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### **Use of research evidence from Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) for achieving policy and social impacts<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Abstract**

Science and technology are seen as driving forces of modern society. There is general agreement that they shape many aspects of public and personal lives and they often do so in a complex and unpredictable way<sup>2</sup>. The author argues that the grand challenges facing Europe in the Global World associated with demography, sustainability, environment, wellbeing, security, and uncertainty, are of social and ethical, rather than technical and/or technological nature. Research helps deal with unexpected and unforeseeable future. Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) researchers have the core competences needed to address many themes related to the grand challenges.

The author discusses how integration of SSH in interdisciplinary research is supported by the research funding agencies, in particular the Framework Programmes of the European Union, which have been conducive to the establishment of the European SSH Community and European SSH Area.

She looks at difficulties associated with SSH impact assessment and addresses use of SSH research evidence by the key policy actors for shaping policies.

**Key words:** Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH); scientific, policy, and social impact of SSH; use of research evidence; European Research Area (ERA).

#### **European Research Area (ERA): emergence of ambitious research policy in the European Union (EU)**

Research policy has been a constant in the European Union (EU) project ever since the 1<sup>st</sup> Framework Programme (FP) established in 1984. The gradual process of research policy building started with the aim to create European added value to research efforts of Member States (MS). The level of ambition increased over time. In the second half of the 1990s Research and Technology Development (RTD) agenda acquired centrality as research was expected to contribute to achieving growth, enhance employment levels and quality of work, and social cohesion in the European Union. Science and technology were to deliver solutions to a growing list of problems.

The ambitious targets for European research performance were embedded in the creation of a

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<sup>1</sup> This article was inspired by the IMPACT\_EV methodology and data draw from WP7

<sup>2</sup> e.g. van Raan, 2000 and 2000a

European Research Area (ERA) endorsed by the Heads of Governments at meetings in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002). ERA is anchored in the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon. Article 179 of the Treaty foresees a single market in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology will circulate freely. The broader ERA aims are to achieve a unified research area open to the world, based on the internal market through which the Union and its Member States strengthen their scientific and technological bases, their competitiveness and their capacity to collectively address grand challenges (EC, COM 2012).

The overarching ERA vision enshrined in the primary EU legislation is transposed into objectives/key building blocks, which have been underpinned by numerous ERA initiatives. The overarching objective of a creation of a single labour market for researchers, is supported by excellent research institutions and universities, world-class research infrastructures, opening of the ERA to the world, effective knowledge sharing, and well-coordinated research programmes and priorities (joint programming) (e.g. Pauli, 2009).

The ERA process is sustained by an ever-growing number of initiatives and funding instruments. Initiatives address better governance and political steering at the ministerial level, European partnership for researchers, joint programming in research, integration and development of research infrastructures, international cooperation including partnerships with Third Countries, and knowledge transfer and intellectual property (IP) management.

### **The evolution of how EU thinks about SSH**

The EU endeavour to integrate research efforts of MS and of EU and create an internal knowledge market is evident more particularly since the 4<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (1994-1998). In national and EU research policy circles the prevailing view about SSH was that social science systems produced fragmented research with researchers working within their national contexts. It was compartmentalized into disciplinary and sub-disciplinary boxes and lacked integration of knowledge necessary for relevant policy-making, especially at the European level. National SSH research communities were often unaware, partly due to language barriers, of research established in other countries. A significant push towards consolidating fragmented SSH research came through the EU research funding instruments.

Framework Programmes (FP) created an intervention space for overcoming structural and institutional barriers that prevailed in the MS by laying EU ground rules in the form of eligibility rules and calls requirements, and evaluation criteria for accessing ERA financial instruments. FP rules and expectations on how social sciences and humanities were to play a role in meeting the knowledge needs had a significant impact for the emergence and establishment of the European Social Science and Humanities Community (ESSHC) and expansion of the European Social Sciences and Humanities Area (ESSHA).

Ambitions towards SSH grew over years together with increased funding. Already in FP5 (1998-2002) SSH were expected to contribute to addressing major challenges such as ageing, city of tomorrow, or innovation, but often as 'add-on'. They had a more prominent place in addressing social exclusion. Furthermore, in FP5 socio-economic impact was introduced as key evaluation criteria and thus integration of natural and engineering sciences with SSH was encouraged. The expectation toward creating a socio-economic impact in all research areas funded under FP6 and later in FP7 placed SSH at the heart of the attempt to integrate natural and engineering sciences with social dimensions of growth, cohesion and wellbeing.

