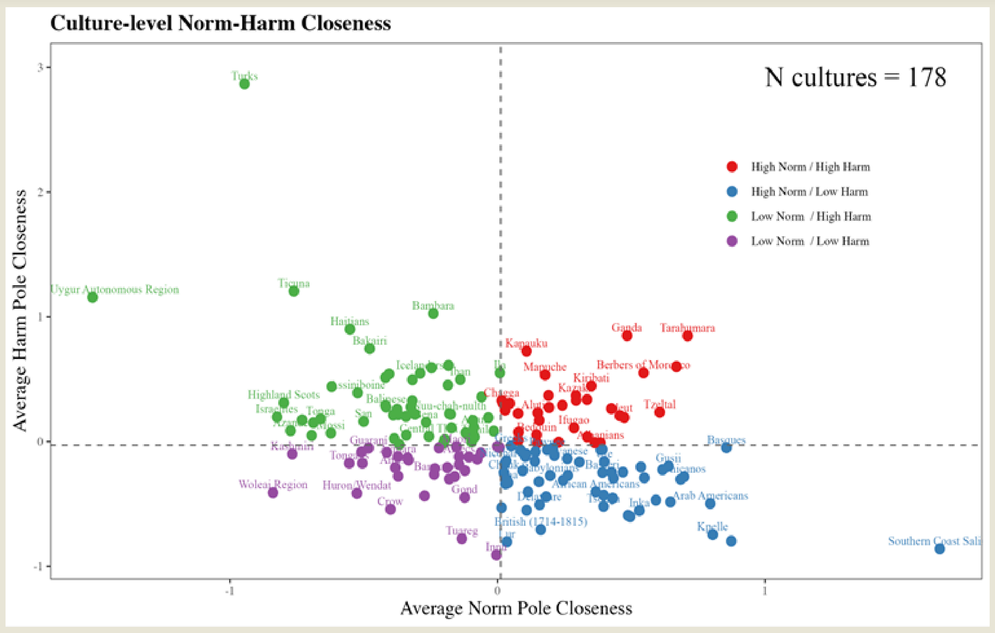
The application of the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle by Research Ethics Committees faces challenges due to the current absence of environmental items, ex-ante evaluation processes, and Open Data policies

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) supports Indigenous rights to govern, control, protect, and benefit from data and digitized knowledge connected to their peoples, lands, cultures, and resources

Distribution of 178 cultures across the two cultural dimensions (Harm – reparation and Norm – deviation)



DNHS principle's dimensions	Research Ethics Committees / Institutional Review Boards current / Review Frameworks	Current gap
Precautionary principle	Ex-ante review	~ (Not considering environmental issues)
Culturally sensitive research	Partially considered through local Partnerships / cultural mediators	~ Actual cultural variation in conceptualizing harm and the appropriate ways of reparation /restoration
Communitarian engagement	Considered through "Guidelines", "Communitarian Consent", "Community review Boards", Participatory methodologies, findings devolution[1]...	~ (Room for improvement)
Continuous monitoring of Eventual harms (environment, cultural values, social organization, non-human species, future generations)	Partially covered by research integrity (codes of good practice) and researchers' commitments to communities	~ (Room for improvement)
	Open Science, Open Data, FAIR Data sharing covered through institutional repositories, Transformative Agreements, and Data Management Plans	**Data Sovereignty**[2] ⚠ CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics). GIDA OCAP | PCAP OCAP® principles (developed in Canada for First Nations contexts: Ownership, Control, Access, Possession). • Participatory Data Management Plans. • Repositories prepared for Community Management. (Often lack of time & skills & resources for a full Commitment)

[1] Doerksen, E., Gunay, A. E., Neufeld, S. D., & Friesen, P. (2025). Community-led approaches to research governance: a scoping review of strategies. Research Ethics, 21(3), 519–545. https://doi.org/10.1177/17470161241269154

[2] Reyes-García, V., Tofighi-Niaki, A., Austin, B. J., Benyei, P., Danielsen, F., Fernández-Llamazares, Á., Sharma, A., Soleymani-Fard, R., & Tengö, M. (2022). Data Sovereignty in Community-Based Environmental Monitoring: Toward Equitable Environmental Data Governance. BioScience, 72(8), 714–717. https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biac048

Conclusion

To fully apply the DNSH principle, current ethical research review practices must incorporate environmental dimensions and, critically, the issue of data sovereignty for indigenous peoples or local communities

Acknowledgements: RE4GREEN project (101131706), ICREA Academia 2024

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Funded by the European Union

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