

NET4SOCIETY response to the

Consultation on the State of the Socio - economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in Europe

launched by the conference “Horizons for Social Sciences and Humanities” in Vilnius, September 23-24, 2013.

1. What are the broad research questions, new methodological or theoretical developments, or generally new approaches that are high on research agendas? Where do you see potential contributions to societal relevance?

A policy-oriented European research programme such as Horizon 2020 must have at its heart the needs of Europe's diverse and complex societies as depicted in the Europe 2020 strategy. It must enable European societies to understand and to adapt to current and future transitions - in society, in the economy, in the environment, in culture, in technology, in demography etc. - and to develop creative responses. **Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)-centred challenges which are high on research agendas and have huge societal relevance are for example:** social inclusion and cohesion (connected to issues of poverty, education, social participation and societal resilience), further development of economic and political institutions (the notions of democracy, of the rule of law, of the welfare state, European integration, global responsibilities), questions of economic performance and growth (investing in future jobs and growth, how to respond to the economic crisis, sustainable growth), social innovation, wellbeing, demography and active ageing (changing life-course patterns, aging societies, migration, etc.), issues of environmental sustainability (green economy, sustainable cities), cultural issues (values, trust, European identities, diversity, family structures, media, tradition, religion), and global issues (Europe as a global actor, increasing interconnectedness and global governance). SSH research will need to produce, inter alia, a better understanding of the needs of 21st century education, and of the ways in which world views and life concepts influence the capabilities for innovation in societies (politics, business, civil society etc.).

Contemporary SSH research is addressing these challenges to the societal development, and defining new ones. In this respect, they elaborate and create new theoretical paradigms and instruments to monitor and measure the state of the art and predict **future scenarios**. In this context, there is also a need for fundamental research in SSH and to further develop existing social and economic theories and methodologies.

Concrete research questions in this area are:

- How do societies develop effective and resilient social, political and economic structures at all levels (institutions - such as families or markets -, governments, inter- and non-governmental governance etc.)? Insights into the requirements for intergenerational and international justice and security – and the institutional and governmental governance tools needed – will need to be developed;
- What is the role and value of culture in local and global transition processes? Historical and cultural research – longitudinal, cross-cultural and comparative – will help understand new conflicts and coalitions, new patterns of identity and integration, as well as reasons for past political failures and future policy needs.
- How is knowledge and creativity created, structured, articulated, transmitted and used by individuals and societies? Cognitive science, linguistics, communication and educational

- SSH research will need to produce, inter alia, a better understanding of the needs of 21st century education, and of the ways in which world views and life concepts influence the capabilities for innovation in societies (politics, business, civil society etc.)
- Research topics with regard to Social Innovation are listed in the “Vienna Declaration” (available at <http://www.socialinnovation2011.eu/vienna-declaration-2011>) that resulted from the 2011 conference “Challenge Social Innovation”, co-organised by NET4SOCIETY.
- Another topic is the further development of SSH infrastructures and “Big data”. In this context, it would also be beneficial to have an infrastructure in place that monitors and promptly produces analyses on social inclusion in Europe with a specific emphasis on EU Member States in crisis.

2. What are the potential contributions that SSH may provide to the “societal challenges”, broadly defined by “Horizon 2020”? Please specify the “societal challenge/s” to which SSH contributions are most likely, and suggest successful steps in this direction, if possible.

SSH contributions are most obvious for the 6th Challenge “Europe in a changing world – inclusive, innovative, reflective societies”. For SSH to successfully address the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and the manifold challenges mentioned above, an adequate budget for the 6th Challenge is of utmost importance (see answer to Q8).

In addition, research from Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities can and needs to contribute **to all societal challenges defined in Horizon 2020** - on climate and environmental issues, health, security, energy and food safety. SSH research and its benefits go well beyond facilitating the market entry of technical innovations. SSH research aspects include a critical view on the solution potential of technical innovations and also look at ambivalent aspects of innovation (the “dark side” of innovation). **SSH research aspects that are of relevance for all challenges include** research on behaviour, lifestyle changes, public awareness and acceptance, values, socio-economic and cultural preconditions for innovation as well as socio-economic and cultural impacts of innovations. SSH research can underpin economic growth e.g. by supporting the successful introduction of new services, products, processes, new business models and providing knowledge on labour markets and local economic development. While SSH can directly provide instrumental knowledge (such as a scientific basis for effective policy making, or for effective market introduction of products), it also produces more fundamental ethical, social, historical, and cultural knowledge that may question existing economic and social models and goals. In this sense, SSH research is innovative in a deeper sense and helps to identify future societal challenges.

