

Objet : Against the Downsizing of Social Sciences in the EU

Dear colleagues,

We would like to draw your attention to some alarming developments in the preparations for the 8th Framework Programme. These include:

1. The downgrading of socio-economic and humanities research in DG Research from a department to one single office (taking effect January 1, 2011).
2. The plan to abolish broader, long-term integrated projects and the like in social sciences and humanities in the 8th Framework Programme. Instead, a focus on "grand challenges" with topics that are more applied than basic research and are supposed to foster European competitiveness on global markets (social science as an 'auxiliary' discipline to be mainstreamed into the other sciences) .
3. The downsizing of funding for socio-economic and humanities research projects in the 8th Framework Programme.

There is nothing we can do against the structural decision of DG Research to down-grade social science and humanities. There is still time to mobilize against its thematic and financial downsizing. Given the decentralized structure of social sciences, concerted action is difficult to organize. However, we suggest that you use the connections and networks you have to disseminate the following demands, both to EU and national policy-makers:

1. No downsizing of socio-economic and humanities research;
2. Continuation of integrated projects and networks on both smaller scale (1-3 Mio Euro) and larger scale (5-12 Mio Euro);
3. Strengthening of social sciences in the Marie Curie Programme;
4. If grand challenges, they should focus on "social and cultural cohesion" of Europe instead only on innovation;
5. Less focus on partnering with industry, rather focusing on public sector and civil society.

Please find attached a 'non-paper' on why it is important to strengthen social science research beyond 2014.

Feel free to forward this email to other colleagues.

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European Funding for Social Science and Humanities Research beyond 2014

Why do we need a European Social Science and Humanities Research programme?

- The Lisbon Treaty states clearly that the European research programme has to benefit industry and all other chapters of the Lisbon Treaty. The European Union is far more than an economic integration area. Europe encompasses values such as democracy, participation, European identity, multilingualism, social and cultural cohesion, peace and international cooperation. Overarching questions to all European citizens, such as ‘How should European integration be brought forward?’, ‘Which societal challenges are citizens concerned about?’, ‘How can Europe find social and cultural cohesion in times of increased diversity of lifestyles and beliefs?’, ‘How can we promote European values beyond the European Union?’ etc. need to be investigated by social science and humanities (SSH).
- SSH investigate prejudices and give early warnings of dangers and problems in society. Politically sensitive issues are often discussed in the cultural field. This highlights the importance to analyse culture and public opinion to detect threats to democracy at an early stage. By way of historical and spatial comparison, SSH offer ways to revise prejudices and offer solutions. Especially humanities can contribute to scientific analysis that fosters cultural cohesion and integration of groups with diverse identities into European society.

Who needs SSH research?

- SSH researchers engage already in multiple collaborations with public authorities and policy makers, international organisations, think tanks, media, NGOs, churches, business and employee’s organisations, companies, museums, citizen fora etc.
- Researchers and these collaboration groups fulfil different tasks in society. Researchers are more independent and offer a differentiated analysis with a medium-term view beyond current situations. All other spheres use research as a basis for their own contributions. Without SSH research, contributions of other spheres of society would become superficial.
- Politics is complicated and contested by various actors. Researchers cannot give simple answers, but highlight sound criteria according to which decisions should be taken and clarify consequences of policies. They enable policy makers to make decisions based on scientific evidence.

Why does research funding need to come from the European Union?

- The European Research Area aims to create a European-wide open space for knowledge. Without European funding, cooperation projects with four to ten European partners would not be carried out. Bilateral cooperation cannot replace European projects. Community and national funding are complementary, creating multiple synergies to transfer knowledge from one level to the other.
- European research projects offer expertise to European actors such as policy makers and institutions. Logically, the scientific consortium needs to be European.
- SSH build on comparison over time and space, necessitating transnational projects. SSH are concerned with social life. Research objects change rapidly, creating the necessity for interaction with colleagues from various countries.
- SSH research has only begun in FP5, but seen a huge success in the scientific community. Trust in the stability of European funding needs to be sustained.
- SSH researchers themselves are an important part of civil society. Especially in the case of societal tensions and difficult political relationships, researchers can contribute to dialogue across groups with opposing views or borders.
- For small research fields, for instance, Chinese or Islamic studies, only very few researchers are established within one MS. European research projects enable the necessary exchange.

Does not this cost too much?

- No. About half of the professors at many universities work in SSH, yet less than 2% of the cooperation budget goes to SSH (€0,6 billion for SSH, in comparison: €9,1 billion for ICT). In FP7, a large number of excellent research proposals could not be supported due to funding limitations. Therefore, the budget for the specific cooperation programme for SSH needs to be doubled in FP8.
- EU and SSH

that is, €1.2 billion for the theme SSH. Even then, SSH would remain the least expensive theme in cooperation.

Which European research funding instruments do we need?

Overall, a framework programme needs to offer four instruments for SSH:

- a) More SSH ERC grants are needed, by increasing the absolute budget for SSH.
- b) Many small- and medium sized cooperation projects (three to ten partners) are the best way to support sustainable innovation. SSH projects are very cost effective, needing only one to five million Euros. These projects bridge between the risky and individual ERC-projects to build a broader consensus involving several institutions. A wide array of topics ensures competition of ideas and enables participation of outstanding young researchers. Topic selection should be made both bottom-up (by the research community) and top-down (by the European political institutions).
- c) Large projects risk splitting up into smaller subsets. Constant renewal of consensus absorbs many resources. The experience of JTI and PPPs has not been without contestation. Therefore, only a very small share of the SSH budget should be dedicated to large projects (beyond ten million Euros). Research themes should not be monopolised. Large projects only work when preceded by collaboration in smaller consortia.
- d) The funding for Marie-Curie programmes needs to be increased substantially to contribute to excellence and mobility in research. It is extremely important that Marie-Curie programmes are not narrowed down to intersectoral mobility into industry, but also open to public institutions and civil society, briefly mobility into all sectors outlined above. Social and cultural cohesion needs collaboration of science with all three, markets, public authorities and civil society.

Why is it not sufficient to open SSH participation to tackle grand challenges such as climate change?

- While SSH have undoubtedly great contributions to make to various grand challenges, these contributions are complementary to intrinsic SSH research. Intrinsic SSH research is researchers' toolbox to contribute to specific existing questions and to adapt to newly arising challenges.
- If an intrinsic SSH programme exists, SSH researchers can indeed make contributions to all types of grand challenges. Interdisciplinary projects need to ensure a share of 30-50% SSH participation in comparison to natural scientists and engineers to ensure common research questions, methodology and proceedings.

Why is it not sufficient to have a 'science and society' or education programme?

- Answers to upcoming societal challenges cannot be given by repeating ten year old textbooks. Research on current and upcoming challenges is of key importance for pushing the knowledge frontier, exploring novel interpretations and ensuring the creation and updating of excellent databases.
- When scientists are actively involved in carrying out research, they can indeed offer excellent education and training to students, doctoral candidates and society as a whole to become innovation leaders in all fields. Decreasing European funding for SSH research will create a considerable innovation gap in a few years time.

What could be improved?

- To make the process of topic selection even more transparent, the Commission should organise an online consultation (or event) each year before drafting the work programme to give interested researchers the chance to highlight new topics. A roadmap with a few broad themes helps the research community for planning, when keeping a balance with newly upcoming themes.
- To keep administrative costs as low as possible, the Commission could outsource the implementation of the programme to a project agency (similar to the German project agencies).
- The European Commission should consider a slightly higher European contribution per project partner. It is extremely important that the entire actual research costs are reimbursed.