Social Sciences and Humanities Scientific Committees

Humanities and Social Sciences in Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges: Implementation and Monitoring

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Humanities and Social Sciences in Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges: Implementation and Monitoring

The aim of this Opinion Paper is to:

- Reiterate support for the Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges and the integral role of Social Sciences and Humanities within these
- Call for a genuine interaction among all the scientific disciplines
- Urge the European Commission to take measures across the research ecosystem to support the integration of discipline
- Specify systematic markers for a coherent ex-ante and ex-post evaluation mechanism
- Recommend establishing the first work programme for the duration of one year only
- Announce the intention to contribute to monitoring the integration of Social Sciences and Humanities in all Societal Challenges

Introduction

The Science Europe Scientific Committees for the Humanities and the Social Sciences strongly support Horizon 2020's third pillar, Societal Challenges, and the integral role of the Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH) therein.[1]

The robustness of results, and the ultimate success of the Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges, will depend on the integration of the human and social factor at all stages of research and research policy development.

Addressing the Societal Challenges necessitates what might be called 'deep change': not only change in technology and know-how but also in behaviour and, more fundamentally, changes in people's pervasive values, cultures of practice and modes of communication. Since SSH researchers have the expertise to analyse and understand deep change, they must play a vital role in the Societal Challenges and they must be integrated at all stages of the research process – from the formation of advisory groups, via the formulation of joint research questions, to *ex-ante* and *ex-post* evaluation and impact assessments. Such a full integration of SSH is key.

Equally important is securing an organisational framework within the European Commission that corresponds to the vision behind Horizon 2020, including the full integration of disciplines.

This Opinion Paper outlines the main prerequisites for the successful integration of SSH throughout Horizon 2020's Societal Challenges and across the entire research 'ecology'. Overall, these elements should ensure a coherent interplay between the high-level objectives of Horizon 2020, the programme design, its implementation and evaluation.

Advisory Groups

The recently-established Horizon 2020 Advisory Groups play a crucial role in the development of the work programmes. Therefore, it is important that:

- The establishment of the Advisory Groups follows the parity principle, as has been advocated by the Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn.[2]
- The Chairs of the Advisory Groups, supported by the Commission, have responsibility for securing proper integration of all members in the Group. Although this may not be an easy process, the Chairs and the Commission are being called upon to take measures to build the necessary trust, respect and understanding.

Clearly, this is conditional to the commitment of the SSH community to engage with this process. In this respect we note that there are good indications that the upcoming Call for Experts, expected by the end of 2013, will attract many candidates from these disciplines.

One-year Approval of the First Work Programme

Although the Advisory Groups have a crucial role in the development of the work programmes, for practical reasons it has not been possible to fully incorporate their advice in the first work programme, for the period 2013 – 2015. We therefore recommend a one-year approval of the first work programme, rather than for the full two years, in order for the Advisory Groups to engage with the process of developing the programme in the short term and to allow for a possible recalibration of the framework after the first year if needed. Subsequent work programmes could be for the duration of two years.

Joint Research Questions

The integration of SSH into joint research projects can only work if all scientists are equal partners. Too often, SSH research is still seen as having an ancillary role – for example as investigating the reception of technological innovation among the public, or translating scientific results and improving their acceptance among sceptical audiences, or supplementing fundamental, causal explanations with some cultural finesse. Notwithstanding the importance of these roles, this is a simplistic view as SSH research has demonstrated a more crucial role in understanding the complexity of the world we live in.

To fully harness the SSH resources, all partners need to be fully integrated from the outset. Of particular importance is the formulation of joint research questions. These have to be clearly spelled out at the level of proposals. We urge the Commission to communicate this clearly in the Calls for Proposals. This is, in fact, one of the reasons why it is important to have SSH researchers involved in defining the Calls. Also, the formulation of integrated research questions must have priority in the assessment of proposals where appropriate, and the novelty in the combination of disciplines and methods should be evaluated.

