

**TEACHING ANIMAL BIOETHICS IN EUROPE: PRESENT
SITUATION AND PROSPECTS****M. Marie, Sandra Edwards, E. von Borell, G. Gandini****Summary**

A survey has been conducted in 17 European countries, in 106 agricultural or veterinary higher education institutions delivering courses in animal bioethics. Information regarding the nature of the curriculum, number and background of the teachers, pedagogic methods, topics covered (nature and time dedicated) has been collected for 199 courses. The wide disparity in the structures for delivering training, the different approaches and histories of teaching in this domain are presented. For now, teaching is biased towards ethical issues relating to the human-animal interaction and animal welfare, and much less attention is paid to other issues. The paucity of PhD or post-graduate courses, and so the few opportunities for young scientists to become specialised in animal ethics is evident. Difficulties, assets and strategies for developing curricula in this field are analysed.

An on-line searchable and continuously updating database has been implemented. Contacts and collaborations between teachers, information and virtual or physical mobility of students are expected outcomes.

Keywords: animal bioethics, higher education, courses, survey

Introduction

The management of animals, either farm, companion, laboratory or wildlife, raises ethical questions. Under pressure from the general public, and

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due to a better awareness from academics (Swanson, 1999, Webster, 2002) and professionals of ethical issues, particularly in relation to the trend towards more intensive production in agriculture, the question of introducing philosophical and ethical dimensions in agricultural and veterinary higher education teaching has been placed on the agenda in many European countries. Although such interest was reflected in a few early cases, for example by the appointment of ethical committees for animal research and agricultural use in Sweden as early as in 1944, or by the creation of a chair on ethics of animal experimentation in 1986 in Leiden University (The Netherlands), such developments are generally more recent. Contrary to what can be seen in the fields of medicine (Kessel, 2003) or experimentation on laboratory animals (Nevalainen Convenor et al., 2002), for which census and analyses of curricula have been performed, the domain of animal bioethics received less attention. Lund (1997) mapped world-wide postgraduate teaching in farm animals welfare and ethics, while reports of experiences (Zimdahl, 2000, Kaltoft and Sandøe, 2001) or guidelines for teaching, such as in the veterinary ethics field (Rollin, 1999), are scarce. In order to draw the picture of the actual situation in Europe, a survey has been conducted, and the main results are presented here.

The survey

In each of 20 European countries, a national representative, expert in the animal bioethics field, was identified and asked to distribute, during the second half of the year 2002, a survey form to all tertiary institution giving courses in animal science in relation to agriculture or veterinary medicine. Information concerning animal bioethics courses was related to: Where? (institution), What? (course, topics), to Whom? (level, number of students), by Who? (number, background of teachers), and How? (teaching methods, tools, assessment). Responses were received from 106 institutions from 17 countries, accounting for 199 courses and 412 teachers. The 162 courses best fitting the target are used in this report.

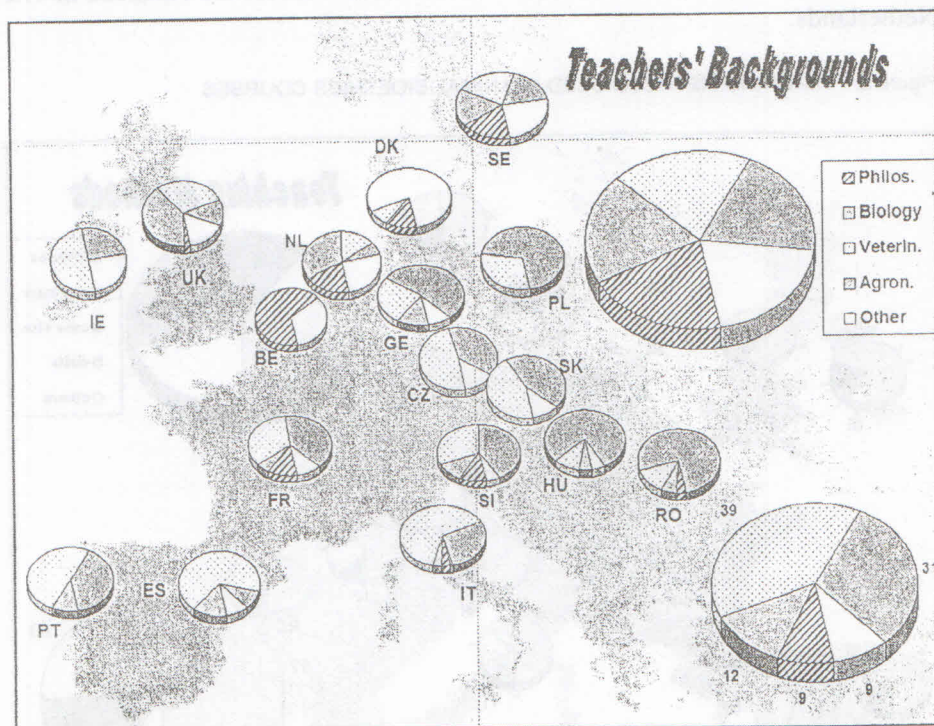
The information collected during this survey has been used to build a database of courses, open online to search as well as to amend through submission of an electronic form. In this way, the information will be completed and updated. This service is designed to give information to students and teachers, to encourage collaborations between universities and physical mobility of students. The database can be accessed from: <http://www.ensaia.inpl-nancy.fr/bioethics/>

