

EurSafe News

VOLUME 26 #2 SUMMER 2026



I hope you have arrived safely in Cappadocia and are enjoying the buzz of face-to-face exchange at the General Conference.

This newsletter is concerned with the role of ethics in policy advice, and with the question of which competences this requires and how they can be taught. It connects directly to EurSafe's aim of encouraging the exchange of professional experience and training approaches around ethical issues and capacities, since science-policy advice – whether on agriculture and food or other domains – raises exactly these questions. This issue brings together three perspectives on the question.

Drawing on his experience advising policymakers, Matthias Kaiser argues that scientists lose influence when they blur the line between acting as “Honest Brokers”, who lay out evidence for decision-makers to weigh, and “Issue Advocates”, who push their own preferred moral conclusions. He argues that trust in science depends on rigorous presentation of evidence rather than claims to superior ethical insight, since elected representatives must balance a far wider range of societal values than any single scientific community holds.

Andreas Bachmann and Ariane Willemsen argue that ethics expertise should be embedded directly within public administration rather than sourced externally, since academic ethics is often too distant to meet administrations' fast-paced, interdisciplinary needs.



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Despite scepticism that dismisses ethics as moralising or unscientific, they contend in-house ethicists provide indispensable value: conducting open-ended, theory-guided analyses of legal and political questions, mediating between disciplinary languages, and offering practical guidance even when conclusions clash with political feasibility – thereby clarifying the gap between what is realistically achievable and what is ethically warranted.

Simon Meisch presents interim insights of the project 'Applied Ethics in Public Policy', based at Tübingen with the Swiss Federal Ethics Committee and University of Zürich, asks which competences ethics advisers need and how universities could teach them, since academic training rarely covers this role. Workshops with practitioners identified competences in four domains: subject knowledge, methodological versatility, social skill, and personal integrity. Since advice only works if recipients can engage with it, teaching must also build competence among those receiving advice.

Attentive readers will have noticed that the newsletter has a new look. We are delighted to welcome a new designer for the newsletter, Caatje Kluskens, who has already brought in a host of wonderful new ideas. We look forward to working with her, and would also like to thank Lucas Dinnissen for his work on the newsletter's formatting over the past years. In this issue, Caatje introduces herself to our members.

Following two event announcements, you will find the latest news from the EurSafe Board.

I would like to close this introduction on a personal note: at the EurSafe General Conference in Porto in 2016, I agreed to take on the role of Editor-in-Chief of the newsletter. Since then, I have had the opportunity to develop the newsletter's content and format together with a wonderful group of Board members. Now, after ten years, I am passing the baton to Svenja Springer, who will take on responsibility for the newsletter. To help ensure a smooth transition, I will remain on the Board. For this, my final issue as editor, I have chosen to sign off with a topic that has been close to my heart of late.

I wish everyone a productive conference amid such stunning scenery.

Simon Meisch

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Paper

Giving policy advice with ethical implications

A painful but necessary process

Matthias Kaiser



Often one hears scientists complaining that their communication to policymakers is either totally misunderstood or completely ignored. When ordinary people complain about the same, namely that they are always misunderstood or ignored, we may refer them to a psychotherapist with a suspicion of borderline personality disorder. Yet, when scientists do the same, we are deeply worried, not about them, but about the system of public governance in our well-organized socio-political structures. We typically try to find a failure in the system they meet, not in the perception they have.

What I am aiming at is the lack of reflexivity among many scientists. I come back to that. But first one needs to admit that the institutional interface and the normative foundation of the science-policy relationship is indeed very complex and sometimes hard to decipher. Here we engage with knowledge claims in the face of power. Looking closer, one realises that both components are somewhat fragmented and beset also with internal conflicts. What I am particularly interested in is the fate of ethical issues and value dilemmas in these communications. I want to convey some of my salient experiences in this field.

