ISSUES - The Voice of Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities in Europe

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Editorial Note

This is the first edition of the bi-annual Newsletter "ISSUES – The voice of SSH in Europe". This newsletter informs policy-makers and other stakeholders about the societal impact of European Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research and current developments in this area.

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activities (modelling, foresight and scenario development) and the formulation of policy recommendations form important aspects of the programme.

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FULL ARTICLES

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The challenges connected to economic and societal transformations that Europe and the world are facing, need to be tackled by evidence-based policy-making. The knowledge base for developing such policies is provided by Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities research.

The first edition of "ISSUES" takes a closer look at the context and societal impact of SSH research. This will be done especially with regard to the goals set out by the EU 2020 strategy – currently being translated into the objectives of Horizon 2020, the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, starting in 2014.

"ISSUES" aims at accompanying the process of developing Horizon 2020. To set the framework for this task is the goal of this first edition.

"ISSUES" is a publication of NET4SOCIETY, the international network of National Contact Points for Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities in the 7th European Framework Programme (www.net4society.eu).

Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities shaping Europe

What can be done to promote economic growth in Europe that is sustainable, smart and inclusive? How can we foster entrepreneurship and innovations through public policies? How do we address the grand societal challenges that lay ahead of Europe and the world, such as climate change or ageing populations? European researchers in Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) work everyday on providing answers to these questions.

The SSH research community in Europe is huge: it comprises about one third of all active researchers, more than 380.000 in total (Source: EUROSTAT, Reference Year 2007, EU27, headcount, with incomplete numbers for Greece, France and the Netherlands). This size is also reflected in the vast range of topics that social scientists and humanities researchers work on – it ranges, for example, from topics such as understanding the innovation system or successful policies for growth to aspects of cultural interactions and diversities.

The impact of SSH research in terms of demonstrable contributions to the benefit of society and the economy is manifold – though not always easy to measure. Research in **Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities has led to innovations in areas such as business management, governance, social services, education and consumer rights**. SSH research provides essential knowledge for understanding the world we live in – in terms of politics, economy and culture. It helps to shape identities, to understand human diversity and to hold communities together. Indeed, insights from SSH research shape policy and

legislation actions.

The knowledge gained from education research has contributed to increasing the skills of Europe's working population. Another example is the 2006 report of the economist Nicholas Stern that analysed the economic impacts of climate change. The Stern Report showed that the benefits of strong and early action on climate change outweigh the costs – and that the costs of inaction would be far greater. The report attracted global media attention and contributed to putting climate change high on political agendas.

Information gathered by SSH infrastructures funded in the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) such as SHARE (Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe) and ESS (European Social Survey) is utilised by a vast variety of users – from public welfare bodies to insurance companies and industry.

At the same time, research on the arts and humanities directly contributes to the flourishing cultural sector in Europe – a sector that is not only of significant economic importance, but also of relevance for the wellbeing of Europe's population. Innovation, including social innovation, is an important instrument to reach the future goals of the European Union. **Research in the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities contributes significantly to the generation and distribution of innovations**. Cultural and societal knowledge fosters creativity and helps to understand the economic, social and cultural conditions that will either support or hinder the implementation of innovations.

Research funding from the European Framework Programmes has contributed substantially to the internationalisation of the SSH community. Since the beginning of the 7th Framework Programme (FP7), more than 150 projects with over 1400 participants have been funded in the FP7 Specific Programme "Cooperation", Theme 8 "Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities". The quality of the proposals and funded research projects is high – the evaluation scores given are above-average, as the "Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme" (2010) has shown. However, as SSH research receives the smallest budget of all thematic priorities of FP7, the success rate is under 10% and a good number of excellent proposals do not receive funding. To make use of the full potential of this research in the future, it is therefore of utmost importance to foresee an adequate budget for SSH research funding in the future European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation "Horizon 2020" (2014-2020).

