

The Future of European Knowledge and the Role of Social Sciences and Humanities Research

Europe will greatly benefit from smarter investment in Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). This was the message of the Vilnius Declaration of 2013. For future research to meet the challenges of the 21st century it is vital that scholars with diverse knowledge across all domains – from the social sciences and humanities to the technical, medical, and natural sciences – contribute to defining research questions, projects, and answers.

The Anthropocene is a time when business-as-usual can trigger a negative chain reaction leading to the destruction of much of our collective achievements and possibly the extinction of our species. Inequalities and environmental degradation generate increasing damage and destructive conflicts. Globalisation and technological change are important drivers of current changes, offering great opportunities to some and undermining the livelihood of others. Societies need new forms of social inclusion in a market economy that combines income-health protection, stakeholder governance in all economic organisations, and comprehensive management of externalities (such as environmental and social impacts). The traditional models of social democracy are insufficient because they protect rather than empower. The role of the nation-state remains important but local, interregional, transnational or supranational actors also play a significant role. Grass-root movements, democratic deliberation in the digital age, and cultural and religious diversity are challenges as well as opportunities for the realignment of polities in the 21st century. They call for proactive public policies based on cutting-edge scientific insights as well as on solid participatory design.

European SSH research is world leading in the study of these challenges and must keep its global edge. Nearly half of the world's top 100 institutions undertaking scholarship in the humanities are based in the EU. Forty percent of leading centres of excellence for research in the social and economic sciences are in institutions based in the EU. Europe has a large and active scholarly SSH community of over 300,000 people. Europe must take full advantage of these strengths and draw on them to address the complex and urgent challenges it faces as a society.

Yet the opportunities to contribute to Horizon 2020 for scholars working in SSH fields have so far been disappointing. Firstly, the budget allocated for SSH collaborative research is low compared to the ambitions and the needs of addressing key challenges for Europe and indeed much lower than in Framework Programme 7. Secondly, according to Commission reports, Horizon 2020 has had limited success in integrating the SSH in the Societal Challenges and in the Industrial Leadership pillars. The design of the calls as well as the evaluation process have not proven to be conducive to the development and selection of proposals with a genuine SSH disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary core. Thirdly, Horizon 2020 has so far failed to invest in SSH research related to the creative industries and social innovation. This has been a missed opportunity and more scholarship in these fields would support some of Europe's fast growing industries.

Towards the next Framework Programme

The next Framework Programme (FP9) shall continue if not reinforce funding both blue-sky research and targeted research. It shall build on and develop the success of the European Research Council and the

Marie Skłodowska-Curie programmes. **EASSH presses for the following changes in the next Framework Programme.**

1. FP9 should embrace the challenges of the Anthropocene, that humans are the major agent of planetary change, and therefore that an improved understanding of human agency, including perception, motivation, and incitement, is critical to timely, well-designed and efficient policy interventions. Funding calls for innovation and creativity must move beyond the predominantly technological framing of today, and fully integrate socio-technological solutions within the complex nature of the social and cultural organization of human life. FP9 must identify SSH as an equal contributor to the definition of objects of scientific inquiry in areas like health and care, energy or food. **EASSH calls for more “disruptive” research on the human and social factors in all global challenges. It reiterates the need for greater awareness of the new trends of social and cultural innovation.**

2. FP9 will need to include a specific collaborative research programme on the major social, cultural, economic and political issues that will shape the future of Europe, its nations, its neighbourhoods and its external actions. Issues such as democracy, growth, attitudes to sustainable development, the ageing society, diversity and cultural exchanges, migration, deserve specialised and/or interdisciplinary SSH scientific efforts with a view to help EU citizens and states to better understand and navigate the future. **EASSH calls for an ambitious research programme on the social, economic, political and cultural challenges of Europe with a strong impact component in order to help develop European competitiveness and inclusiveness.**

3. FP9 must move beyond short-termism. Most European science investment today is for short projects, which are expected to undertake world-class research and achieve immediate direct impacts on stakeholders. Such a short cycle allows too little time to develop the original and “disruptive” insights that will have deep future impact. The short cycle is particularly deficient in regards to research in evolving and dynamic social systems that integrate contributions from across scientific disciplines. In a three-year project, researchers are often only beginning to learn how to work across disciplinary boundaries just when the project is expected to produce results and impacts. **EASSH challenges the current short term EU programming and calls for extended project frames. EASSH supports the introduction of ‘integrative research platforms’,** which will be sustained over 6-8 years and can be given the space to develop, to learn from early research outcomes and to respond to social dynamics.

4. The laboratory for much of humanities and social science research is data. Research and insights are as strong as the quality and consistency of data. Researchers need to share their data and results as widely as possible. Now is the time to take full advantage of the rapid changes in technological platforms, digital developments and better processes for data governance. **EASSH supports EU efforts to make research data more easily and consistently available. It calls for co-designed data collection, access to data and availability of administrative data from the member states for use in scientific research on key societal challenges.**

The ‘European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities’ (EASSH) brings together more than 25 European disciplinary associations and scholarly networks. The main purpose of EASSH is to promote research on social sciences and humanities as a resource for Europe and the world and to give a voice to SSH disciplines

in the design of science policy at and international levels. The paper has been endorsed by Academia Europaea