First, the use of the term “ethics” does as a rule not go down well, not within the scientific community nor within the group of decision- and policymakers. This is despite both communities often speaking about their deep commitment to good ethics. But perceptions differ when the term enters this interface between science and policy. Many relate evoking ethics to taking a position of superior morality. Not strange that the receivers of such a message revolt. Furthermore, within the scientific community there is still the widespread belief in a strict separation between facts and values. Scientists fall back into claiming they just describe the (relevant?) facts. And policymakers refer to institutional mechanisms which will decide normative issues in the state, like the parliament, regulatory mechanisms or the legal embedding of binding values in a constitution. Therefore, my advice is to be careful with the evocation of ethics as your main communication point. Package it also with other considerations.

If ethically relevant outcomes of a certain policy are admitted, they are normally subject to a trade-off with other aspects. These are typically of an economic nature. Questions turn to something else: not if a climate adaptive action is just for future generations and good for the integrity of nature, but whether the current costs can be expected to be carried by a particular actor in light of other established uses of the monetary funds. This way, ethical issues slide into the trap of not being able to hang them on the current moral responsibility of a particular economic actor. In general, I fear that ethical considerations are sidelined by referring them to trade-offs where economy and quantities play the major role.

When giving ethical advice to policymakers, be it originating from the natural, technical, social or humanistic sciences, be prepared that governments need to consider a very broad range of the value-landscapes in society. Your number one values may not be the ones that other significant groups in society favour. One could see this during the pandemic. While many people saw public health as the number one priority for a majority, some groups disagreed and reminded us of the value of education, care for the elderly, or the importance of social networks. Elected representatives or government is ultimately accountable to the whole range of values in a society. Values favoured by a scientific community may be in competition with other values. Example: When Sir Peter Gluckman started the newly defined role as Chief Science Advisor for the Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Prime Minister decided on a policy for the beneficial nourishment for newborns which was opposite to what Peter Gluckman had recommended just months before he took that role. The press naturally asked if that was not a failure of science advice. Gluckman's response was "science does not make policy, it informs it".

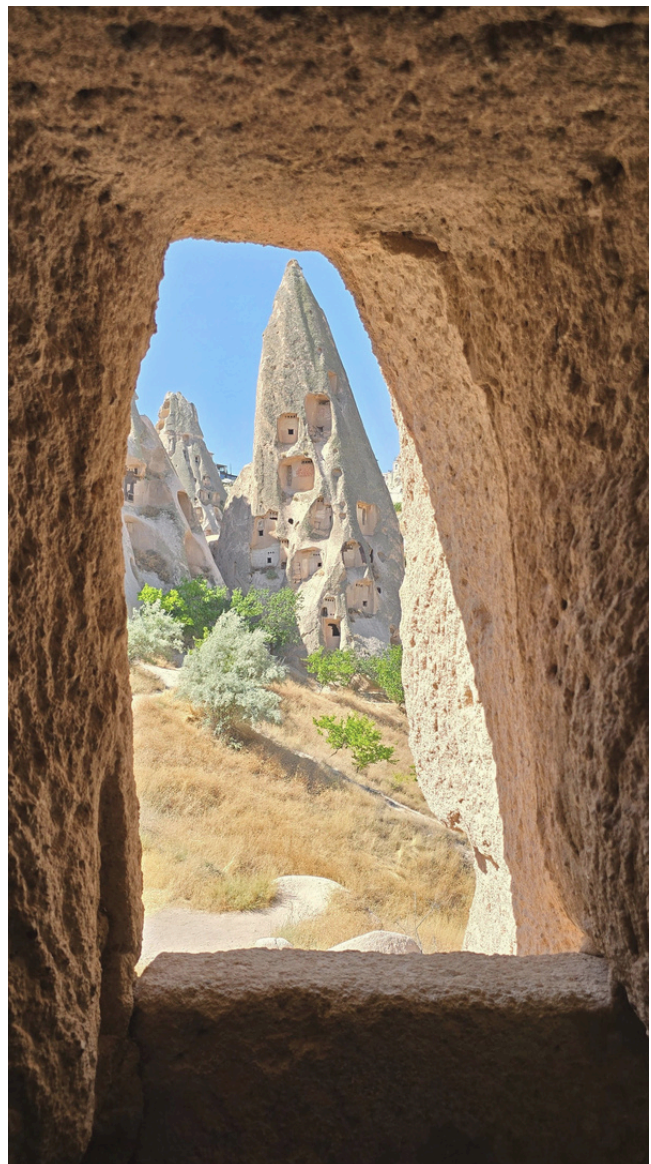
As scientists and scholars, we typically can wear many hats: as scientist, as citizen, as family member, as religious believer, as nature-lover and so on. Virtually in all these roles, modern democracies encourage participation in the politics of our society, be it as voices of opinion or only as voters. The worst one can do as a scientist is not to keep these different hats apart. If we do not distinguish between these roles, one runs the risk of losing the trust in science which still many of us have and actually depend on. Therefore, it is not always advisable to recommend that we push forward with strategies that we think are right on a moral ground, even if we think the arguments are crystal clear. This would then be the role of Issue Advocates as Richard Pielke calls it in his book *The Honest Broker* (2014). Let me give you a personal example:

