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A Pumping Heart for European Research

Three scenarios for research on society, democracy and culture in the 9th European Research Framework Programme

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the debate about the role of research on the future of society, democracy and culture in Europe in the next European Research Framework Programme (FP9).

The future of Europe is uncertain because of a number of seriously challenging problems: Challenges to our society, challenges to our democracy, challenges to our economic system, scepticism of traditional institutions and of our media, political radicalisation, inequality, and challenges to our identity as European societies and as Europe as a whole.

It is this paper's **central hypothesis** that due to this uncertain future and these challenges, the **Member States and the European institutions would not want to give up necessary research on these central survival issues in the next Research Framework Programme**. The EU actors and the Member States will want to see this kind of research being carried out, but they will also want social innovation to happen in this field, because this research and these social innovations provide the knowledge, data and impact that are necessary for Europe's future.

Research on this issue is the core concern of the disciplines in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH). For instance, Horizon 2020 projects such as "The Choice for Europe since Maastricht - Member States' Preferences for Economic and Fiscal Integration" (EMU_SCEUS),[1] which looks at fiscal integration from an innovative political science perspective, the project NEGOTIATE, which examines the consequences of experiencing labour market exclusion among young Europeans,[2] or the project "Cultural Opposition – Understanding the Cultural Heritage of Dissent in the Former Socialist Countries" (COURAGE),[3] which describes the rich and colourful legacy of cultural opposition in the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, all of these are projects do not shy away from addressing hard questions and making bold recommendations on Europe's future.
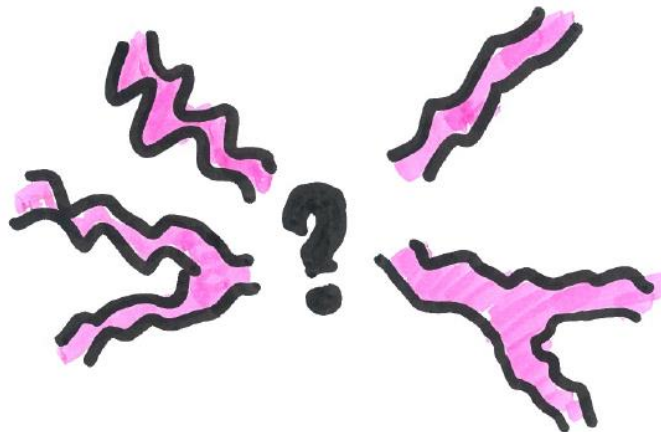
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[1] emuchoices.eu
[2] negotiate-research.eu
[3] cultural-opposition.eu

The question is – will such research be funded in the future?

Let us look at **three possible scenarios**: They are called "No Heart", "Old School" and "Pumping Heart". To serve Europe's society and Europe's future, we need a strong funding strand dedicated to research on society and culture at the heart of the next Framework Programme.

"No Heart"
SSH integration only

The fear that research on society, democracy, economy and culture will disappear in the next FP is of course unfounded. Instead, we might simply see more integration of these topics into technical research questions through the concept of SSH Integration. This concept was a good idea when Horizon 2020 was created, but it has not worked. The European Commission's report on the "Integration of social sciences and humanities in Horizon 2020" states this fact in diplomatic terms and calls quantitative integration of SSH "satisfactory", and the quality of SSH integration "highly uneven".[4] A recent analysis by the Austrian research promotion agency FFG is more candid: "The integration of expertise from the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) into all thematic areas relevant to solving societal challenges can only be classified as not having been sufficiently successful, in quantitative as well as qualitative terms."[5] Even the European Parliament calls for improvement in its latest statement: "[…] SSH integration means SSH research in interdisciplinary projects and not an ex-post add-on to otherwise technological projects".[6]

