



# **Founding and position paper**

## **Research Network Extraterrestrial Intelligence**

### **Introduction**

During the past two decades various discoveries in astrophysics, astronomy and astrobiology have revealed that extrasolar planets are common in our galaxy, that a certain number of these planets are earthlike and that life is possible in extreme environments. In consideration of these facts it appears likely, that the earth is not the only life-bearing planet and that mankind is perhaps not the only intelligent species in the universe. Therefore, contact with an extraterrestrial civilisation could occur unexpectedly and in different ways.

A remote contact scenario, as favoured by SETI, is dominating the scientific debate, but it is just one possibility for how humankind could encounter an extraterrestrial civilisation. Several other scenarios, such as the discovery of extraterrestrial artefacts or foreign space probes in our solar system, are at least *thinkable* and should also be taken into account. Such options should be considered when thinking about initial contact with an extraterrestrial civilisation.

Gaining certainty about the existence of extraterrestrial civilisations would have dramatic impact on our concept of the position of humans in the universe. The consequences for science, philosophy, religion, culture etc. are unforeseeable.

A systematic engagement with the questions of possible extraterrestrial civilisations, communication options and cultural consequences of different contact scenarios is heavily required. This task can not be fulfilled by a single discipline alone, but has rather to be addressed by the humanities, science, philosophy and theology. Collaboration between different professions is important, in order to analyse the presuppositions of different contact scenarios and in order to evaluate their consequences.

All of these questions ultimately affect humankind as a whole, so that beside the scientific community other social groups should be involved in the process of research and debate.

Although the necessity of research has been known for decades, a scientific approach to the issue has so far been restricted to isolated initiatives, which have mostly been privately funded. Cultural presuppositions in the debate about Extraterrestrial Intelligence should be reflected upon and considered in the analysis of academic restraints surrounding the subject.



## **Research Network Extraterrestrial Intelligence**

Considering that contact with an extraterrestrial civilisation could happen in the foreseeable future and knowing that this would be one of the most momentous events in human history, we propose to establish an (initially) German speaking *Research Network Extraterrestrial Intelligence*. This network should

- push the collaboration between science and the humanities in the field of ‘humans and extraterrestrials’ and build an infrastructure for scientific and social exchange;
- encourage scientific research on the preconditions of the origin and the development of intelligent life (including postbiological civilisations) and critically follow this process;
- question anthropological and cultural presuppositions involved in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence;
- foster public debate about the current results of astronomical science concerning the probability of extraterrestrial life;
- supplement the classical SETI paradigm with further thinkable contact scenarios with extraterrestrial intelligence;
- advance research about chances and risks of contact between humankind and an extraterrestrial civilisation and publish according results;
- promote scientific, civil and political reflections about the cultural impact of contact of humankind with an extraterrestrial civilisation;
- evaluate the difficulties of communication with an extraterrestrial species;
- analyse the crucial role of the media regarding the public perception of research initiatives;
- critically question research taboos in the field and actively oppose the stigmatisation of researchers;
- investigate cultural barriers of an unbiased scientific and public debate about the mentioned fields of research and help to remove these barriers;
- identify the scientific, political and medial guidelines and responsibilities regarding the process of dealing with potential evidence for the existence of extraterrestrial intelligence;



The first step for the organisation of the network is to connect researchers of different disciplines, for example by a discussion forum, a mailing group, a project website, symposiums etc..

In the long term the goal is to establish an interdisciplinary research network, systematically dealing with the above questions. Furthermore, contact with journalists should be built-up and intensified, in order to make the communication process within the network available to the general public.

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