



The Future of Social Sciences and Humanities: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Approaches

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The report on the future of social sciences and humanities delivered to the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research is based upon some relevant EU projects in the field. Of particular interest are the following studies:

- **Social Sciences and Humanities for Europe**
- **Strengthening the role that Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) have on the ERA Development**
- **Study of the Impacts of the Transport RTD Projects in FP5 and FP6**

The three studies are complementary and look at the relevance of social sciences and humanities for policy, economy and society. Science and research have undergone a remarkable shift of attention. Science and research have not only to meet the traditional criteria of excellence, validity and reliability, but have to be evaluated against the criteria of valorisation.

Hence, social sciences and the humanities are confronted with the following challenge: **How can the social sciences and humanities better address the needs of societies in the future?**

This question is far from being trivial. Societal needs are not easy to be defined, especially when it comes to “intangibles” like social sciences and humanities. It is, for instance obvious, that life sciences and medical research fulfil societal needs. And nobody would question the necessity of basic and generic research in the field; there are some normative debates about the direction of this research, however the principle of spending money on life science research is widely accepted.

Of course, these are relevant questions for social sciences and humanities as well: what about the access to health, what about participation of patients concerned about the direction of medical research is directed, and the research on which sicknesses are prioritised? These questions, however, are by and large understood as normative questions to be decided politically. The need for scientific knowledge in this field is frequently neglected.

The study ‘**Social Sciences and Humanities for Europe**’ has examined the prospects for future development of the social sciences and humanities in Europe, their potential alignment and how they relate to social demands and societal needs. The results shed light on the added value of a stronger inclusion of the social sciences and the humanities in the research policies in Europe. It has considered the experiences of the diverse international and national communities of scholars as well as those of knowledge stakeholders.

The study ‘**Strengthening the role that Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) have on the ERA Development**’ shed some light on the general role of social sciences and humanities in the European funding strategy and on the perception of social sciences and humanities (SSH) held by natural scientists, agricultural scientists, medical scientists and engineers. The contribution of social

sciences and humanities in interdisciplinary teams reflects the paradigm shift: In some literature this shift is referred to 'Mode-2' research. It overcomes the traditional gap between basic research and applied research. The societal impact has to be assessed in a rather indirect way, e.g. it has to be understood against the impact of the final result of the interdisciplinary team and not alone directly against the social science and humanities exercises.

In direct application of this approach, the '**Study of the Impacts of the Transport RTD Projects in FP5 and FP6**' is a good example how science and research can serve the society, economy and policy better with interdisciplinary approaches.

The results of the studies here referred to have had an impact on the European funding strategies.

- Unlike in earlier Framework Programmes the Commission has paid **more attention to the inclusion of social sciences and humanities in all of the thematic programmes** of the 7th Framework Programme. There are examples for projects that were funded by the Commission under the condition that research on societal issues has to be undertaken and the consortium has hence to be enlarged. This was possible through the increase of flexibility of the financial instruments in FP7.
- However, the **programme that require social sciences' and humanities' knowledge has been maintained** for issues related to (European) democracy and other fields in which policy studies are required.
- Not directly related to the three studies is **the construction of the European Research Council** that is of interest for purely academic research.

All the three studies have clearly shown that social sciences and humanities have an important role to play in the European research. However, not all national research systems did already react to this important shift from the traditional scientific paradigm to the more general paradigm of knowledge creation and diffusion. The new paradigm will become increasingly relevant in the international competitiveness. Lack of understanding will increase the gap between leaders and laggards.