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[4] European Commission (2017): Integration of social sciences and humanities in Horizon 2020. Participants, budget and disciplines : 2nd monitoring report on SSH-flagged projects funded in 2015 under the societal challenges and industrial leadership priorities, p. 10 and 12, bookshop.europa.eu/en/integration-of-social-sciences-and-humanities-in-horizon-2020-pbKI0116934

[5] FFG (2017): ERA-Themendossier Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in Horizon 2020 (English version expected to be online by the end of June 2017), p. 5, translation by author, www.ffg.at/sites/default/files/downloads/program_line/ssh_themendossier.pdf

[6] European Parliament (2017): Draft report on the assessment of Horizon 2020 implementation in view of its interim evaluation and the Framework Programme 9 proposal (2016/2147(INI)), Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, p. 13, www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+COMPARL+PE-600.940+01+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN

As stated in the introduction, this paper builds on the hypothesis that the European Institutions and the Member States will not want to give up certain types of research projects relating to the fields of society, democracy, economy, geopolitics, culture and democracy. As a consequence, these projects will be funded somehow, even if under the label of SSH-integration only.
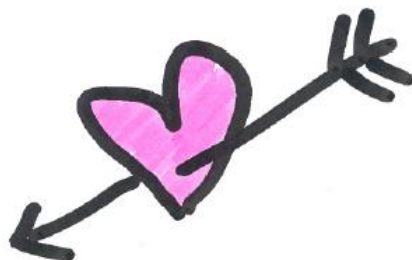
Therefore, the next question is: Where will they be funded? Let us think this through: Where would certain topics that are currently funded mostly under "Societal Challenge 6 – Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies" finally end up?

Such topics will have to be placed under other Societal Challenges or so-called "Missions". Missions – defined as having more specific, technical, product-oriented aims in comparison to Societal Challenges – will most likely provide the new micro-structure in FP9. At the moment, there is talk that Missions, like for instance the "End of Plastic", will structure FP9. Therefore, projects looking at challenges within the field of society, democracy and culture will have to be placed under inappropriate umbrellas like the one mentioned before, or others like "Robot Revolution" or "Urban Utopia".

But complete SSH integration without any funding strand dedicated to Europe's society, culture and democracy will be like a Framework Programme without a heart; a heart where research is conducted on the core questions of the European project, research on its economy, its democracies, its history, its languages, its identity. The "No Heart"-approach will cause severe problems for the European research landscape, and in general for a European science community which should serve our society. A lot of bypasses will be needed to channel the veins and arteries around the hole the missing heart leaves behind. If there are no Missions to examine social or cultural questions, this would simply ignore some of the most important issues we are facing today. In the short term, this would be bad for Europe. In the longer term, we will find that our capacity to undertake social or humanistic research would be further eroded. As a consequence, the absence of a central funding strand to which SSH disciplines can be connected undermines our future capability to identify, examine and find solutions for some of the most significant challenges we will face.

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"Old school"
A classical, small SSH challenge

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This is the current approach of Horizon 2020. Rather than having no programme at all for research on Europe's society and culture, the Commission created Societal Challenge 6 –"Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies" as a compromise. The programme that serves as a mini-hub for research on society and culture has, however, become not much more than the dark, shabby corner of Horizon 2020, with a tiny share of 1.7 % of all the money for Societal Challenge going there. In the face of the

threat of having no such programme in FP9 at all, one could resort to securing something similar to Horizon 2020 rather than ending up with no funding, or SSH integration only.

Even the tiny share of 1.7 % does not all go entirely to research. 25 % of this budget share is reserved for so called "Other Actions" – mostly support for policy activities – and is not used for competitive research calls. A large share of the research budget of Societal Challenge 6 also goes to technical research in ICT, although there is a dedicated ICT programme in the LEIT-pillar of Horizon 2020. The Commission itself admits that most of the money in Societal Challenge 6 – the programme that should fund research on democracy, unemployment, radicalisation, inequality, migration, etc. – is not used for SSH research on these issue: "During the period 2014-2015, the budget devoted to socio-economic research topics under Challenge 6 in the Work Programme was EUR 127 million, compared to a total budget of EUR 310 million for the entire Societal Challenge, around 41 % of the budget." [7]

