

CNCC

Consciousness in a Natural and Cultural Context



Consciousness in a Natural and Cultural Context (CNCC)

At the beginning of the 21st century, we know more than ever about the function and anatomy of the neural systems underlying human experience. However, nothing close to an explanation has been proposed for the phenomenon of consciousness. In fact, *Science* magazine recently ranked the issue of consciousness second on its top 25 of big questions facing science over the next quarter-century.

The source of this impasse may be a too narrow focus on the neural basis of consciousness. It cannot be denied that consciousness depends on the brain. But perhaps the brain enables consciousness *only given a broader embedding*. Perhaps *consciousness only arises in context*?

Considering a broader context – the body, the environment, social structures, etc. – opens up to perspectives made available by humanities and social sciences. One of the important challenges is then to integrate these philosophical clarifications and conceptualizations with cleverly designed experiments and modern technology.

The EUROCORES programme “Consciousness in a Natural and Cultural Context (CNCC)” aims to contribute to this challenge. The programme – with a budget of over 5 Million Euros supported by 9 national funding organisations – offers a valuable framework for researchers from the humanities, social and natural sciences to build joint research projects. In these projects, empirical data can serve to challenge and validate theoretical analyses, while conceptual analyses can provide directions and tools for the empirical scientists.

Within these research projects, but also via targeted dissemination activities, training opportunities and strategic networking, the CNCC programme fosters top-quality consciousness research in Europe and beyond.

List of funded Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs)

Brain, Agency, Self, Intersubjectivity and Consciousness (BASIC)

(AHRC, CNRS, FIST, NSF)

This project examines the relation between phenomenologically relevant markers of self – e.g. a conceptual identification of the notion of “agency” and “ownership” – and particular patterns of brain activity. The aim is to further develop both empirical research and conceptual refinement, integrating into an interdisciplinary research field whose epistemological validity is supported by a solid anchoring in well-established research traditions.

Project Leader:

Dr. Andreas Roepstorff

University of Aarhus, Denmark

Principal Investigators:

Prof. Christopher Frith

University College London, United Kingdom

Prof. Shaun Gallagher

University of Central Florida, Orlando, USA

Dr. Anthony Jack

Washington University, St. Louis, USA

Dr. Tatjana Nazir

Hôpital Lyon Université, France

Prof. Marcus Raichle

Washington University, St. Louis, USA

Prof. Dan Zahavi

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Associated Partners:

Prof. Vittorio Gallese

Università degli Studi di Parma, Italy

Prof. Patrick Haggard

University College London, United Kingdom

Prof. Evan Thompson

University of Toronto, Canada

Prof. Kai Vogeley

University of Cologne, Germany

Unconscious Boundaries of Mind; research into the extended mind hypothesis (Boundaries of Mind)

(AHRC, FWO, NWO)

Interaction with the environment can alter our way of conceiving things. Think for example how drawing sketches may help to find the solution to a problem. This project studies (re)conceptualisation and the factors that facilitate or impede it. Further, it investigates the influence of preconceptions, the role of our visual system and the limits to the flexibility to switch concepts in normal and clinical populations.

Project Leader:

Dr. Tjeerd Jellema

University of Hull, United Kingdom

Principal Investigators:

Prof. Albert Postma

Utrecht University, the Netherlands

Prof. Johan Wagemans

University of Leuven, Belgium

The Conscious Experience of What is Reachable: neural, behavioural, cultural and philosophical aspects (CEWR)

(CNRS, MEC, NWO)

Being conscious of our environment implies that we are conscious of the actions that can be performed within it. Spatial boundaries exist in the cognitive agent that organise the external world as a function of what is reachable with the body. The overall aim of the CEWR project is to investigate the phenomenological experience of the boundary of peri-personal space, and to evaluate to which extent it depends on interaction between sensory and motor representations

Project Leader:

Prof. Yann Coello

Université de Lille, France

Principal Investigators:

Dr. Joan Lopez-Moliner

Universitat de Barcelona, Spain

Dr. Angela Sirigu

Université Claude Bernard, Lyon, France

Prof. Jeroen Smeets

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Associated Partners:

Dr. Bernard Pachoud

Centre de Recherche en Épistémologie Appliquée, Paris, France

Prof. Alan Wing

University of Birmingham, United Kingdom

Consciousness in Interaction. The Role of the Natural and Social Environment in Shaping Consciousness (CONTACT)

(AHRC, CNR, NWO)

The brains and bodies of cognitive agents (humans and animals) interact dynamically with both their natural and social environments. The CONTACT project opposes the claim that brain activity by itself enables conscious experience and instead investigates the claim that explaining consciousness requires studying the interactions of animals and humans – and their brains – with the environment.

