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# Current state of the debate regarding the role of Social Sciences and Humanities in Research and Innovation in the EU<sup>1</sup>





**The role of social sciences and humanities (SSH) in European research and innovation (R&I) has been acknowledged for quite some time now. However, an understanding of this role is changing and evolving through successive Framework Programs. Recently, several policy documents contributing to this debate have been developed and the current brief aims to provide an overview of the topic.**

The HubIT project has identified four main dimensions through which the role of SSH can be understood:

- ▶ SSH for increasing competitiveness
- ▶ SSH for ensuring that R&I meet societal needs
- ▶ SSH for communicating R&I results through impact
- ▶ SSH for anticipating and driving change

1. This analysis is only based on a selection of policy documents and thus is not an ultimate guide of the role of SSH in the EU funding of R&I

## SSH for increasing competitiveness.

The future of the EU with the backdrop of rising competition from Asia and the US and related uncertainties provides one way to contextualize the role of SSH. The Lamy report<sup>2</sup> contains suggestions to broaden the concept of innovation to include *social innovations* and to encourage more inter(non)disciplinary collaboration to increase the impact of European research. The report on the assessment of Horizon2020 implementation<sup>3</sup> emphasizes the fact that the EU has not reached its 3% Research and Development (R&D) expenditure goal (only 2.03% of EU GDP in 2015). While SSH has received wider

integration into Horizon2020 compared to Framework Program 7, there have been two notable problems: 1) the budget for SSH partners in Horizon 2020 is concentrated in a few countries (~2/3 of the SSH budget has gone to partners from 7 leading countries – the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Spain and France) and 2) SSH integration in H2020 has so far largely ignored the arts and humanities<sup>4</sup>. The Tallinn Call for Action encourages policymakers to provide more funding for collaborative research including cooperation between SSH and "hard sciences" (e.g. biology, chemistry, physics).

## SSH for ensuring that research and innovation meet societal needs.

A theme shared by most of the analysed sources concerns the SSH contribution to understanding, articulating and advancing the needs of the citizens. The Lamy report calls for prioritizing R&I with high added value for the economy and society. The Mazzucato Report<sup>6</sup> on the mission-oriented approach stresses that

each "mission" should be framed in strong societal terms – as something that has direct impact on individuals' lives. Moreover, the need to combine understandings of sociology, politics and economics with technology is emphasized, as technology alone has not been successful in solving complex problems of

2. Lamy report - Report of the independent High-Level Group on maximising the impact of EU Research & Innovation Programmes (2017). Accessible at: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/other\\_reports\\_studies\\_and\\_documents/hlg\\_2017\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/other_reports_studies_and_documents/hlg_2017_report.pdf)

3. Report on the assessment of Horizon 2020 implementation in view of its interim evaluation and the Framework Programme 9 proposal (2016). Accessible at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A8-2017-0209+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

4. Issue paper for the High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research and innovation programmes: Social Sciences and Humanities and Responsible Research and Innovation (2017). Accessible at: [https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/hlg\\_issue\\_papers.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/hlg_issue_papers.pdf)

5. TALLINN CALL FOR ACTION 2017 Seize the opportunity now: research and innovation matter for the future of Europe (2017). Accessible at: [https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/tallinn\\_call\\_for\\_action\\_2017.pdf](https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/tallinn_call_for_action_2017.pdf)

6. Mazzucato report - Mission-Oriented Research & Innovation in the European Union. A problem-solving approach to fuel innovation-led growth (2018). Accessible at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/mazzucato\\_report\\_2018.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/mazzucato_report_2018.pdf)



modernity. Inclusion of the public in defining the challenges and implementing solutions is noted as something that could play a role in

keeping society motivated and invested in a mission, thus ensuring its sustainability.

### SSH for communicating R&I results.

Tightly connected with the previously mentioned point on engaging the public with research, is the theme of communicating research results in an attractive way. Several issues are mentioned in this regard<sup>7</sup>.