The data analysis by the European Alliance for the Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH) shows what this means for the future: "Extrapolated to the seven years of H2020, it makes for an estimated investment of just EUR 450 million in understanding such significant problems; as little as 0.6% of the overall budget. This represents a sharp decline from FP7 Theme 8 "Socio-Economic Sciences and the Humanities" both in terms of the gross funding (EUR 580 million) and the overall proportion (1.3% of the total FP7 budget)."[8]

To put this very small sum of SSH funding into perspective, let us look at what happens if SSH-research enters into the contest for research funding:

When SSH research receives money on a competitive basis, it typically gets a quarter of all funds available. When we look at the performance of the ERC in Horizon 2020, we see an average of 24 % of the budget allocated to SSH.[9] The data for Austria is similar: 20 % of the budget of all projects funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF (on the basis of an open contest for all disciplines) goes to projects from SSH disciplines.

If SSH disciplines do so well in excellence-based funding schemes, why do we not use their expertise more intensively in mission-oriented research programmes? SSH disciplines should also receive an appropriate budget share in top-own, mission-oriented research calls. Otherwise, we will miss out on some of the best brains when we try to tackle society's problems.
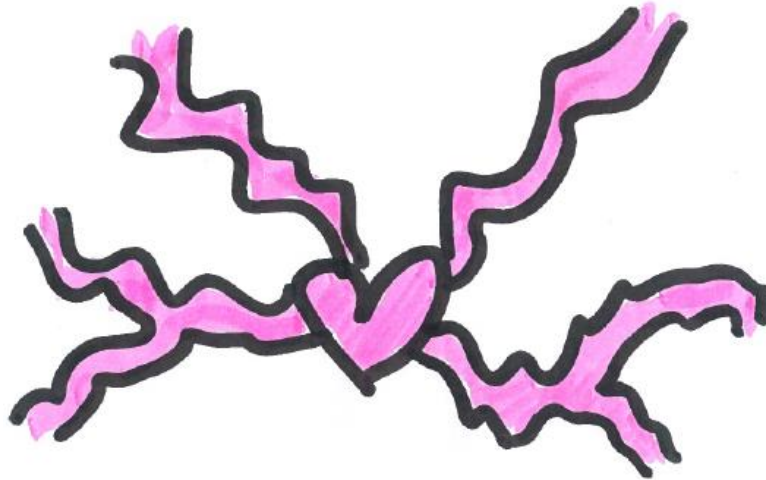
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[7] European Commission (2017): Issue papers for the High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research and innovation programmes, see above, p. 107.

[8] EASSH (2017):, EASSH assesses the DG RI analysis of SSH research contribution in the "Issue Papers" for the High Level Lamy Group, p. 1,

[9] 24.6 % in 2015 and 23.7 % in 2016. These approximate numbers are provided by the European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH). The calculation is based on the budget figures of the ERC (1,631 billion Euro in 2015, 1,619 billion Euro in 2016, see European Parliamentary Research Service, 2015: Horizon 2020 Budget and Implementation, table on p. 21, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/571312/EPRS_IDA%282015%29571312_EN.pdf) and an approximation of funding allocated to SSH projects, based on the total number of projects awarded per scheme, and on the assumption they required the maximum grant available (see ERC Statistics https://erc.europa.eu/document-category/statistics).

"Pumping heart"
Research Missions on society, democracy and culture at the heart of FP9

The pumping heart approach means having both, SSH integration and a true and financially solid Mission (or several Missions) for research on Europe's society and culture. With that, we will have a pumping heart in the next Framework Programme, and a strong and vital SSH blood supply running through the arteries of the entire Framework Programme, energising all other Challenges and Missions with SSH competence and energy.