NET4SOCIETY, the network of National Contact Points for Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities in FP7, has advocated the importance of SSH research within future European research funding with a number of initiatives. The network has submitted a position paper within the European Commission's public consultation process on the Green Paper "From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation funding". The Position Paper particularly stressed the importance of Social Innovation as a part of the Europe 2020 strategy and the contribution that SSH research can make to foster social innovation. The European Commission's proposition for "Horizon 2020" contains three pillars: (1) excellent science, (2) industrial leadership and (3) societal challenges. For the third Horizon 2020 pillar of societal challenges, the NET4SOCIETY position paper, proposed a society-focused challenge, entitled "Understanding Europe in a global context – transitions towards innovation". It not only focuses on European societies and its people (" I.Building Resilient Societies") but also on the new and arising responsibilities of the European Union in a volatile political and economic environment ("III. Actor Europe"). It recognizes the necessity of research focusing on explicit targets of the EU 2020 Strategy ("II. Social Innovation", "IV. Education and Employment"). This proposal was supported by numerous SSH key players.

Together with other European organisations and networks in the field of SSH, NET4SOCIETY launched an Open Letter. It is addressed to Europe's policy makers and calls for an independent and significantly strengthened programme for SSH research in "Horizon 2020" (the challenge "Understanding Europe"). The Open Letter can be signed by all interested stakeholders online at http://www.eash.eu/openletter2011. By January 2012 , around 24.000 signatories from all over Europe and beyond had expressed their support. The start of the Open Letter initiative was presented to Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, the European Commissioner for Research and Innovation, in London on 10 November 2011.

On this occasion, Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn confirmed that the inclusion of an SSH focused programme in the Commission's proposal for Horizon 2020 was the result of the expressions of support for SSH research from the research community and other stakeholders such as NET4SOCIETY. Ms Geoghegan-Quinn stressed the importance of SSH research, stating that "in the current context of the deep economic crisis and of constant transformation in our economy and society, the Social Sciences and Humanities help us to address the most fundamental economic, social, political and cultural issues. […] Social Sciences and Humanities are essential in providing the evidence and analysis needed to put our policymaking on a sound footing." While Geoghegan-Quinn's speech was very much welcomed by the SSH institutions represented in London, the realities of the first draft of Horizon 2020 were sobering and let to discussions within the SSH community. Many felt that Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities, were not at the heart of the foreseen six societal challenges.

To ensure that the final framework of Horizon 2020 sufficiently integrates SSH, a number of European research organisations and networks in the field came together in December 2011 to establish a "European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities" (EASSH). This Alliance sees itself as a single contact point for policymakers, societal and scientific stakeholders in Europe and beyond and will provide SSH with a strong voice in Europe.

Links:

Open Letter to support SSH research in future European research funding: http://www.eash.eu/openletter2011

Draft Proposal for an SSH-Challenge "Understanding Europe in a global context: transitions towards innovation societies": http://www.eash.eu/openletter2011/index.php?file=background.htm

Speech of Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science on "The future of Social Sciences and Humanities in Horizon 2020": http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?

reference=SPEECH/11/741&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

NET4SOCIETY Green Paper Consultation Position Paper: http://www.net4society.eu/public/increasing-ssh-visibility.php

NET4SOCIETY survey "SSH experiences with FP7 – a commentary": http://www.net4society.eu/public/documents.php

Report on Social Innovation by the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA) http://ec.europa.eu/bepa/publications/special-issues/index_en.htm

Synopsis of FP7 projects "European Research – Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities – List of projects 2007-2010": http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/books35_en.html

European Commission Portal on Horizon 2020: http://ec.europa.eu/research/horizon2020/index_en.cfm?pg=home

Update on recent Conference "Challenge Social Innovation" and Vienna Declaration

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The concept of social innovation is not yet used in a harmonized way in all contexts, but some definitions have emerged. The Bureau of European Policy Advisers defines social innovation "as a new response to pressing social demands, which affect the processes of social interactions. It is aimed at improving human well-being" (BEPA 2010). An example for a social innovation would be the idea of microcredits which enable poorer members of the population in emerging economies to start small businesses and earn a living. The concept remains controversial – the danger that in some cases social innovation "would be window-dressing for outsourcing services that the state was providing but cannot afford anymore", as one conference participant put it, was also discussed.