While these SSH contributions are relevant to all challenges, they have been more actively picked up by some themes than by others in FP7. **A good practice example would be the “Environment (incl. Climate Change)” Theme**, where more and more SSH aspects were included while FP7 progressed. As the research questions in other fields now follow the “societal challenge” approach and become more complex, they need to follow this path as well. This will be especially relevant in the 1st Challenge as the focus moves from medical care towards the concept of well-being. To successfully do so, it is of utmost importance that the topic descriptions are clear and directly state the need to include SSH in an interdisciplinary design.

3. Do you foresee (or have you experienced) obstacles that may prevent the SSH community from making contributions to the “societal challenges” approach? Please provide specific indications.

While SSH has important contributions to make to the different societal challenges defined in Horizon 2020, a number of obstacles for SSH participation in interdisciplinary research projects can be identified.

In a NET4SOCIETY survey on SSH experiences with FP7¹, around two thirds of online survey respondents were not satisfied with the integration of SSH in other FP7 Cooperation Themes and saw particular difficulties for SSH researchers applying there – such as building international consortia and ensuring that evaluators have the necessary background to judge SSH research and interdisciplinarity.

In January 2013, NET4SOCIETY organised the conference “Learning by doing – making interdisciplinarity work”² with a specific focus on SSH where **the following obstacles to interdisciplinarity** were mentioned:

- Institutional barriers: Academic institutions or journals tend to be *monodisciplinary* – making it difficult to build a career on interdisciplinarity.
- Interdisciplinary research is more time-consuming than other research as one has to come to terms with different mindsets and methodologies. This is seldom acknowledged in the design of the project and the funding instruments.
- Specialist vocabularies/technical jargon make communication between different disciplines more difficult.
- Many researchers have little (if any) knowledge of how to build interdisciplinarity into a proposal or how to implement it in work packages.
- Ideological divides (different schools of thought) prevent some researchers – especially within the social sciences – from cooperating effectively.
- Different disciplines can have different time horizons – to synchronize knowledge development from different disciplines is therefore a challenge.
- Interdisciplinarity often ends up getting clumsily ‘tacked on’ to topics and proposals due to lack of experience/knowledge and/or time; this often leads to poor results with the disciplines operating in parallel instead of together. Experience shows that attempts at interdisciplinarity frequently become *multidisciplinary*.
- Evaluation of proposals is usually not geared toward recognizing or rewarding interdisciplinarity. At the same time few evaluators are capable of properly assessing the interdisciplinary merits of a proposal.
- Many research administrators have difficulty identifying topics/fields that lend themselves to an interdisciplinary approach.
- Lack of proper demonstration modes for SSH research results.

The conference also recommended a number of measures to overcome these obstacles, that are listed under the NET4SOCIETY answer to Q4.

4. In order to foster a more integrative approach that would benefit all research communities, what would you consider the most important incentives for successful contribution of SSH that “Horizon 2020” could provide?

In principle, SSH researchers are motivated to participate in European Framework Programmes, as they offer opportunities for international cooperation which provides advantages such as higher recognized quality of the research outcomes, increased share of

¹ “SSH experiences with FP7 – a commentary”, available here: <http://www.net4society.eu/public/documents.php>

² The proceedings of the conference are available here: <http://www.net4society.eu/public/conference.php>

knowledge and growing professional connections and collaborations. Still, a number of barriers to participation are in existence. Very important incentives for SSH participation in “Horizon 2020” could be **simplified application and management procedures as well as higher success rates, which can only be achieved through a substantially increased budget** for SSH research in general and the 6th Challenge in particular (see answer to Q8).³

At the same time the integrated and highly interdisciplinary approach of Horizon 2020 necessitates **increased support with partnering and consortium building**. National Contact Points and their thematic networks could play an important role in providing this support, e.g. through the organisation of brokerage events, aimed at bringing together researchers from different disciplines.

Funding opportunities in Horizon 2020 need to be easy to identify for SSH researchers.

Compilations of SSH relevant topics such as the “Opportunities” Document provided by NET4SOCIETY can help here. At the same time, researchers from other disciplines need to clearly understand from the call and topic text that SSH integration is necessary to tackle the topic adequately.

Topics in other Challenges of Horizon 2020 than the 6th Challenge should clearly state that SSH researchers need to be included in the research projects - in an appropriate and flexible manner with the option of having SSH-coordinated projects in these other Challenges as well.