Transnational research was to address the supra-national challenges. Design and implementation of research in joint research projects and research and training actions involving mandatory mobility were seen as tools leading towards the establishment of the European Research Area. As result of this vision the SSH area of social and policy relevance received substantial funding in 6<sup>th</sup> (2002-2006) and 7<sup>th</sup> (2007-2013) framework programmes.

The EU flagship initiatives accelerated changes in the national science systems and enabled solid establishment of the SSH as significant part of ERA. The EU research agenda and quest for transnationality, multidisciplinary and the new meaning of comparative research (e.g. Agalinos, 2006) had a profound effect on structuring SSH and steering its outputs.

The way social sciences and humanities do research has been changing, more particularly during FP7. This change in itself is a significant outcome of the implementation of research policy through funding of SSH projects. The EU funding of SSH research is a drop in the ocean in comparison to amount of investment by MS in national research projects. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that it had some multiplier effect for shaping national research, training and mobility schemes, and promoting research careers in Europe (e.g. ENGRES, 2014; Avramov, 2015).

### **The evolution of how SSH do research**

The design and implementation of socio-economic research in the EU collaborative projects built on eligibility criteria that required participation of at least two or more partners from different EU-countries and associated countries. In FP7 specific calls sometimes requested seven or more partners, and in general in FP7 there was an embedded conviction that “big is good” and “the bigger the partnerships the better”. There is lack of consensus in the SSH community, and in other disciplines for that matter, as to the extent that FP7 large, so called Integrated Projects (IPs) involving sometimes 20 or more partners, contributed to better, more applicable knowledge and structural consolidation of research excellence. In our view IPs were in practice more of a mechanical sum of loosely related sub-projects and partnerships that were difficult to manage and were not sustainable after the end of EU funding.

Regardless of the controversy over “the right size of partnerships”, what remains unchallenged is evidence about the benefits of transnational cooperation in SSH and establishment of the European SSH area. As result of the stimulus through funding instruments, the intra-EU networking in SSH was intensified. European networks were encouraged to cooperate in research with Third Countries, breaking thus the tradition of bilateral cooperation in SSH, mainly with USA. The meaning of transnational research was in turn shaped by the evaluation criteria that valued user/stakeholder involvement under 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> FPs (and earned centrality in Horizon 2020). Internationalization of SSH was a major achievement of ERA.

The traditional division between pure and applied research faded away. Kuhn and Remøe (2005) argue that a transition occurred from contemplative to collaborative applied SSH research. SSH research community by and large took up the challenge of shaping project outputs and communicating science in ways that are policy oriented. Focus shifted significantly towards partnerships between academia and non-academic institutions. Academia-industry/academic-non-academic organizations/public-private partnerships did not come natural to SSH - they occurred largely EC/top-driven. Requirements were introduced

for academia/stakeholder partnerships<sup>3</sup> or such partnerships were encouraged by embedding inter-sectorial dimension in the evaluation sub-criteria for the selection of research proposals for funding.

In the 3rd call of the Socio-economic Research Key Action of the 5th FP, two themes, “The development of European infrastructures for comparative research in the social sciences and humanities”; and “Support activities to stimulate the development of social sciences and humanities in the European Research Area” were designed to contribute structuring and consolidating SSH area (e.g. Watson et al, 2010). The authors of the evaluation of formation of the ERA in SSH underline the importance of the incorporation of such objectives into FP6 "Citizens and Governance in the Knowledge Based Society". The authors also mention that the use of Networks of Excellence (NoEs) and Integrated Projects (IPs) in FP7 also aimed at structuring the research scene.

The EU-driven expected impact of research was strongly incorporated in the FP7 eligibility and evaluation criteria. Projects were selected because they committed to transnational, multidisciplinary research involving stakeholders. This resulted in significant shift from academia centred research towards public-private/academia-non-academic-institutions partnerships and pathways, and on job training of early stage researchers including secondments in non-academic institutions, and inter-sectorial exchange of staff. These requirements for funding during implementation of projects were evidently transposed into new forms of outputs and achievements/impacts of individual projects.

