

Ethics Lab: real-time ethics in biotechnology research

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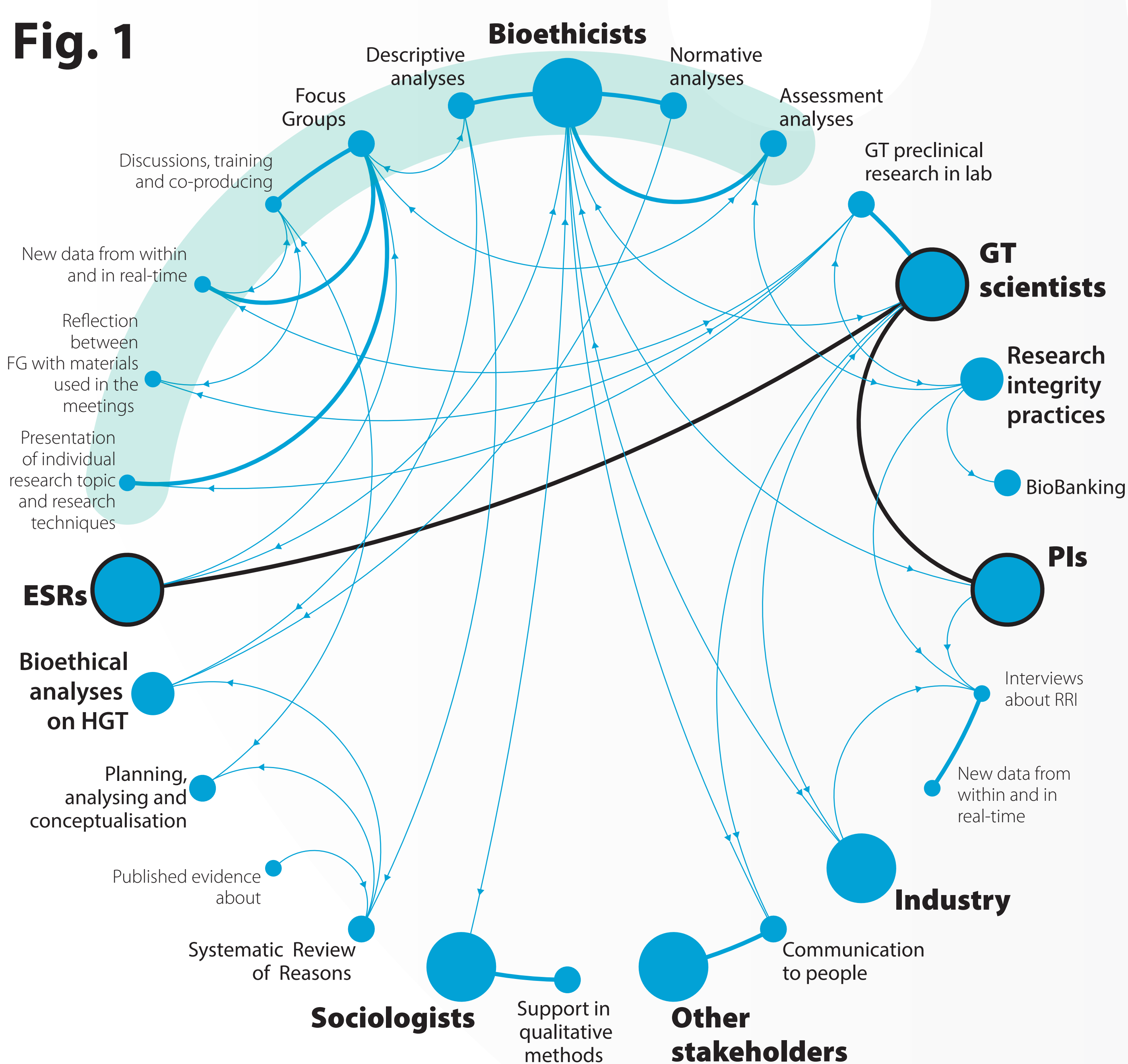
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Introduction

Biotechnology innovation requires anticipation of potential bioethical implications. To achieve this goal we created the Ethics Lab. The Lab is a part of multi-disciplinary European consortium performing research in biotechnology, focusing on Gene Transfer (GT). The Ethics Lab enables a parallel bioethics investigation in GT to guide the

biotechnology development process with specific normative evaluations, in real-time and co-produced by all stakeholders (Figure 1). One of Ethics Lab activities was a series of focus groups (FGs) including all the Early-Stage Researchers (ESRs) of the consortium (light-green area in Figure 1). The objective was to promote the integration of research ethics.

Fig. 1



Methods

We performed a series of 5 longitudinal FGs with 14 ESRs. In the FG meetings we: a) explored participants' doubts, b) introduced ethics research and research integrity concepts, c) analysed researchers' biomedical techniques and ethical questions, d) brainstormed how to approach those ethical questions and e) co-produced ideas to improve research ethics in their own environments. FGs were performed online, lasted 90 minutes and were videorecorded. After each meeting, the discussion was transcribed verbatim

and pseudonymized. To assess whether and how this strategy enables the integration of ethics, we designed a structured questionnaire that ESRs answered before and after the meetings; we also evaluated the changes in their discourse through the meetings. We analysed the qualitative data using thematic content analysis (3). Transcriptions were introduced to MAXQDA software to be analysed and coded. Quantitative parts of the questionnaire were analysed with statistical tools in Excel.