The conference aimed at profoundly discussing the significance of social innovation as a highly relevant topic in research and research policy contexts. Addressing a wide range of research communities as well as specialists from different social fields and from policy related institutions, researchers and experts from the social sciences and the humanities actively participated in discussing different aspects and implications of social innovation, both in the plenary and the 14 parallel sessions of the conference. At the matchmaking event, organised by NET4SOCIETY on the third day, more than 150 conference participants met through pre-arranged bilateral meetings, networking towards potential future research proposals to be funded in FP7.

The most immediate outcome of the conference is the 'Vienna declaration: the most needed social innovations and related research topics', addressing researchers, social innovators, and key organisations involved in innovation research and policy. The declaration consists of 14 research topics or questions that were voted on by the plenary of the conference participants such as e.g. 'Lifelong learning, work and intergenerational solidarity as components of societally engaged ageing'. The research topics identified and prioritised, were also chosen according to their contribution to a desirable development in the globalised knowledge society, allowing for social sciences to feed strongly into the preparation of the EU's next framework programme for Research and Innovation, HORIZON 2020. The Vienna Declaration was formally presented to Commissioner Maire Geoghegan-Quinn during an academic event in London, on 10th Nov. 2011.

Links:

Challenge Social Innovation Conference website: http://www.socialinnovation2011.eu/

Vienna Declaration: The most needed social innovations and related research topics http://www.socialinnovation2011.eu/vienna-declaration-2011

Video screening of plenary sessions of the conference: http://www.net4society.eu/public/socialinnovation2011.php

Robert Burmanjer from the European Commission on Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities in FP7

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To learn more about future scenarios, the NET4Society project discussed current and future challenges with Robert Burmanjer, Head of the Unit "Social Sciences and Humanities", Directorate-General Research and Innovation, European Commission, during the Conference "Challenge Social Innovation" (http://www.socialinnovation2011.eu/).

Touching on the current state-of-play in the area of SSH in FP7, Robert Burmanjer stated that the programme enjoyed great popularity and was "currently oversubscribed: for normal projects we have a success rate of around 6% while for large projects we have a success rate of 13%. This means that it is a very competitive programme, since our main criteria is the scientific excellence."

During our discussion, Robert Burmanjer emphasized that the main challenge for SSH research is multidisciplinarity. He stated that it is important for the scientific community to work together to underpin policy decisions in various domains, such as health, employment etc, by relevant scientific results.

Regarding the next European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, "Horizon 2020", he was confident "that there will be a self-standing challenge that will be occupying itself with societal issues and at the same time will make an endeavour to make a certain degree of mainstreaming of SSH involvement in the other main challenges. Besides that, in terms of bottom up proposals there is always the opportunity of the ERC as well to cater for this kind of demand."

On the topic of social innovation, a concept that has become more and more important in the context of European Commission initiatives, Robert Burmanjer highlighted substantial interest from SSH researchers in social innovation: "The research community itself is of the opinion that there should be a self standing research programme dealing with social innovation issues and this has also come forth with the public consultation that took place this year".

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European Commission publishes Horizon 2020 proposal

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More Information can be found here: http://ec.europa.eu/research/horizon2020/index_en.cfm?pg=home

Forward-looking activities to determine future social challenges

Within the FP7 Theme "Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities" a number of research projects were funded that give insights about future societal challenges that need to be addressed by EU research and innovation. Results of these projects fed into the EC publication "European forward-looking activities: Building the future of "Innovation Union" and ERA".

The publication can be downloaded here: http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/library_en.html