Roughly 10 years ago I got involved in the discussion about what to do with a sunken German submarine just off the coast of Bergen near the island of Fedje, the U864. The boat was sunk by a British submarine in February 1945 and was discovered at 150 meters depth in 2003. The problem is that the wreck contains 67 tons of mercury, a highly toxic substance. It can escape the containment of steel flasks in which it is stored, and if the liquid comes in contact with bacteria on the seafloor, it turns into methylmercury. This then would be one of the most powerful environmental toxins. Ever since the U864 was discovered there was political debate about what to do with it.



Two strategies dominated the discussion: the entombment strategy, i.e. cover the wreck with a large protective layer of sand, gravel and concrete, versus the salvage strategy, i.e. using modern subsea technology to extract the wreck and its containment of mercury to the surface. The discussion was delegated to the Coastal Agency – note: not the Ministry of the Environment! – which normally deals with short term risks like oil-spills and ship accidents. Based on consultations with professional consultancies, the Coastal Agency favoured strongly the entombment strategy. This then went to parliament ahead of a national budget debate. At this point the community of the island of Fedje asked the University of Bergen for help. We built a task force of three members (environmental toxics, chemistry, risk). Even though our own preferred strategy (and that of other international academic experts) was the salvage strategy, we decided to intervene in parliament on the grounds that the decision-makers had received biased and partially incompetent and certainly incomplete advice. The argument was that at no point was relevant academic expertise used and many arguments against entombment have not been examined. This message was well received, both among the parliamentarians and later in the Ministry which ordered new studies. What we did was to act as Honest Brokers, not as Issue Advocates. We looked at the available evidence for political decision-making and found it lacking. The conclusions we left for the elected representatives to make. This brought new life into the debate and a more balanced information on both strategies became available. (By the way: the issue is not finally decided at the time of writing.)

Let me try to sum up what I want to convey here: In spite of many scientists still embracing the value-free ideology of science, the very same scientists often complain about the politicians not listening to their advice. But they tend to overlook how often they act as Issue Advocates rather than Honest Brokers. Among us academics and scientists we may agree on what is right or wrong with certain strategies. And some of us may even have some very good ethical arguments pro or con some of these strategies. But our scientific rationality and logic is not all that needs to come to the fore when we decide on public policies. Our strength is not a higher morality, or even more certainty of good ethical arguments, but our grasp at the available information and the causal implications of it. This may be morally convincing to us, but then we must realize that we act as citizens just as everybody else. We need more reflexivity on our own role with all its strengths and weaknesses in society. We often get preferred access to decision-makers not because of our ethical judgements, but because of our comprehensive insights into empirical evidence, into causal nets that affect our world, and because of our rational look at attitudes and positions which bespeak their ethical relevance. In the end, science (and ethics) is just one tool to make a better living for all of us, not a God-given torch towards a happy life.



What do people who provide ethics consulting in public administration do?

Andreas Bachmann, Ariane Willemsen



Within the administration, there is a sceptical attitude toward ethics consulting. This attitude can be attributed to three main reasons.

