



Report of the Matariki Summer School: „Challenges in Research Ethics“

8-11 July 2015, University of Tübingen

The Matariki Network of Universities (MNU) as an international group of leading, like-minded universities conducts transformative research across a broad subject base in natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. Among others it tries to promote a combination of academic learning and personal growth through extracurricular activities such as the annual Matariki Summer School, organized from 8-11 July in Tübingen.

Supported by the Institutional Strategy of the University of Tübingen (funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, ZUK 63) and wonderfully hosted by PD Dr. Hans-Jörg Ehni and Prof. Urban Wiesing from the Institute of Ethics and History of Medicine in Tübingen, the Matariki Summer School took place in the beautiful “Fürstenzimmer” of the Tübingen Castle. Participants arrived from Queen’s University, Durham University, Uppsala University, University of Western Australia, Dartmouth College, Erasmus University Rotterdam, University of Utrecht, and the University of Tübingen. They all came together to discuss the recent challenges and issues in the field of research ethics.

Experts, such as Mike Adcock (Durham), Rieke van der Graaf (Utrecht), Udo Schueklenk (Queen’s), Suzanne van de Vathorst (Rotterdam), Hans-Jörg Ehni (Tübingen) and many more early career researchers, PhD candidates and students from different disciplines (philosophy, medical ethics, medicine, theology, law or bioethics) sat on one table with their various approaches to research and research ethics and discussed several topics in the group.

On Wednesday the program started with a welcome address by Prof. Wiesing and the following introduction of this year’s program by PD Dr. Ehni.

In the first coffee break all participants were able to get to know each other and learn about the different participating fields in general.

Afterwards Prof. Schueklenk demonstrated during his lecture about the access to experimental agents in an Ebola Outbreak impressively the topicality of research ethics and its possible contributions to the global challenges of our time.

On Tuesday the group started of where it left the discussion and was able to acquire a legal perspective of the topic thanks to the presentation by R. Smalling. Continuing with current issues the presentation by M. Ancillotti dealt with the ethical problems that are linked to the global issue of growing Antibiotic Resistance and later that day S. Shariat provided everyone an insight on the perspective of medical practitioners on stem cell therapies. Another topic just as up to date was introduced by M. Mordmüller with the ongoing Malaria Challenge Experiments on Friday.

Especially these current global topics showed the need for an international get together such as the Matariki Summer School, to provide a platform for a fruitful exchange.

During the four days a continuously concern was the concept of informed consent (Prof. Adcock). Starting with S. Boers, that shared her research on Broad consent especially linked to the development of bio banking, to Prof. Cave, that presented ideas on how to develop an informed consent for vulnerable groups as well as the contribution by J. Zawila-Niedzwiecki on the competence to consent in psychiatric medical research and the presentation on the role of autonomy in good human research (K. Louk).

The second very present issue was clearly concerning the ethical treatment of vulnerable groups in research and medical practice for example in paediatric research (K. Tromp), with pregnant women (I. van der Zande), drug addicts (T. Duncan) and with family members of patients in intensive care (A. Heigl). In this broad field with very different questions to be answered everyone agreed on the particularly need to rely on medical ethics to give a vulnerable group the best possible protection within research.

On Friday morning the dominating topic was the ethical treatment of animals in research (Prof. Arnason) and Animal Rights as well as the ongoing debate in this area (A. Traykova).

Furthermore Prof. van der Graaf contributed with “The Support Study” her thoughts on innovative trial design and B. Vanderhagen shed light on the question “What is empirical bioethics”.

Complementary to this program Prof. van de Vathorst enabled all participants to develop their view on research integrity by discussing various cases in smaller groups and Dr. Ehni prepared the group during the group work, in which the teams argued for and against the declaration of Helsinki, for the simulation of an Ethics Committee on Saturday, that at the same time constituted the successful conclusion of the Matariki Summer School 2015.

While students had the opportunity to get inspired by interesting conversations, critical thinking or possibilities for their own future, experts profited by presenting their research topics, getting feedback for their work, using this platform for interdisciplinary exchange and establishing relations between the universities of the network.

This course offered a scientific practise for young researchers and gave a fundamental education of challenges in research ethics. They were thought to have a critical view on studies and the importance of an international collaboration in research ethics was illustrated.

Supplementary, while enjoying the nice atmosphere at the castle with an overwhelming view over Tübingen participants had a vivid exchange during coffee breaks or as a highlight throughout the conference dinner on Thursday evening.

It would be desirable to establish this annual Summer School in the future to tighten the exchange between the universities of the network and to ensure this outstanding possibility to upcoming researchers.