The Austrian Think Tank on FP9 comes to this conclusion on what is needed: "A genuinely 'European' SSH-research strand, dealing with Europe (among others) as ideological concept, as societal reality, as identity and as political structure."[10]

So, we need both: better SSH integration and an excellent and well-funded programme that engages in research on Europe's society and culture (because SSH integration must be linked to first-class research).

However, Horizon 2020's Societal Challenge 6 is not a good template for constructing this new Mission. Why not?

First, it is a very mixed bag: "Societal Challenge 6 covers not only SSH relevant research such as on migration, polarisation, employment etc., but also ICT research topics, innovation policy topics and a whole array of other actions, such as COST, which makes its coordination a very challenging task."[11] Because of its mixed nature, the programme is very hard to communicate to researchers and policy makers. In other words, such an elusive research programme is unmanageable.

Second, it is seriously underfunded (see above under the "Old School" scenario).

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[10] Austrian FP9 Think Tank (2017): Fostering Impact and Sustainable Collaboration in FP9 within a new Common Research, Technology and Innovation Policy
www.era.gv.at/object/document/3117/attach/FP9_Theses_Paper_2_final.pdf
[11] European Commission (2017): Issue papers for the High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research and innovation programmes, p. 107,
ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/hlg_issue_papers.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none

The aim should be a funding rate in mission-oriented programmes that comes closer to those budget shares that SSH research is able to receive in excellence-based programmes like the ERC. A new research programme on society and culture should be much bigger. And Europe's citizens are also asking for more SSH research.

If you ask citizens, ordinary people in our Member States, which questions they want to pose to science, which topics they would like to see research on, you basically end up with two fields: social sciences and health. A European research project that received funding through Horizon 2020 asked more than 2,000 citizens in 30 countries on what topics they would like to see more research done.[12] We should listen to them. Of course, we cannot only do research in the fields of social sciences, humanities and health, but we should get better aligned with the questions on our citizens' minds. A European Commission reflection paper on the social dimension of Europe also shows that there is a role for research.[13]

What are the biggest challenges for Europe according to its citizens? The answer is: unemployment, social inequalities, migration, terrorism and security issues, the public debt of Member States, insufficient economic growth and the ageing population.[14] This is the outcome of the latest Eurobarometer data of December 2016, and it reads like a summary of the issues SSH disciplines are working on. It also reads like seven possible missions for FP9 …

We need to do much better in SSH integration. So far it has not worked.

Solutions have been put on the table, for instance by the European Commission's Task Force on SSH-Integration[15], by the League of European Research Universities (LERU)[16], by Science Europe[17] and many others (see an overview of position papers from various stakeholders on the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 and on the next Framework Programme on the ERA Portal Austria[18]).

Let's just implement them!

We need both! We need well-functioning SSH Integration, and dedicated Missions for research on Europe's democracies, societies and cultures.

Do we have a choice? Open the Financial Times on any given day, and you will find that economic problems, migration, radicalisation, crises of democracy and debates deeply rooted in historical questions among the top headlines. All these are questions at the heart of SSH research. If we want to meet Europe's challenges, we need strong SSH research to be the pumping heart and life-sustaining blood in the arteries of the next Framework Programme.

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[12] www.cimulact.eu

[13] European Commission (2017): Reflection paper on the social dimension of Europe, ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-social-dimension-europe_en.pdf

[14] European Commission (2016), "Future of Europe", Special Eurobarometer 451, p. 13, ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2131

[15] European Commission (2017): Integration of social sciences and humanities in Horizon 2020, see above, p. 61

[16] League of European Research Universities (LERU) (2016), Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020, Advice Paper no.21, www.leru.org/files/publications/LERUs_interim_evaluation_of_Horizon_2020_final.pdf

[17] Science Europe (2016), Position Statement, The Framework Programme that Europe Needs, p. 12, www.scienceeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/SE_Position_Statement_H2020.pdf

[18] Input-Papers on the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 and on the next framework programme, www.era.gv.at/object/document/2871

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