SSH Integration in Horizon Europe and its Missions

January 2022

In this contribution, EASSH makes a plea for a better understanding of the SSH research contribution and demonstrates that the Missions have so far failed to ensure that an inclusive mechanism is in place. We hope that the second call for experts can identify some good academic profiles to be included.

EASSH welcomes the continued commitment of the European Commission to integrate SSH expertise in decision making processes across the major programmes of Horizon Europe (HEu).

However, in the four years of monitoring Horizon 2020 (2012-2017), the integration of SSH across the societal challenges has remained weak and EASSH has highlighted clear recommendations to improve the architecture of HEu to integrating SSH research, but HEu has not yet implemented enough changes to improve previous results. We express our concerns that HEu will not live up to the ambitions that the Commission has set itself with regard to embedding SSH expertise.

The European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH) thanks the European Commission for its continued commitment to integrating research from the humanities, arts and social sciences in the cooperation programme via the research funded in the different clusters, and the Missions. The true success of HE heavily depends on an integration of the full range of perspectives offered and covered by these disciplines.

The Commission's own reports attest to the **continuing difficulty of integrating SSH research across the societal challenges of Horizon 2020**. While we acknowledge the genuine challenge of interdisciplinary integration, EASSH has already made recommendations **for transforming the implementation of SSH integration in Horizon Europe (HEu)** and addressing the bottlenecks that emerged in the implementation of H2020. . We strongly encourage the Commission to direct its energies to ensuring that the recommendations made will be implemented.

In previous papers, EASSH has highlighted three main dimensions of the H2020 architecture, namely call design, call implementation and evaluations, that acted as barriers access to SSH researchers contributions. EASSH thus recommended:

- a strong cluster on societies,
- a redefinition of the concept of integration,
- an enhanced participation of SSH academic experts
- a revised methodology for monitoring interdisciplinary integration.

Design of the work programme

Horizon Europe has only recently closed its first round of calls for the 2021-2022 work programme and we see some hopeful signs. The intervention areas of all clusters have a more open approach to the contribution from SSH disciplines and more attention to the impact on society (which does not necessarily mean integrating research from SSH). Some topics are skilfully written to clearly highlight what kind of arts, humanities or social sciences disciplines are a better fit for addressing a given issue.

EASSH acknowledges that topics and intervention areas are the outcome of protracted negotiations between national and European priorities. Yet, the position of SSH researchers in contributing to the design of the programme remains marginal.

There have been several attempts to look systematically and objectively at the work previously undertaken in relation to policy priorities in the set-up of the new Strategic Planning approach adopted by the Commission. Efforts have also been made to assess the future needs for research investment and to identify research gaps. However, the EC report on integration and EASSH's own work have both demonstrated that in multidisciplinary projects and in the of large-scale challenges, SSH research is under represented both in terms of previous research funded and publications 'connected' to policy topics. Therefore, we are concerned that the appropriate subject and discipline expertise from SSH is once more absent, or at least scarce, from the process.

Implementation of the programme

H2020 demonstrated that the good intentions driving the overall programme can be undermined by poor implementation, particularly at the level of the evaluation of proposals. A preliminary analysis conducted by EASSH has demonstrated that, for example, **the proportion of evaluators with SSH backgrounds was very low in all H2020 societal challenges other than SC6 – in some cases less than 3% of evaluators – making it difficult to evaluate SSH-flagged topics.** EASSH has also observed that, in challenges where a reasonable proportion of SSH experts are included in the lists of reviewers, the integration of SSH research has shown better results.[1]

In spite of this easily evidenced gap between the policy of SSH integration and its practice, evaluation processes have changed little from H2020 to HEu, which seems more an 'evolution rather than a revolution'. Chapter 5, Art 49 of the HEu Regulations 2021/695 does state when discussing experts: "*When appointing independent external experts, the Commission or the relevant funding body shall take appropriate measures to seek a balanced composition within the expert groups and evaluation panels in terms of skills, experience, knowledge, **including in terms of specialisation, in particular on SSH**, geographical diversity and gender, taking into account the situation in the field of the action*."[2]

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[1] See EASSH position paper Interdisciplinary perspectives for Horizon Europe; See also the ouputs of Shape-ID: https://zenodo.org/record/4442374

[2] REGULATION (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of The Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013, p. 45-46.

The legal text is encouraging and EASSH will observe and monitor how it is realised through the choice of experts from SSH disciplines in the evaluations. It is, however, disappointing that no interdisciplinary semi-permanent panels have yet been established to overlook the evaluation of the programme. Working together in an interdisciplinary manner, such panels are crucial to identifying the most well-rounded proposals, where disciplinary balance is able to provide innovative, socially-grounded responses to EU priorities.

Finally, EASSH suggests that simply talking of SSH integration is not enough to make it happen, unless there is a clear gravitational centre responsible for its implementation. The same mechanism could also monitor the process of implementation and eventually adjust emerging bottlenecks. The strategic planning committee seems to be the one responsible for SSH integration, however EASSH has yet to identify any mechanism in place to enforce an efficient process to support SSH integration across the whole programme.

SSH Integrations and Missions

These same concerns also apply to the Missions. The issues addressed by these new mechanisms impact profoundly on society and need a further targeted and intensified investment to ensure their full potential is reached. The first round of HEu has identified five missions, which will be funded by money reallocated from the clusters budget allocation.[3]

All of the Missions have in their title and description a relevant and important focus on people and societies. However, an analysis of members selected for the Mission Boards in July 2019 reveals that out of 64 experts listed in all the boards, 40 are heads of scientific departments and science institutions. **However, none of these experts are currently affiliated with a scientific institute or leading research institution in the arts, humanities or social sciences disciplines.**

The data again demonstrate that there is still a yawning gap between rhetoric and action. Claims that the work of the missions will be embedded in social and cultural contexts are empty without structures that can understand the type of research needed to achieve this aim, where this research is produced and developed, and how to recruit leading researchers to participate. As a new call for experts was launched with a deadline on 2 February, EASSH hopes that greater in SSH academic leadership will be recruited to take part into the Mission boards.

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[3] The five missions are: Adaptation to Climate Change: support at least 150 European regions and communities to become climate resilient by 2030; Cancer: working with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to improve the lives of more than 3 million people by 2030 through prevention, cure and solutions to live longer and better; Restore our Oceans and Waters by 2030; 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030; A Soil Deal for Europe: 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030

Conclusions

EASSH welcomes the positive attitude and intentions expressed by the Commission towards delivering a truly interdisciplinary programme, which focuses on the integration of expertise from the private sector and civil society. However, the lack of SSH expertise in the Mission Boards is a major concern for us.

Our analysis demonstrates, however, that within the in the first call of Mission Board membership, no scientists with SSH expertise have been called to serve, raising continued concern that expertise from these fields will not be able to make the vital contributions expected of them.

EASSH hopes that in the second call for the renewal of the Mission Boards, the Commission will identify academic experts who can contribute to identify the latest research and literature relevant for the Missions including SSH.

EASSH would also like to reinforce previous recommendations for a strong mechanism to design and monitor the process of integration of SSH across all areas of the HEu programme. There is a need for interdisciplinary panels, with an appropriate representation of experts from all disciplines, so that experts may work together in structured evaluations of the programme as a whole, as well as the individual calls.

Our plea is about creating the necessary framework to truly understand and address the challenges at the heart of each Mission. It is about identifying relevant research across all disciplines, including SSH.