Evaluation of Interdisciplinary Proposals: *Ex-ante* Evaluation

There is a need to establish coherent and systematic evaluation markers over the entire research ecosystem.

First, interdisciplinary proposals require a different evaluation approach in comparison with disciplinary proposals. In particular, there is a need to establish evaluation criteria that:

- Promote *innovative* research collaborations - involving new combinations of disciplines – where appropriate. This will help harness the entire spectrum of SSH resources.
- Acknowledge the different profiles of interdisciplinary researchers compared to those following a disciplinary career path.
- Acknowledge publications in interdisciplinary journals which may be the proper outlet for this type of work, even when these are not considered high impact journals.

Second, in the context of Horizon 2020 it is important to establish a review structure that:

- Prioritises evaluators with a broad *curriculum vitae* and documented interdisciplinary research expertise, both as reviewers and panellists.
- Recognises boundary crossing as a sign of intellectual drive and excellence.
- Gives weight to the 'flagging' of SSH. That is, proposals under calls that have been flagged as having an SSH relevance need to be assessed by panels that include an SSH panellist. Even if there may be good reason for a proposal submitted in such a call not to have a SSH project member, this reason needs to be assessed by an SSH evaluator.
- Supports evaluation panels of a size that would allow, if relevant, at least one SSH member.
- Explores new models of peer review (such as those recently developed in successful national programmes).

Monitoring Results: *Ex-post* Evaluation

Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn has referred to Horizon 2020 as a 'learning process' with a need for continuous recalibration.[3] The Science Europe Committees for the Social Sciences and Humanities agree with this analysis and therefore point to the necessity of establishing mechanisms to:

- Assess the degree of interdisciplinarity in the projects. This should address both the relatively simple question of the amount of SSH research funded throughout the seven Challenges, as well as the more important issue of the extent to which SSH research (conceptual frameworks; methodologies) has been integrated in the funded projects.
- Assess outcome of interdisciplinarity: did it work? If so, on what grounds? Did the project, for example, come up with different answers than mono-disciplinary research?
- Include key performance indicators beyond the usual ones such as publications, patent applications and prototypes. Such indicators do not measure deep change. More is needed. We recommend a qualitative evaluation after one year as an important exercise to inform further developments.
- Conduct longer-term impact assessments (perhaps in line with RCUK 'pathways to impact' approaches)[4]: what lessons need to be learnt for the future – by public, private and third-sector stakeholders? Understand impact on scientific communities (for example, through conferences, visiting scientists, PhD submissions, training programmes).
- Provide a continuous feedback loop over the course of Horizon 2020, involving the Advisory Groups and Programme Committee, to monitor the successful integration of SSH throughout the Societal Challenges.

Conclusions

This Paper has specified the main prerequisites for a successful integration of SSH throughout the Societal Challenges and across the entire research ecology.
In particular, the Paper:

- Reiterates support for the Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges and the integral role of SSH within these
- Calls for a genuine interaction among all the scientific disciplines
- Urges the European Commission to take measures across the research ecosystem to support the integration of disciplines
- Specifies systematic markers for a coherent ex-ante and ex-post evaluation mechanism
- Recommends establishing the first work programme for the duration of one year (rather than two), allowing for calibrations when needed.

Overall, these elements should ensure a coherent interplay between the high-level objectives of Horizon 2020, the programme design, its implementation and evaluation.

The Science Europe Scientific Committees for the Humanities and the Social Sciences are ready to contribute to monitoring this process, in order to maximise the successful engagement of SSH and the overall success of Horizon 2020's Societal Challenges.

Notes and References

1. This has been expressed previously, for example in the Science Europe Position Statement 'Embedding Social Science and Humanities in the Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges', January 2013, www.scienceeurope.org/downloads
2. EU Presidency Conference 'Horizons for Social Sciences and Humanities', 23-24 September 2013, Vilnius
3. *Idem*
4. http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/kei/impacts

This Opinion Paper has been produced by the Science Europe Scientific Committee for the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

About the Science Europe Scientific Committees

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