While the beneficial impact on how SSH do research and the scope of knowledge they produce, the impact for the big ERA landscape is less evident. The transformative effects of SSH research outputs are slow to emerge.

In FP7 mid-term evaluation Watson et al (2010) conclude:

*“The findings of this evaluation have shown that in the field of SSH research policy making, the FP SSH programmes have had a limited impact on national programmes, and that national SSH research policy is still mainly driven by domestic agendas” (ibid).*

### **Social innovation and socio-technical integration**

Social Innovation and the Innovation Union Flagship Initiative gave a new direction to SSH by boosting social innovation research under FP7 Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities. Starting in 2011 the European Commission (EC) funded substantial research programme on public sector and social innovation. In 2011 Social Platform on innovative social services was launched. In the work programme in 2012 social innovation calls addressed social innovation against inequalities, social innovation in the public sector, and a Specific International Cooperation Action addressing social innovation for vulnerable groups. In the last year of

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<sup>3</sup> Various terms were used during FP7 to define quest for the involvement of non-academic partners in EU funded research. Widely in use, especially in MCA was the term “industry” conceptualized in the broad sense as it included institutions such as museums. The term “public/private” partnership was also in use but that was disbanded as a growing number of universities were operating as private sector organisations. Finally, all “non-academic/industry/private/public/policy/public at large” were bundled under the umbrella notion of “stakeholders”.

FP7 several other topics on social innovation were supported.<sup>4</sup> In addition to measurements, evaluation and financing, also barriers for scaling up were to be addressed. Bringing to the table the issue of scalability was, in our view, a significant step forward for the enhancement of relevance of SSH.

The discussion about accessibility, affordability, accountability, and acceptability needed to expand to include replicability of service innovation, scalability of service innovation and customization/personalization of service innovation without which there is no effective social innovation (Avramov, 2014).

Despite significant funding in the 2010s the policy makers were critical towards SSH in particular as research projects were not visibly/measurably contributing to economic growth and citizens' well being. The research policy mainstreaming shifted towards quests for the so-called Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The shift from the notion of value of research towards measurable indicators of impacts as requirements for funding research was not SSH friendly. The outcome of the short-term vision of how science is to change society was a sharp disenchantment with SSH. It resulted in the weakened position of SSH in research policy orientations.

The end of FP7 (in 2013) marked the end of large scale funding for SSH. Instead a new vision was promoted of how SSH should do research and be involved in tackling global challenges. The vision entailed integration of social sciences and humanities across all Horizon 2020 (2013-2020) activities. The EU expectation is that this approach will:

*“... maximise the returns to society from investment in science and technology.”*<sup>5</sup>

Socio-technical integration as the baseline of the ERA vision had acquired centrality (e.g. Rodrigues et al., 2013)<sup>6</sup>. Social sciences and humanities have become one of the so-called key cross-cutting issues together with gender, and international cooperation. Other cross-cutting issues that may also be included in the work programme are, for example, science education, open access to science publications, ethics, standardisation, climate and sustainable development.

Some MS that are forerunners in evaluation of research outcomes, such as Finland, do see a positive development through opportunities for social sciences and humanities to cooperate with other disciplines (Academy of Finland, 2012, 57):

*“Many of the themes related to specific grand challenges identified by the Academy of Finland call for cultural and social research.”*

The analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of research and research training in the fields under the auspices of the Finnish Research Council for Culture and Society concluded that there is high societal impact of research. Opportunities lie with new innovative, transdisciplinary lines of inquiry as SSH researchers have the core

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<sup>4</sup> For the list of topics see <http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index.cfm>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/area/social-sciences-humanities>

<sup>6</sup> Rodrigues et al. (2013) studied the socio-technical integration (STI) in EU Framework programmes and concluded that STI has increased substantially over time.

competences needed to address many themes related to the grand challenges. However, this opportunity may come at a high price (Academy of Finland, 2012, 59):

*“Some lines of cultural and social research are at risk of being relegated into auxiliary disciplines and/or practices of technical expertise”.*

### **Political disenchantment with SSH**

An often reiterated reproach to the SSH by policy stakeholders is that the research continues to be fragmented, isolated from other research disciplines, and is largely self-referential. Researchers cite each, and talk among themselves in their own comfort zones at annual conferences organized by their professional associations. Some Editorial boards of journals composed by peers even request auto-referencing.