Main features

Many of the identified courses are recent, in that 43% have been created after 1997, and 15% after 2000. The level is graduate for 77%, post-graduate for 19%, and PhD (from Denmark, The Netherlands, Hungary, Slovenia, Spain) for 4% of the courses. 65% of the courses are a compulsory part of the curriculum.

The volume of the courses is very variable: 1 to 320 hours specifically devoted to ethics (mean of 25 hours), with 10-hours courses being the most frequent. Only 25% of the courses are totally devoted to ethics; generally ethics is a part (usually 10 to 20%) of a more general course.

Figure 1. - DISCIPLINARY ORIGIN OF THE TEACHERS INVOLVED IN ANIMAL BIOETHICS COURSES



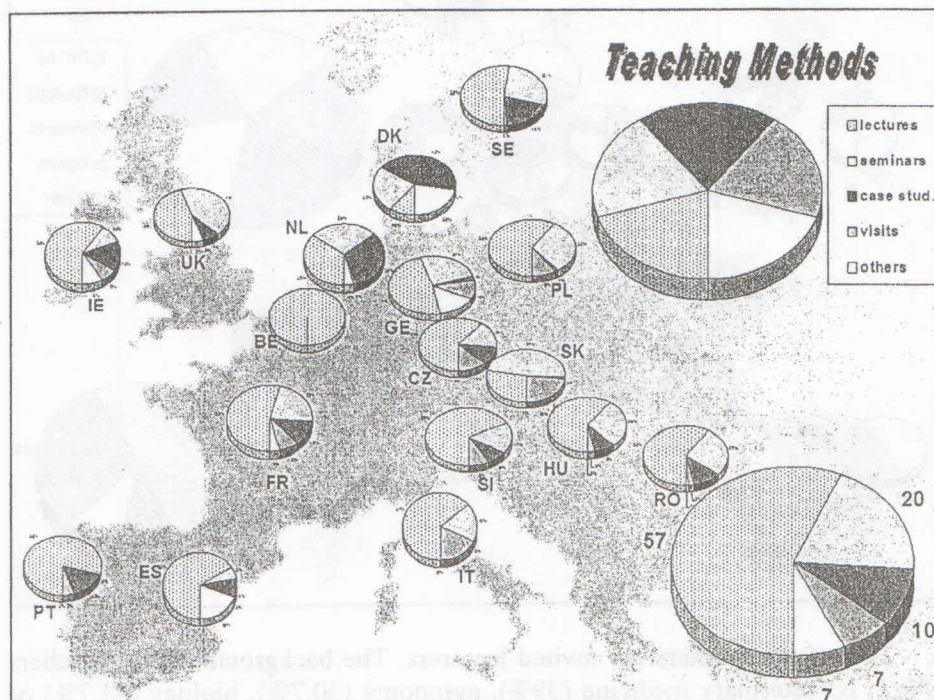
23% of the teachers are invited lecturers. The background of the teachers (Fig.1) is: veterinary medicine (39%), agronomy (30.7%), biology (21.7%) or

philosophy (8.6%). There is at least one philosopher in only 15% of the courses.