References

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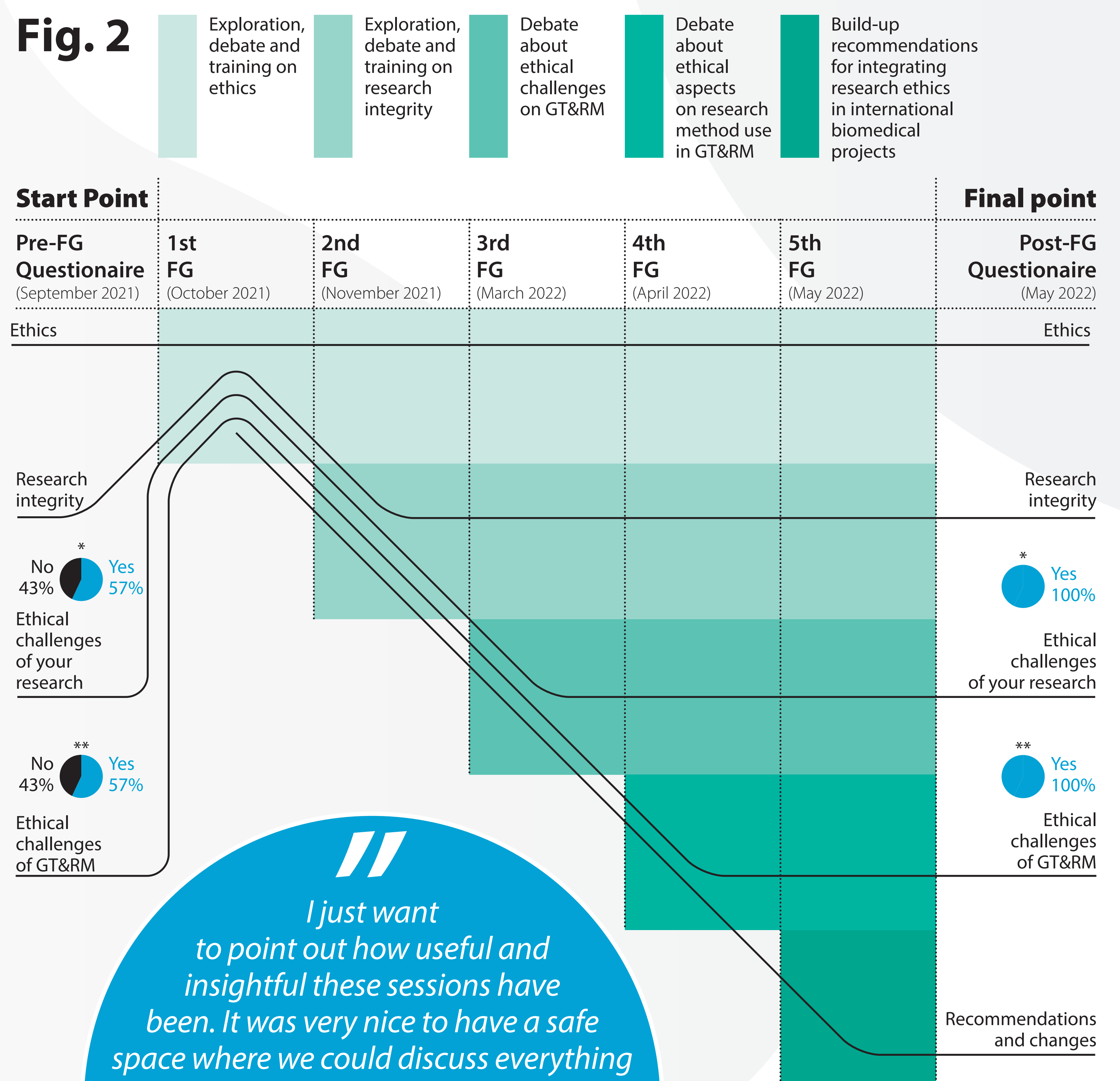
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Results

In every FG we established a place for discussions, micro-interventions, and analysis to develop essential skills and gain a real-world understanding of ethical challenges of GT research (Figure 2). All participants agreed that thanks to the meetings they learned research ethics and research integrity concepts, developed ability to reflect on research ethics and increased

awareness of ethical issues in their own research activities. All ESRs were satisfied with their participation in the focus group meetings. All participants declared that if they had a chance, they would make changes to improve their research in terms of ethics and integrity; 50% had already made changes as a result of the FGs meetings.

Fig. 2

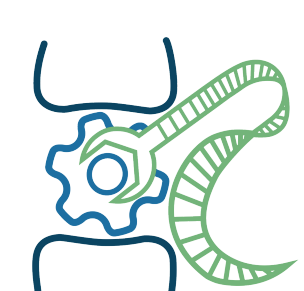


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Questions?
Ask me...



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 955335.

Ethics Lab strategy provided cross-disciplinary collaboration during biotechnology development that allowed ethical problems to be identified early, created specific inputs for normative evaluation and set up a research integrity environment.

As an add value of Ethics Lab, not planned activities were inspired by the meetings: ESRs started altogether a new research project about one of the topics discussed on the FGs.