Indeed, in the landscape of the bulk of national funding of social science research the disciplinary boundaries are still very strong. National funding organisations are slow to bridge disciplines, and to actively promote scientific dissemination and also exploitation, communication and outreach.

We acknowledge many pitfalls of SSH fragmentation, disciplinary borders, excessive importance for academic career advancement given to publication in journals evaluated by peers, read (only) by peers, and referenced by peers<sup>7</sup>. We acknowledge the resilient practice of “preaching to the converted” at annual conferences of own association where researchers keep persuading each other to share theories and values that they already believe in and already share.

We also acknowledge that there are tensions in the SSH community due to conflicting ideologies built in the SSH theoretical frameworks. There are also tensions between the stakeholders, such as NGOs, involved in research as producers and users of knowledge, who may have different agendas and different visions about issues such as inequality, social justice, communitarism, markers of group identity, social cohesion, just to mention a few.

After reviewing hundreds of project reports produced under FP6, FP7, and Horizon 2020 we can also acknowledge that some are written in a format, which is not suitable for policy makers (e.g. Avramov, 2003; Reale et al., 2013; IMPACT-EV, 2015). Even when research findings and conclusions are transposed into lay language via policy briefs they are often very far from what policy makers need and can effectively use.<sup>8</sup>

To address these drawbacks, significant EU research funding instruments have been allocated for consolidating dispersed project findings on similar or complementary issues and communicating science for bringing it closer to citizens/taxpayers who are the ultimate agents of funding of research.

### **Use of research evidence for policy review to enhance impact of projects**

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<sup>7</sup> In 2010 the research advisory committee conducted a review of the Swedish research system (Regeringskansliet, 2010) and critically remarked that *“Citations provide an indication of how well known the research is among other researchers (p.5)”*. See also Wouters and Costas (2012).

<sup>8</sup> See also <https://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index.cfm?pg=library>

The promotion and exploitation of results of SSH research projects in European policy domains dates back to TSER 1995-1999, and the Socio-economic Research Key Action 1998-2002.

A process was established to review emerging and current policy directions in particular areas, look through the overall research portfolio for pertinent findings, conclusions and lessons, and develop policy briefing reports in the following domains: employment and unemployment; social exclusion (poverty, social stratification) and social security systems linked with pensions; social indicators and social sciences infrastructures; citizenship and identity; education, inequalities and social exclusion; enlargement; family and welfare; information society; quality of work; European identity and the relationship between European secular state and religious communities; innovation and research policy; training; regional policy; sustainable development; education; governance; science, society and governance; migration; framework conditions and intra-firm dynamics; higher education; gender equality.<sup>9</sup>

For a variety of reasons this promotion of European research results to European policy did result in the publication of all the review reports. Reports were not made available to other stakeholders and were put on the back burner by the commissioning agency, the EC.

There are examples of better-structured and durable impacts that were produced in the area of educational research initiatives. Educational research has a long tradition in FPs and the use of research evidence from projects for supporting policies is an example of high impact for enhancing ERA. Significant networking in the area has been operating since 2007. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) set up two networks: the Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training (NESET) and the European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE).

NESET and EENEE add value to SSH research by clustering research findings from a broad range of individual projects and pass the key messages to the policy actors on behalf of the SSH community. These networks were setup to serve as intermediary bridging the gap between research and policy-making as global network of academics working on social aspects of education and training<sup>10</sup>. The work is organised around policy themes, and includes preparation of analytical reports and policy briefs and responses prepared by network members to the *ad hoc* questions. Topical conferences are designed to bring together a broad range of stakeholders to enhance the take up of evidence for policy making. NESET and EENEE are robust dedicated resource for policy makers and practitioners. They pool expertise in SSH that draws on actions funded by the EC, and databases and project outputs available worldwide.