- Many people equate ethics with morality and moralising with a raised index finger. It is criticised for primarily serving unreflected moral convictions and emotions, thereby exacerbating existing problems instead of contributing to their solution.
- Too little is known about what ethics is as a science (subject area) and what it does (methodology). As a result, there is a lack of understanding of the extent to which ethical arguments can be useful within the administration.
- Ethics is sometimes denied its scientific nature. The opinion that ethics is not a science is particularly widespread among scientists from a wide range of disciplines, who also work in public administration. It is limited to subjective judgements that cannot be objectively verified.

This scepticism is contrasted with two theses:

- Firstly, ethical expertise is not only useful for the administration, but indispensable, because many legal regulations implicitly or explicitly contain moral aspects, whether in enforcement or in the further development of the law. An appropriate understanding of these aspects requires such specialised knowledge.
- Secondly, this knowledge should be available within the administration. Experience shows that obtaining project-related ethical expertise from outside the administration is often unproductive. University ethics is not sufficiently familiar with the specific needs of the administration and is therefore unable to take them sufficiently into account in its expertise.

These two reasons – the practical significance of morality for law relevant for public administration and the special interests and needs of administrations – support the idea of embedding the necessary ethical expertise within the administration itself, at least in those administrative units that are regularly confronted with moral issues due to their tasks such as preparing legislative proposals to the parliament and enforcing law.

Ethical expertise should be available within public administration because, for example, obtaining project-related expert opinions from outside the administration is not able to adequately fulfil the administration's needs. Within the administration, work is carried out mostly across groups and offices and therefore also interdisciplinarily in iterative processes. Relevant value-related issues arise not only, but often precisely where no agreement on content can be reached. In some cases, continuous support is therefore required to work on these value-specific issues in a way that is useful for the administration. For ethics advice, this means not only familiarising oneself with the major fundamental issues, but also with the day-to-day detailed work, as is naturally expected of representatives of other scientific disciplines within the administration. Due to its distance from the day-to-day business of the administration, university ethics cannot take the needs of the administration into account in sufficient detail, nor can it react quickly enough to questions that often need to be answered at very short notice within the framework of internal administrative procedures and legal deadlines.

Paper

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Ethics must be integrated within the administration, both regarding the tasks of legal development and enforcement, and even more so regarding the task of recognising problems at an early stage and developing options to be able to make a timely contribution to good or better solutions. Due to its hermeneutic tradition, it is predestined to bring the scientific languages of different disciplines into dialogue with each other, to avoid and clarify misunderstandings and to ensure coherence. Its analytical and systematic approach enables it to scrutinise proposals, recognise the ethically relevant aspects and develop its own proposals with plausible justifications. However, ethics can only do this in a credible manner if it is able to integrate scientific, economic and legal knowledge. This is a prerequisite for an appropriate ethical evaluation, which must take all these aspects into account.

A professional ethical analysis generally consists of a comprehensive overview of arguments in which either an existing political or legal solution proposal is analysed and evaluated from the perspective of the relevant ethical theories; or in which possible answers to a political or legal question, for which no solutions have yet been proposed, are developed from the perspective of these ethical theories. Taking an open-ended approach means being guided solely by the logic of the ethical arguments, even if this leads to results that are not politically opportune or are in tension with the applicable law. If desired by the consultees, this interpretation can be supplemented by a recommendation as to which ethical approach should be favoured within the given legal or political framework and for what reasons.