Project Leader:

Prof. Cristiano Castelfranchi

Istituto Scienze e Tecnologie della Cognizione, Roma, Italy

Principal Investigators:

Prof. Andy Clark

University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Prof. Enrico Rambaldi

Istituto per la Storia del Pensiero Filosofico e Scientifico Moderno, Milano, Italy

Dr. Finn Spicer

University of Bristol, United Kingdom

Prof. Ed S. Tan

University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Associated Partner:

Prof. Thomas Metzinger

Johannes Gutenberg – Universität Mainz, Germany

Metacognition as a Precursor to Self-consciousness: evolution, development & epistemology (METACOGNITION)

(AHRC, CNRS, FWF, NSF)

Metacognition, – i.e., thinking about thinking – may not be uniquely human, according to new experimental paradigms. This project critically examines the existence and nature of metacognitive abilities in non-human primates and develops comparative knowledge of metacognitive processes, by exploring how similar these capacities are in non-human animals, human children and human adults. It will also examine how metacognitive processes contribute to self-consciousness.

Project Leader:

Prof. Joëlle Proust

CNRS, ENS-EHESS, Paris, France

Principal Investigators:

Prof. Johannes Brandl

Universität Salzburg, Austria

Dr. Hannes Leitgeb

University of Bristol, United Kingdom

Prof. Josef Perner

Universität Salzburg, Austria

Dr. Bernard Renault

CNRS, Hopital de la Salpêtrière, Paris, France

Prof. John Smith

University of Buffalo – State University of New York, USA

Associated Partner:

Prof. Josep Call

MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany

CNCC Activities in 2008

- **Workshop “Subjective Pre-Reflective Experience and Action”**
29 January – 1 February 2008, Copenhagen, Denmark
- **Workshop “Boundaries of what the mind can reach”**
28-29 February 2008, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- **CNCC session at the conference “Toward a Science of Consciousness”**
8-12 April 2008, Tucson, Arizona, USA
- **CNCC session “Metacognition of Ignorance”**
8-10 May 2008, Ioannina, Greece
- **Workshop “Religion and Cognition in Context”**
31 May – 1 June 2008, Aarhus, Denmark
- **Summer school “Sense of Body”**
16-21 June 2008, Bologna, Italy
- **Final “CNCC Essay Award”**
27 June 2008, Edinburgh, UK
- **Workshop “Sense of Agency: from sensorimotor processing to meta-representation”**
30 June 2008, Edinburgh, UK
- **Summer school “Social Cognition and Social Narrative”**
7-13 July 2008, San Marino
- **CNCC session “Consciousness in Context” at ESOF 2008**
20 July 2008, Barcelona, Spain
- **Workshop “Representations: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychology and Neuroscience”**
August 2008, Kirchberg am Wechsel, Austria
- **Expert meeting “Self and Other in Social Neuroscience and Philosophy of Mind 2”**
October 2008, Alghero, Italy
- **Workshop “Motor representation and language of space”**
January 2009, Lille, France

Final “CNCC Essay Award for Junior Scholars”

27 June 2008, Edinburgh, UK

The CNCC Essay Award invited young researchers to submit a scholarly essay on a relevant topic in the field of consciousness studies, framed within the scope and aims of the CNCC original call for proposal. After an international reviewing stage, 6 finalist papers have been short-listed and sent to the jurors, who will select the winners of the two awards. The awards will be presented in Edinburgh at the end of a special event devoted to the discussion of the six finalist papers.

Summer school “Social Cognition and Social Narrative”

7-13 July 2008, San Marino

Social Cognition and Social Narrative is a one-week interdisciplinary collegiums/ summer school on contemporary research in the area of social cognition, theory of mind and narrative theory. It will bring CNCC researchers and other major figures in the area of social cognition together with younger scholars, graduate students and post-docs to discuss the role of narrative and embodied inter-subjectivity.

The aim of the European Collaborative Research (EUROCORES) Scheme is to enable researchers in different European countries to develop collaboration and scientific synergy in areas where European scale and scope are required to reach the critical mass necessary for top class science in a global context.

The scheme provides a flexible framework which allows national basic research funding and performing organisations to join forces to support excellent European research in and across all scientific areas.

The European Science Foundation (ESF) provides scientific coordination and support for networking activities of funded scientists currently through the EC FP6 Programme, under contract no. ERAS-CT-2003-980409. Research funding is provided by participating national organisations.

www.esf.org/eurocores

THE FOLLOWING NATIONAL FUNDING ORGANISATIONS SUPPORT THE CNCC PROGRAMME:

Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen (FWO)

Research Foundation Flanders, Belgium

Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung (FWF)

Austrian Science Research Fund, Austria

Forsknings- og Innovationsstyrelsen (FIST)

Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation, Denmark

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS)

National Centre for Scientific Research, France

Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR)

National Research Council, Italy

Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO)

Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, the Netherlands

Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (MEC)

Ministry of Education and Science, Spain

Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)

United Kingdom

National Science Foundation (NSF)

United States of America



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