### **Assessing the impact of research evidence**

The collaborative research project IMPACT-EV (<http://impact-ev.eu/>)<sup>11</sup> used the CORDIS database for exploration of EU FP6 and EU FP7 projects (period 2006 to 2012). The

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<sup>9</sup> [http://cordis.europa.eu/citizens/res\\_clusters.htm](http://cordis.europa.eu/citizens/res_clusters.htm)

<sup>10</sup> <http://nesetweb.eu/en/about-us/>

<sup>11</sup> IMPACT-EV <http://impact-ev.eu/> consortium is composed of: University of Barcelona, (CREA-UB) Spain, Department of Science Policy and Scientometrics, Library and

IMPACT-EV reports present an impact assessment of a total of 439 SSH projects funded under FP6 (last call) and FP6 Priority 7 and Priority 8 FP7 SSH, NORFACE (Health, Energy, where SSH are embedded), European Research Council (ERC) SSH and FP7 SSH. The assessment covers four domains: scientific, political, social, and the promotion of the European Research Area. Reports convey abundance of SSH research evidence to inform and/or change policies that can address the key global challenges identified by the EU.

In the fast changing socio-economic and technological landscape there is obviously a never-ending need for new and updated SSH research evidence. Yet, there is a certain malaise both in the research and a broader stakeholder community that the policy makers' mantra "we need more evidence" and researcher's mantra "we need more data" is used as an excuse for not making effective use of existing SSH research knowledge.

Indeed, the existence of research evidence, innumerable (albeit disperse) data bases, systematization of evidence, tailoring of evidence for a range of communication tools targeting various stakeholders, dissemination and communication, and high visibility communication events, are insufficient to produce a structuring effect for society when there is weak political exploitation landscape.

It would be rather ingenious to believe that the relationship between policy and research is linear. The production of research and the use and application of evidence is mediated by complex social and political processes. Research evidence *per se* is not sufficient for creating a policy space for action.

The claim of the Swedish Research Council that the increase in the volume of the scientific outputs worldwide is contributing to shift in policy making from predominantly ideological premises of societal value of research questions toward a more knowledge-based approach to research questions which address important societal issues and take on board end user needs is enlightened. Yet, in the ERA landscape it appears as aspirational rather than a factual statement.

It is reasonable to assume that research can be an important part of the development and implementation of knowledge driven policies. This premise is increasingly used for embracing the narratives about science that guides policymaking in terms of objectives and instruments it uses. Policy research in engineering, science and technology is identified as the key agents of socio-economic change and learning firms and citizens (e.g. PREST et al., 2002). In these domains evidence of impact may be complex to produce, but it is relatively straightforward to argue in comparison to SSH impact.

The key agents for generating SSH impact are policy makers and governance institutions, and citizens. The learning paradigm for the transfer of knowledge (ToK) in domains addressed by SSH is less of a game changes in terms of the transformative potential. Indeed, scrutinizing

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Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA KIK-TTO), Hungary; DANS Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW); Centre for Organisational Research (CORE) at Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland; Institute for Economic Research on Firms and Growth (CERIS –CNR), Italy; Population and Social Policy Consultants (PSPC), Belgium; Trinity Long Room Hub, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland; Health Economics Research Group (HERG), Brunel University, UK; Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK



ToK processes and use of SSH knowledge generated under FPs we find little evidence of transformative effects of research evidence on policy processes and implementation practices.

There is much evidence that SSH research has informed policy makers. There is not much evidence that this information has been conducive to informed policy choices in some of the key challenges. A striking example is the mismatch between research evidence and non-take up of evidence for managing migration and integration of immigrants, for example (e.g. Avramov, 2016; 2017). SSH knowledge is not (sufficiently) used and is not (effectively and fast enough) transposed into policies. As result, there is not much visible and measurable evidence of socio-economic impacts of SSH. In research policy orientations the lack of measurable evidence of societal impact, has resulted in recent years in lowering expectations towards SSH, disenchantment with SSH outcomes, and decrease of funding for SSH.

The Gordian knot for SSH having to demonstrate the impact of research on bettering of society is the indispensable requirement for achieving any impact that lies at the border of the research landscape. Achieving impact of SSH requires a political will to embrace research evidence.

Poor take up of SSH research evidence equals low impact of SSH research evidence.

### **The transformative power of SSH and its limits: political space and political will**

There has been an ever-growing quest coming from policy circles for more research-based evidence and ever-present evidence of low take up of research evidence for policies. The transformative power of SSH knowledge produced under FPs is not strikingly evident.

There has been abundance of EC funded research on education and inequality, education and wellbeing, education and social cohesion, and other social aspects of education, so it is possible to use this SSH research area as example how research relates to educational policy in ERA. There have been numerous peer-learning activities to synergize national efforts to promote equity in education, as well as commitments at the highest levels of governance. Ministers committed to several EU targets, one concerning early school leaving.