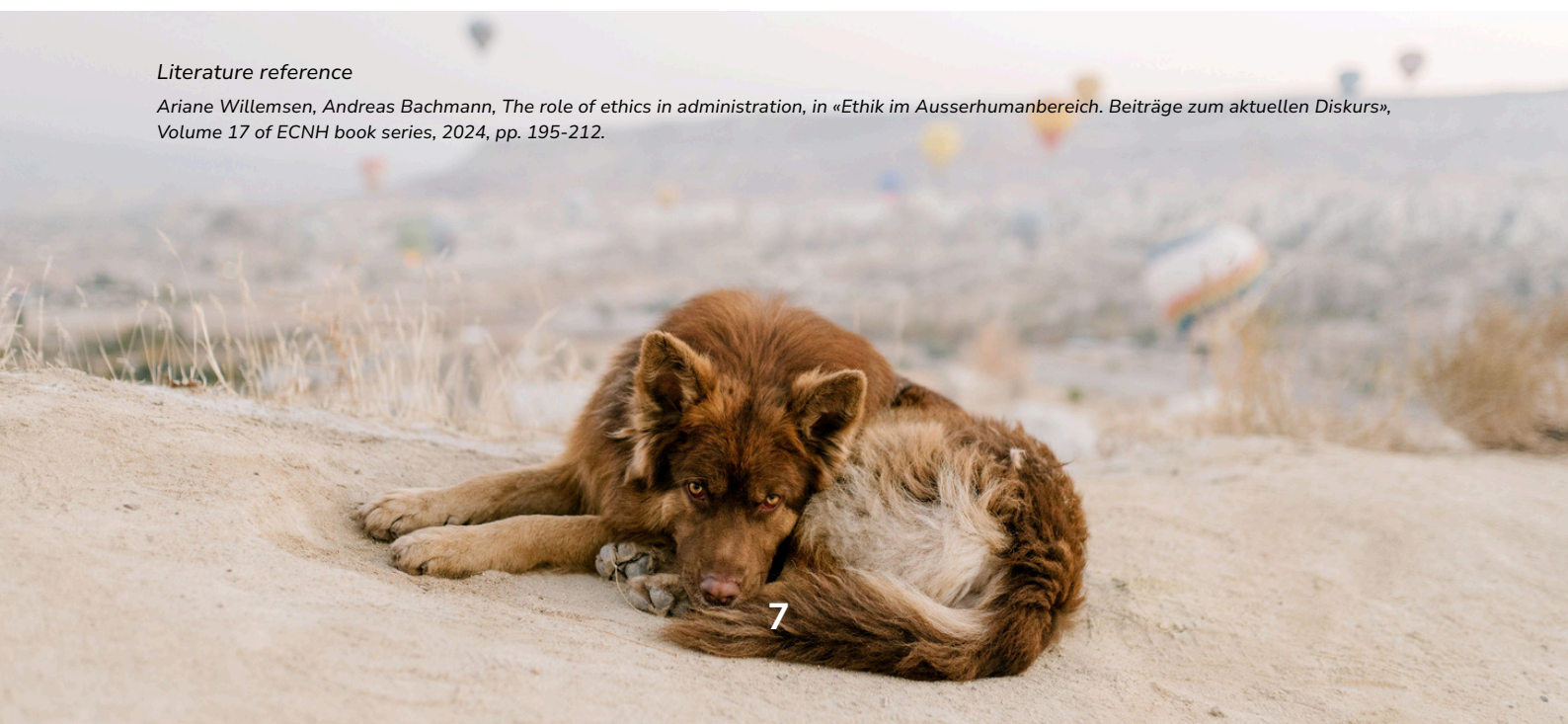
A particular challenge of internal ethics advice is to carry out the analyses in a scientifically sound manner and at the same time in a way that enables specialists of other disciplines who have no scientific expertise in ethics to understand the arguments. If this is successful, it can be useful for the administrative unit being advised even in situations when its results cannot be implemented under the given political and legal framework conditions. In such a case, an analysis clarifies the discrepancy between what is realistically feasible and what should be done from an ethical point of view.

Open-ended ethical analyses have a further benefit for the public administration that is independent of the aspect of feasibility. Such analyses are characterised by the transparent presentation and evaluation of the arguments. This provides the administration with an overview of the arguments in favour of and against its concerns and enables it to make a more appropriate assessment of whether and to what extent these concerns can be justified in comparison to other concerns. It can thus better assess their strengths and weaknesses and incorporate these into its tactical and strategic considerations.

Ethical analyses can operate on different levels. They can concern fundamental questions, such as the question of which general criteria should or can be used to determine threshold values. Or they can provide concrete answers to concrete questions. For example, if it is asked by the responsible administrative unit whether the politically determined reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 is justified from a fairness perspective, it must provide a concrete yes/no answer. It must therefore do what has been a central task of ethics since Aristotle: provide concrete practical guidance.

Literature reference

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Dr Simon Meisch

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Paper

What Skills Do People Need to Advise Public Administrations on Ethics?