In addition, to address the identified obstacles for interdisciplinary research projects that integrate SSH, **NET4SOCIETY proposes the following measures:**

- **Involve the SSH community at all stages of topic development through involvement in advisory committees and programme committees across all societal challenges.**
- **Approach the research programme itself as an exercise in co-creation. It is not enough to involve academics and administrators. You need to challenge them with the views of those who will use the knowledge (e.g. civil society organizations, policymakers, business people).**
- **Adapt the evaluation process - criteria and evaluators - to the realities of interdisciplinary research, involve evaluators with an SSH background.**
- **Fund preparatory stages / pilot projects and fund over a sufficient period - as interdisciplinary projects are more time intensive.**
- Allocate funds to assure that there are sufficient knowledge exchange pathways – these exchanges do not happen without resources.
- Interdisciplinary projects are per se innovative and thus might include higher risks – this needs to be accounted for during evaluation.
- Funding instruments need to account for demonstration measures specific to SSH research. In an SSH context, demonstration activities do not mean building a physical prototype, but rather testing specific concepts in a certain environment (like a community) including users and stakeholders, as well as assessing the results of this test phase. Such demonstration exercises need time and resources.
- Integrate interdisciplinarity at all project levels of the process.
- Implement interdisciplinary research funding on all levels of governance (regional, national, international).
- Train scientists to work in interdisciplinary projects and acquire the necessary skills for this.
- Build interdisciplinarity into the project right from the very start - Avoid the ‘add-on’ approach (i.e. trying to tack interdisciplinarity on later in a project).
- Leave space to consider and negotiate interdisciplinary interaction once the project has begun (sometimes calls/evaluations see this as a weak point.)

³ “SSH experiences with FP7 – a commentary”, p.7.

5. Can you give examples from your agency's experience of how SSH research areas can be involved in (a) opening up to each other, (b) opening up to the sciences, (c) translating findings and/or methods to or from the sciences, (d) contributing to the emergence of new, cross-disciplinary fields, and/or (e) transcending, with its results and insights, the fields of academic research?

Examples of how SSH research can be involved to open perspectives for other disciplines were provided e.g. by

- the **PERSEUS project** (2011-2014) on border protection through surveillance use. While SSH was originally only included to assure that legal and ethical aspects would not be disregarded, it then led to new and important research questions being addressed. The project demonstrates SSH's usefulness in an interdisciplinary context, in this case for the task of conceptualising the research.
- the **CLICO project** (2010-2012) on climate change, hydro-conflicts and human security, which brought together climatologists, hydrologists, social environmental scientists, geographers, political scientists and economists on the question of the link between climate change and human security.

With regard to EU projects funded under FP7, Theme 8 "Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities", there are numerous examples where results from SSH research have transcended the fields of academic research. Some selected examples are:⁴

- Members of the project **MERCURY** (2009-2012) on multilateralism met with the president of the European Union, José Manuel Barroso, to discuss their results. The Commission noted that Mercury "is likely to have an impact on EU external relations".
- The project **INNODRIVE** (2008-2011) produced research results that were also included in the Innovation Union Competitiveness Report 2011. This report acknowledges that innovation is more than investment in research and development (R&D). It points out that some countries that are not particularly R&D-intensive rank very high on a broader measure of innovation intensity. By making visible such different innovation models across countries, the findings of INNODRIVE are arguably influencing the implementation of the EU 2020 strategy.
- The Project **PRIV-WAR** (2008-2011) was concerned with regulations for private military and security companies. The European Parliament adopted a resolution that draws on the results of PRIV-WAR and its recommendations and which says, among other things, that the European Parliament "considers that the adoption of EU regulatory measures, including a comprehensive normative system for the establishment, registration, licensing, monitoring and reporting on violations of applicable law by private military and security (PMS) companies [...] is necessary".

An example for the successful contribution of SSH to foresighting of societal challenges is the following project:

- **PASHMINA** (2009-2012) developed and experimented a new generation of tools to better assess the interaction between the economy and the environment, the paradigm shifts in the energy-transport-environment nexus and land use and territorial functions, and the shifts beyond GDP measurement and the economic growth paradigm. The project produced a set of policy recommendations for decision-makers which are crucial for modelling long-term global scenarios.