Firstly, creating a cross-sectoral community – an ecosystem – involving multiple stakeholders associated with EU R&I activities is suggested<sup>8</sup>. Policymakers need to make sure that research results are accessible to the public and consequently that more collaboration happens consistently between all involved parties<sup>4</sup>. The Tallinn Call for Action<sup>9</sup>, for example, notes that there is a need for more engagement with the public as well as more dialogue within and

between research, public and policymaker communities. In addition, the mainstream media should feature more news about how R&I projects contribute to society in order to open up constructive dialogue about the limitations of research.

Secondly, the need to create necessary tools to assess the impact of R&I activities and communicate this impact to citizens was mentioned<sup>4</sup>. An SSH perspective and an RRI approach (responsible research and innovation) are instrumental in solving this challenge (making sure that data is available and understandable to the public, that R&I is rationalized in terms of societal benefit, etc.).

### SSH for anticipating and driving change.

Perhaps the main theme present in the analysed sources is the potential of SSH to drive

transformation. Anticipating changes (in the domains of the future of work, democracy,

<sup>7</sup> Issue paper for the High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research and innovation programmes: Social Sciences and Humanities and Responsible Research and Innovation (2017). Accessible at: [https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/hlg\\_issue\\_papers.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/hlg_issue_papers.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space) (2017). Accessible at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32439/st15212en17.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> TALLINN CALL FOR ACTION 2017 Seize the opportunity now: research and innovation matter for the future of Europe (2017). Accessible at: [https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/tallinn\\_call\\_for\\_action\\_2017.pdf](https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/tallinn_call_for_action_2017.pdf)



privacy, etc.) is strongly emphasized - SSH researchers are encouraged to lead projects on such societally relevant topics as working in the era of robotics, living in culturally diverse societies and ensuring equal access to innovation<sup>10</sup>. The mission-oriented approach provided by Mazzucato presupposes that missions are not only reactive to the already existing problems, but also proactive – driving societies to achieve ambitious goals of the future. In conclusion, despite acknowledging the contribution of SSH, there still seems to be a lack of understanding of the concrete role SSH can play in making R&I more competitive – helping to understand the end-users of the product/prototype, the context of innovation, etc. SSH can help with matching R&I goals with societal needs by a) providing added value to technological solutions of complex problems; b) making sure that societal needs are articulated and c) keeping the public interested and engaged in research activities. The contribution of SSH to communicating R&I results is

recognized in the documents analysed in this policy brief, however no specific suggestions are offered as to how the ecosystem of engaged stakeholders can be formed (or can form naturally). A strong emphasis on impact and its assessment suggests a more quantitative and formal approach to understanding the importance of projects and/initiatives. There is an effort to incorporate social sciences and humanities more deeply and organically into European R&I activities while also engaging more actively with the most pressing societal concerns. It is important to understand that the added value of SSH is multidimensional – from articulating new challenges and leading change to developing new ways of understanding whether an initiative was impactful. Whether the approach articulated in analysed documents will lead to development of new funding and/or ecosystem support instruments remains a question.

10. Mazzucato report - Mission-Oriented Research & Innovation in the European Union. A problem-solving approach to fuel innovation-led growth (2018). Accessible at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/mazzucato\\_report\\_2018.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/mazzucato_report_2018.pdf)



**HubIT** (Horizon 2020) is a cooperation effort focused on making ICT research more ethical and responsible through strategic collaboration with social sciences and humanities. The project unites the efforts of 14 partners from 11 countries to ensure the application of responsible research and innovation (RRI) actions to better follow the expectations, needs and values of the society. The HubIT Platform will host **periodic policy briefs**. You can also find some additional information about planned events, including **4 policy workshops**, through the project website above.

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## Key information of HubIT partners:

						
Estonia	Germany	Israel	Italy	Estonia	Slovakia	Denmark
						
Hungary	Lithuania	UK	Portugal	Slovakia	Italy	Germany