Simon Meisch



Public administrations increasingly face regulatory challenges shaped by technological change, environmental transformation, and shifting societal expectations. Alongside legal and political considerations, these questions often carry a genuine ethical dimension.

Yet most administrations have no in-house ethical expertise and rely instead on advisory committees. A natural assumption might be that universities already train people for this role. In practice, the specific competences needed for ethics advice are only weakly covered in academic education.

This is the starting point of the project Applied Ethics in Public Policy, based at the University of Tübingen and carried out together with the Swiss Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology (Ariane Willemsen, Andreas Bachmann) and the Chair of Applied and Normative Ethics at the University of Zürich (Susanne Burri). The project asked a simple but under-explored question: which forms of knowledge, competences, and skills do people need when they advise public administrations on ethical matters, and how could university teaching help develop them?

To find out, two workshops were held in 2025, bringing together practitioners from advisory bodies with scholars working in ethics teaching and higher education didactics, asking people who already do this work what it actually demands of them.

Two intertwined challenges

Ethics advice in public administration is difficult for two connected reasons. The first is intellectual: ethical judgement itself is complex. Even a simplified model of ethical reasoning, moving from a descriptive premise and a normative premise to a conclusion, quickly becomes demanding once you ask where the premises come from and how solid they are. Descriptive claims need to be checked against standards from philosophy of science; normative claims need to be located within a broader (meta-)ethical framework. Advisers must make hidden assumptions visible and be honest about how contested each step really is.

The second challenge is institutional. Ethics is frequently mistaken for moralising rather than treated as a rigorous field of enquiry. Administrations are bound by law and political mandates, while ethical analysis speaks a different, normative language that must be translated into something usable. On top of this, ethical reasoning must fit into policy processes, meet tight timelines, and stay independent even under political pressure for quick, clear-cut answers.

Four types of competence

Drawing on the workshop discussions, the project grouped the competences that practitioners see as essential into four broad categories.

Subject competence covers the knowledge base: familiarity with ethical approaches, philosophy of science and epistemology, and an understanding of administrative and regulatory contexts. On the skills side, this includes being able to reconstruct arguments and to formulate, justify, and prioritise alternative courses of action.

Methodological competence is about how this knowledge is generated in, and applied to, practice. It includes working comfortably in inter- and transdisciplinary settings, translating ideas across disciplinary boundaries, thinking analytically, identifying and communicating uncertainty, spotting emerging issues early, and making regulatory needs explicit.

Social competence concerns how advisers interact with others: the capacity for genuine dialogue and attentive listening, curiosity, empathy, and perspective-taking, encouraging others to make their own arguments explicit, and enough diplomacy to function well within committees.

Personal competence, finally, is about self-reflection and integrity: dealing with disciplinary arrogance, whether one's own or that of others, perseverance, building trust and credibility over time, being clear about one's own standpoint, and keeping critical distance from both the issue at hand and the process surrounding it.

Taken together, these four domains suggest that good ethics advice is not simply applied philosophy but also depends on interdisciplinary fluency, interpersonal skill, and personal maturity, qualities a conventional philosophy curriculum rarely addresses.

Beyond the adviser

One of the more unexpected findings concerned the people who receive ethics advice rather than those who give it. If ethical analysis is to have any real effect, the people receiving it, often civil servants or committee members, also need enough competence to understand and critically engage with it. This has opened up a further question for the project: what do those who commission or receive ethics advice need to know and be able to do?

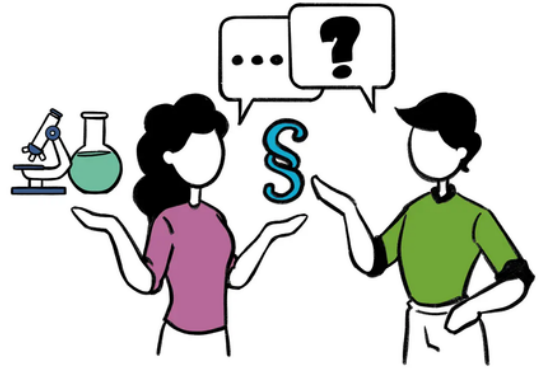
The implication for university teaching is that a single training track is not enough. One strand should prepare people to give ethics advice; another should prepare people to receive and make good use of it. Developing suitable teaching formats for both groups is the next step, alongside a clearer sense of what can realistically be taught at university and what can only be learned through practice.