⁴ More examples can be found in the NET4SOCIETY publication "Success Stories: Impact of Social Sciences & Humanities", which is available for download here: <http://www.net4society.eu/public/382.php>

6. Given your experience, which funding mechanisms have proven to be particularly successful in strengthening SSH? (on a national/European/international level)

It can be stated that **small and medium-scale research projects** are generally preferred by the SSH community. Of even higher importance, and independent of the size of projects, is the need to **fund more than just one project per topic** to ensure a variety of perspectives on a given topic.⁵

While smaller projects better suit the needs of SSH researchers, at the same time there is a need to fund **targeted large projects** in order to address very specific issues e.g. where infrastructures need to be established. Examples for such projects in the past would be SHARE (“The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe”) or DARIAH (“Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities”).

SSH research for tackling societal challenges usually has a strong **comparative dimension**; a broad thematic coverage and a wide geographical focus is of importance for the research design. This needs to be acknowledged by evaluation criteria.

Funding mechanisms for highly interdisciplinary projects, that also include SSH, need to take into account that interdisciplinary research is more time consuming. They should offer the possibility to include **pilot phases**.

7. Who would be key players from outside Europe to be involved in order to identify best practice in research funding and foster research cooperation? (individuals and/or institutions)

Key players from outside Europe in order to identify **best practices in research funding** could be: NSF (US), NEH (US), SSHRC (Canada), HSRC (South Africa), CONACYT (Mexico), FAPESP (Brazil), Indian Council for Social Science Research (India), UNESCO, and the ISSC (International Social Science Council).

A further important player would be the **Consortium of Humanities Centres and Institutes (CHCI)** as a highly international umbrella organisation and a network for the circulation of information and best practices related to the organisational and management dimensions of humanities centres and institutes. For the European neighbourhood regions, new transnational groups of research institutes are emerging, that will become important partners, such as HUMED for the Mediterranean.

In the emerging field of “**Public Humanities**” a key player in terms of research cooperation is the American Council of Learned Societies, which has established a National Task Force on Scholarship and the Public Humanities.

8. What would be the single most important measure that should be implemented at an EU level to foster SSH research?

The single most important measure to foster SSH research at an EU level would be to foresee a **considerably higher budget for the programme parts with a strong SSH orientation** (in particular Challenge 6 “Europe in a changing world – inclusive, innovative, reflective societies”). The overall success rate in FP7 Theme 8 “SSH” is around just 9% and

⁵ “SSH experiences with FP7 – a commentary”, p. 32.

is thus considerably lower than the average success rate of around 22% in FP7 in general.⁶ At the same time the FP7 Interim Evaluation showed that the average total evaluation score of funded projects in Theme 8 “SSH” (13.75 points out of 15) is the highest of all thematic areas in the specific programme “Cooperation”.⁷ Due to budgetary restraints, a substantial number of excellent proposals have been denied funding in past calls.

In order to fulfil the objectives of Horizon 2020, successfully harness Social Sciences and Humanities for tackling societal challenges, and increase the overall success rate, a **budget of 5 billion €** for the 6th Challenge “Europe in a changing world – inclusive, innovative and reflective societies” is necessary.

9. What would be your suggestion how best to support the further integration of the new Member States into EU-funded SSH research?

A **strong NCP network**, in particular for the 6th Challenge, is needed to ensure a high quality of consulting services provided by National Contact Points in EU 12 countries. In addition, an NCP network can provide support with regard to partnering and help to build consortia through the organisation of targeted conferences and brokerage events, or services like the establishment of a Research Directory of key SSH players.

However, the integration of new Member States is not only an SSH-specific challenge but a general issue for all fields of EU-funded research. In FP7, participation of EU12 countries in terms of proposals was comparably high in Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities”. **Measures should therefore not be restricted to SSH but need to be horizontal to all fields of Horizon 2020.**

A possibility for such a horizontal measure could be a mechanism that provides top-up funding for successful projects to include in an additional research phase EU12 researchers – similar to measures that existed in earlier Research Framework Programmes.

In addition, further integration could be best supported by short-term exchange programmes that allow EU12 researchers to do research in EU15 research centres as well as summer schools and similar seminars where EU12 post-docs can make connections to potential partners. Last but not least, low national budgets for funding SSH research in EU 12 countries pose a major obstacle that needs to be addressed.

NET4SOCIETY is the international network of National Contact Points for Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in the 7th European Framework Programme (FP7). National Contact Points (NCPs) are set up to guide researchers in their quest for securing EU funding. NET4SOCIETY includes the European and International National Contact Points of almost 50 countries. NET4SOCIETY is funded by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme.

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⁶ European Commission (2010): “Third FP7 Monitoring Report. Monitoring Report 2009”, available for download at http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index_en.cfm?pg=fp7-monitoring. SSH success rate refers to the first two calls (2007-2009).

⁷ Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme, p. 27.