In 2008, upon request of the council of Ministers, a report was presented with findings from the cluster on access to education and social inclusion focusing on Early School Leaving (ESL) and migration (Avramov, 2008). The report to the Council of Ministers made it clear that the target set by the Ministers that by 2010 an EU average rate of no more than 10 per cent early school leavers should be achieved is not going to be attained due to insufficient support and ineffective policies during the 2000-2008 period. Data presented clearly showed that early school leaving persisted as a serious social problem. There was an improvement of only 2,3 per cent since 2000. It was clearly communicated to the Ministers by the SSH research community that if this trend of slow pace of action continued the percentage of early school leavers would drop from 15,3 percent in 2008 only to 13,9 percent by 2010.

Additional efforts that were needed to reach the benchmark level of 10 percent by 2010 were systematized and supported by research findings. It was communicated that research evidences how children from families with interlocking social disadvantages such as poverty, unemployment, bad housing, low initial education of parents, poor literacy, immigrant or ethnic minority background, are overrepresented among school drop outs in all countries. Instruments for action identified for guiding policies included: *Prevention* (prevention is

more efficient than compensation); *Partnership* (it is necessary to involve different actors and agencies and address also the needs of the parents of children at risk); *Quality* (evaluate and monitor the quality of all schools); *Support for teachers* (avoid a very high turnover of teachers and ensure that well trained and experienced teachers work in disadvantaged schools); *Ethos of respect* (the sense of well-being and respect at school must be fostered) (Avramov, 2008).

In 2010 after failing to reach the 10 per cent target, the policy makers simply shifted the time line for another 10 years. The same target for reducing early school leaving to 10 per cent was now set for 2020.

The conclusion that may be drawn from this example is that even when research evidence captures the attention of the highest level of national governance, even when the Council of Ministers hears the research finding, research evidence is not a sufficient tool for SSH to achieve transformative impact. The ultimate keys to policy impact are outside the research domain.

One of the problems about a variety of targets such as Early School Leaving (ESL), decreasing poverty or increasing the Healthy Life Years (HLY), i.e. disability-free life expectancy, is that EU sets unrealistic targets that are bound to fail. One of the stakeholders, Freek Spinnewijn, interviewed in 2015 for the IMPACT-EV project stressed:

*“EU institutions set unrealistic time lines and do not provide financial resources. It’s as if they build the ambition into the failure.”*

In the narrative about expected impacts for socio-economic development, and in more recent years quest for innovation, there are also limitations inherent to social innovation that stem both from ways SSH do research and the composition of stakeholders users of SSH research evidence.

The transformative power of technical/technological research and development/innovation has to do with the fast take up of innovative technologies by the market of things. The market of policies has an infinitely slower take up of innovative solutions by governance institutions. SSH research evidence is trapped in traditional institutional set ups and volatile political landscapes. Any change in social services is a politically hazardous enterprise however well documented it may be. A typical example is the abundance of evidence about needs for people to work longer years and resilience of opposition to change of age for entitlement set in the Bismarkian old-age and disability pension scheme of 1891 – a threshold to which most people did not survive in those days.

While fragmentation still persists in SSH, low take up of research evidence for policy-making and thus slow passage to social innovation appears to be the most significant challenges for the future. We can go as far as to argue that one of the key global issues that may need to be addressed in the successor of Horizon 2020 and in national research funding programmes could bear the title: “Take up of research evidence from SSH by the stakeholders for addressing global challenges”. This would be justified by the informed hypothesis that global challenges are ultimately of social and not of technical/technological nature and that obstacles to valorising SSH research evidence are mainly of political nature.

## SSH inherent limitations to the transformative impact of evidence

It is acknowledged by the SSH community that evidence produced by SSH is dispersed and can lead to various policy directions. In SSH there are in-built theoretical and methodological mechanisms for producing plurality of possible implications of findings. Responsible recommendations, as a rule, are presented as several options/scenarios. This makes policy makers nervous and is generally confusing for laypersons.