The project also touches on a broader, more institutional question: applied ethics work of this kind still tends to receive less academic recognition than research aimed primarily at internal philosophical debates, even though it demonstrates very directly why ethical reflection matters in practice.



A role for academic societies

Academic societies have a genuine role to play here. They can strengthen subject competence through conferences, publications, and research networks; support methodological exchange between disciplines and professional contexts through workshops and thematic groups; contribute to training future advisers through summer schools, mentoring, and early-career networks; and provide a wider space for dialogue between scholars, practitioners, and civil society on emerging normative questions. For a society such as EurSafe, whose aims already include promoting research, exchange, and training in agricultural and food ethics, giving more explicit attention to ethics advice in public administration would fit naturally within its existing mission.



What next?

Effective ethics advice in public administration draws on more than ethical theory. It requires subject-specific knowledge, methodological versatility, social skill, and personal integrity, developed through education that goes beyond a traditional philosophy curriculum and involves cooperation across disciplines. Equally important is building the capacity of those who receive such advice to engage with it critically. The next steps for the project are to translate these findings into concrete teaching formats and to explore, together with academic societies, how training and dialogue in this area can be strengthened further.

This paper is a short version of an extended abstract submitted to the 2026 EurSafe General Conference. Check out the proceedings volume. For more information on the project Applied Ethics in Public Policy: <https://uni-tuebingen.de/de/281139>



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Introduction to the new designer of the newsletter of EurSafe

Caatje Kluskens



I am excited to introduce myself as the new designer of the EurSafe newsletter, taking over from Lucas Dinnissen, who has shaped its design over the past years. Since the beginning of this year, I have had the pleasure of working on the newsletter's new look, and I look forward to continuing to contribute to this community.

My fascination with human–animal relationships began at an early age. Growing up surrounded by sheep, cats, dogs, chickens, and many other animals, I was intrigued by the very different roles they played within our (multispecies) family. I often wondered why some animals became companions or were considered wildlife, while others were primarily seen as food. This curiosity (and perhaps confusion) about our relationships with other animals has stayed with me, and motivated my academic journey. By reading more academic literature about human-animal studies, I found explanations to questions that had long bothered me.

During my Bachelor's degree in Media Studies, I explored how nonhuman animals are represented across different forms of media and how these representations shape the ways we relate to animals and the natural world. During my Master's degree in Digital Humanities, I became increasingly interested in the role of digital technologies in mediating human relationships with nature and nonhuman animals.

Since 2025, I have been pursuing a PhD at Wageningen University & Research on artificial intelligence developed to "decode" nonhuman animal communication. Alongside my doctoral research, I am involved in developing a platform that enables animal behaviour and communication researchers to use AI to analyse and manage large amounts of data, *EtholInsights*. A key part of my responsibility is incorporating insights about the risks and responsible development of AI for animal communication research into the platform's design. During EurSafe 2026, I am organizing a workshop about this work: *Developing EtholInsights: A Participatory Workshop on Ethics and AI for Animal Behaviour*.

I look forward to meeting many of you during the upcoming EurSafe conference!