The content of the courses can be appraised through the domains covered: 86% of the courses include material related to farming (and exclusively in 31% of the cases), 49% to animal in experiments (7% exclusively), 34% to companion/sports animals, and 28% to wildlife. Key-words which are the most frequently used to describe the contents are legislation, human-animal relationship, animal rights, animal welfare, environment. Socio-economy is less cited (23%), and transport (3%) and slaughter (1%) largely ignored. Ethics (philosophical, normative or professional) is referred to in 40% of the courses.

The way the courses are taught (Fig. 2) is mainly through lectures (57%), then seminars (20%), case studies (10%), or visits and other activities (14%), with great disparities between countries. Whilst lecture is the only or predominant method in certain countries, case study (43%) is the main tool used in Denmark, while lectures, seminars and case studies are balanced in The Netherlands.

Figure 2. - TEACHING METHODS USED IN ANIMAL BIOETHICS COURSES



Discussion

The reason for reluctance in the development of moral issues in curricula could be that ethical concerns can be perceived as a threat to productivity and efficiency. Another reason could be the difficulty of introducing new topics or teaching methods in a well established system. A real difficulty, in fact, is that such a subject needs to be addressed in an holistic way, and from a multidisciplinary point of view. As we showed, the involvement of philosophers, or specialists coming from outside of the biological or agricultural sciences is still low, even though some invited persons are already participating in these courses. A specific effort must be made in order to facilitate this multidisciplinary approach and team work. Another difficulty arises from the lack of academics trained in animal ethics. The paucity of PhD courses, or even of post-graduate courses (Lund, 1997), and as a consequence the low number of opportunities for young scientist to become specialised in animal ethics or related fields, is a reality.

On the other hand, many arguments militate in favour of a rapid development of ethics in curricula, relying on an intense movement of philosophical ideas (DeGrazia, 1999). These arguments include the expectations of society, the high standard of regulation in force in the EU, even further reinforced in some member states, the need for the professionals to a better appraisal of their practices and the need for experts qualified for communication with the public. The interest of students for this domain, as shown by a Congress recently organised by the International Association of Agricultural Students on Bioethics in Life Sciences, and by students' willingness to participate to optional courses, further reinforces the need. During recent years, the process of accession of new countries to the EU is leading them to change their laws and regulations regarding animal ethics. Intense discussions among experts, academics, students and the general public takes place in these circumstances and increases the interest for this subject. The willingness of most of the participants in the survey to be involved in a programme of exchange of experience and teaching material, the opportunity to give an European dimension to the education, and to encourage mobility of students and teachers can be seen as positive inputs of this programme, embedded in the framework of the Socrates Thematic Network AFANet (network for agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and the environment, <http://www.afanet.info>).

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PODUČAVANJE BIOETIKE ŽIVOTINJA U EUROPI: SADAŠNJE STANJE I IZGLEDI

Sažetak

Provedena je anketa u 17 europskih zemalja, u 106 viših poljoprivrednih ili veterinarskih obrazovnih ustanova koje drže tečajeve iz bioetike životinja. Sakupljeni su podaci za 199 tečajeva o prirodi nastavnog plana, broju i kvalifikaciji nastavnika, pedagoškim metodama, obuhvaćenim temama (vrst i predviđeno vrijeme). Predstavljena je velika nejednakost u ustanovama za obavljanje prakse te različiti pristupi i razvoj podučavanja na tom području. Danas je podučavanje usmjereno na etička pitanja u vezi s interakcijom čovjek - životinja i dobrobit životinja, a mnogo manje se pozornosti posvećuje drugim pitanjima. Malen je broj doktorata ili poslijediplomskih tečajeva i zato je, očito, malo prilika da se mladi ljudi specijaliziraju u etici životinja. Analiziraju se poteškoće, prednosti i strategije za stvaranje nastavnih programa na tom području.

Ostvarena je dostupna i stalno ažurirana on-line baza podataka. Očekuju se veze i suradnja između nastavnika, informacijska i virtualna ili fizička pokretljivost studenata.

ključne riječi: bioetika životinja, više obrazovanje, tečajevi, anketa

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