

The Significance of the Social in a time of Turmoil

Towards a New Research Agenda for Europe

in FP9

Position paper from the University of Bergen

The Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH) have been severely affected by the transition from FP7 to Horizon 2020. There is a general agreement on the lack of success of the SSH integration and mainstreaming ambition. More importantly, given the severity of social and cultural challenges in Europe, in relation to democracy, unemployment, equality, migration, terrorism, cooperation between European countries for peace, the future of youth and the role of Europe in the world, it is worrying that the EU gives less (and not more) attention to these challenges. The University of Bergen strongly believes that these issues should be a given significant weight in the work for a solid policy in FP9.

The above should not prevent a recognition of the obvious success of the H2020 in many other areas. For instance, research on societal and cultural issues witnessed a significant support under the ERC in H2020. The University of Bergen strongly supports the continued funding of excellent research frameworks.

However, the integration of SSH in the Societal Challenges program of H2020 has clearly been poor and incomplete. This should worry both the architects of the EU research policy as well as the general research community in a wide sense. A lack of integration of broader societal concerns implies missed opportunities for new knowledge about key issues of vital importance for the future. We live in a time when the digital and the virtual significantly affect the form and content of social relations. However, redefinitions of social relations, threats to social cohesion, and decline in trust are key issues that cannot be met by technological fixes. Instead, more encompassing approaches to address fundamental issues that shape and transform the social are needed. Focus on technology is integral to this, and the social sciences and humanities need to be in the forefront to address these issues, and not only be added in order to increase acceptance for new technologies.

The Commission's decision to stop funding a specific area for collaborative research on Europe's obvious social, political, economic and cultural issues in H2020 is a fundamental change from past practice between FP4 and FP7. As a consequence, European-wide comparative research on democracy, culture, identities, migration, education, employment etc. is now only a minor aspect of the H2020 Societal Challenge 6 entitled "Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies". As a result, the funding for such collaborative research under H2020 has decreased significantly, probably by more than a third compared to FP7.

Given the challenges that the EU has to meet in the next years and decades, what is needed is to develop and put in place a genuine policy for research on such fundamental issues at the European level.

This policy has to rest on two pillars:

First, a collaborative research programme on the social, cultural political and economic issues of Europe has to be re-established in FP9. We need a programme that is driven from the social sciences and the humanities that will give vital perspectives on key challenges of our time.

Second, the Commission should establish a genuine policy for interdisciplinarity across FP9 that redress and rethink the current efforts to integrate SSH in H2020 which are interesting but insufficient. A genuine and effective policy in favour of interdisciplinarity should include not only the drafting of topics texts, but also the evaluation set-up, the communication on the potential and best practices of interdisciplinarity, as well as the actual analysis of interdisciplinary practices in order to feedback on research policy.

The University of Bergen is of the opinion that given the current democratic concerns in many European countries, the European Commission should propose for FP9 an ambitious comparative and collaborative research programme in the relevant social, cultural, political and economic fields which will determine the future of Europe as much as, or even more than, technological development. In a time of turmoil and insecurity, an appeal to the humanities and social sciences is vital.

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