Caatje Kluskens

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Caatje Kluskens, MA

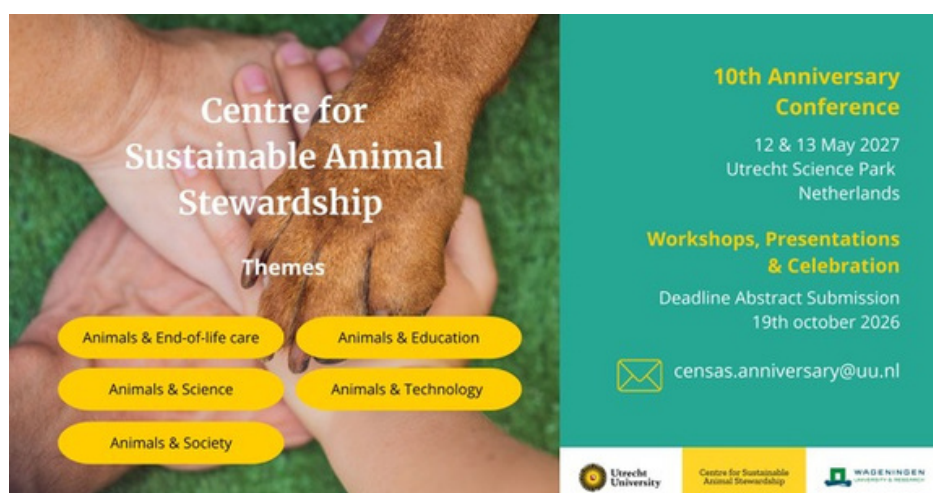
Philosophy Group,
WASS

Wageningen University
and Research

Conference

10th Anniversary Conference: Centre for Sustainable Animal Stewardship

Utrecht, Netherlands



Scaling the Environment: Methods and Perspectives in the Environmental Humanities

Date: 23./24. November 2026

Organization Committee: Claudia Keller, Ivo Wallimann-Helmer

The Environmental Humanities are a relatively new, multidisciplinary field of research. They hold the promise of analyzing and providing solutions to environmental challenges that are original and go beyond pure engineering perspectives. This workshop, hosted by the University of Fribourg Environmental Sciences and Humanities Institute, brings together scholars from various Environmental Humanities disciplines. Our goal is to discuss how the methodologies that are crucial to the different fields that comprise the environmental humanities can complement each other. This workshop contributes to methodological development in the Environmental Humanities and discusses how different disciplines approach environmental challenges, thus living up to the discipline's promise.

To facilitate our discussion, we will focus on the various scales of environmental issues and how they are approached in the Environmental Humanities. Environmental phenomena are studied and perceived across multiple scales – from the local to the global, from individual experiences to planetary processes, from short-term events to deep historical time and into the distant future, and from theory to practice. Different disciplines in the Environmental Humanities approach these scales in diverse ways, using methods that reveal some aspects while obscuring others. Our speakers will be reflecting on their methodological approaches regarding these different scales and their main methodological approaches.

This workshop brings together researchers from the University of Fribourg and other European universities to explore how methods shape our understanding of the environment across spatial, temporal, and epistemic scales. Through this lens, the workshop aims to promote dialogue among different methodological approaches in the Environmental Humanities, highlight their similarities and differences, and encourage stronger collaboration across fields. Speakers include: Michael Boyden (Fribourg), Elizabeth Callaway (Salt Lake City), Rony Emmenegger (Fribourg), Lilian Kroth (Fribourg), Federico Luisetti (St. Gall), Pooja Nayak (Munich), Flurina Wartmann (Fribourg).



Conference

EurSafe Executive Committee Update

Franck Meijboom



I hope you've enjoyed the summer and had a chance to relax. When you read this new edition of EurSafeNews, we are at the start of the EurSafe 2026 Congress!

As a Board, we are delighted to welcome you all. For those who cannot make it to Cappadocia, we will miss you, but luckily the results will be available in the congress book entitled "Farming the Future: Ethical Challenges in the Age of AI and Digitalization", published Open Access by DeGruyterBrill publishers (see: [Farming the Future - Ethical Challenges in the Age of AI and Digitalization – EurSafe2026: Proceedings | Brill](#)).

We are looking forward to a successful congress on a wonderful location that allows us again to meet, exchange and discuss.

The Congress also provides an opportunity for us to formally discuss the Society's progress and plans with you, its members. This will take place during the General Assembly on Friday 11 September. The agenda will include a financial report, EurSafe interim events and communications, and the (re)election of board members, and will have been sent to all members by the time you read this update.

We are also pleased to announce the location of the EurSafe2028 Congress, which will be held in a European country that our EurSafe congress community has not yet visited. The location will be revealed during the Congress, with further details to follow shortly afterwards.

Best regards,

Franck Meijboom

On behalf of the Executive Board

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