Assessing the value and broader societal impact of SSH research evidence is, no doubt, challenging. Difficulties for establishing sequential or causal links between research and policies may be summarized as follows. Causality, especially in SSH is unclear and nonlinear; attribution is spread between research under a single project and/or other inputs and activities; internationality is affected by spillovers of knowledge and policies across national borders; time scale for achieving impact for social policy may be (very) long-term: breakdown of impacts of any SSH project to particular policy target is unrealizable; positive impacts in one domain such as enhanced mobility of early stage researchers may entail negative effects for life-course insecurity of researchers in the knowledge market due to (non)portability of retirement benefits<sup>12</sup>.

The interlocked social disadvantages are difficult to disentangle in terms of outcomes of policy support. Take for example the "Housing first" programme catering for people with high support needs studied under IMPACT-EV (Spinnewijn interview for IMPACT-EV, 2015):

*"We know that people stay in "Housing first" programmes but does dealing with housing issues resolve people's addiction problems? There we have diverging evidence. So impact in one area, may be measurable, but in a more complex phenomena, we can't really tell"*

Similar cautioning comes from the Finnish Research programme on nutrition, food and health (ELVIRA), which has health as the underlying theme. The ELVIRA research programme comprises 31 projects and 14 funded consortia, is coordinated by the Academy of Finland and funded by the Academy of Finland (AKA), TEKES and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The programme looks at potential socio-economic benefits in terms of most direct possible impact in the consumer behaviour, lifespan and health, nutrition, genetic factors and metabolism, food related risks and food safety themes. One of the projects "Eating patterns among conscripts in the Finnish Defence Forces: Exploring formation of food choices and intervening to promote healthy life-style" created a public discussion on health issues and eating patterns of Finnish conscripts. A researcher from the project took part in government

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<sup>12</sup> RESAVER consortium was setup to tackle fragmentation of existing retirement pillars in view of creating as a single European pension arrangement open to all organizations that employ researchers within the European Economic Area (EEA). RESAVER aims to become a tailor-made cross-border Institution for Occupational Retirement Provision (IORP) run by research institutions, managing 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar occupational pension plans, and offering physical pooling of assets and liabilities. It is likely to be a complex and long process to reach critical mass of participants and contributions (see: ENGRES, 2014).

expert group producing reform statements on the whole defence system, including nutrition and health lifestyle. As consequence, changes in menus and products served in the canteens were made. However, the Academy raises a question (Roos, interview for IMPACT-EV, 2014):

*“Do these changes have sustainable impact on the health-related behaviour and health status of young men?”*

The evaluation panel for the ELVIRA programme consisting of four internationally recognized scientists confirms that the programme has value but concludes (AKA, 2013, 33):

*“The socio-economic impact of a single research programme cannot be directly assessed, not only because of the relatively short duration of the programme, but also because the socio-economic effects are influenced by several factors outside the programme.”*

These notes of cautions are not sufficiently heard by policy makers when setting targets for example for Healthy Life Years (HLY) or expecting direct measurable indicators as evidence that SSH contributes to enhancing innovation, competitiveness, and wellbeing, and that it creates quality jobs.

It is reasonable to conclude that ERA has created a research space for SSH but SSH area *per se* is not sufficient for creating a policy space prone for transformative action (AKA, 2012, 76):

*“... even the most optimistic view of science does not envision that the grand challenges facing humankind and society can be resolved by means of science alone”.*

So instead of being coerced by funding agencies to produce evidence of measurable impacts of science for society, the SSH community could put more effort into better articulating the notion of societal value of research evidence. The proliferation of social indicators by policy area (e.g. Europe 2020 poverty and social exclusion target; Overarching portfolio; Social inclusion; Pensions; Health and long-term care; Investing in children)<sup>13</sup> has no doubt some value for international comparison and ranking of countries according to reasonably comparable parameters. It also brings about risks of information overload and lack of meaningful hierarchization and interconnectedness of policies. Attempts to measure impact by means of a plethora of indicators, in potentially infinite number of SSH policy areas, inevitably remain relatively generic, limited to comparing levels and frequencies across countries, rather than a step towards use of integrated knowledge for prioritizing end effective policy implementation.

A more plausible approach for SSH could be to look for value of science for society and use of research evidence for informing policies and monitoring accessibility, affordability, accountability, and acceptability, replicability and scalability of policy choices across a broad range of interconnected policy areas. We need to look at mechanisms and channels that are specific to SSH for generating impact at a more global level.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=756&langId=en>

### **Instead of a conclusion**

European Research Area as a research policy project was kick-started by strong political will to support knowledge production and has been underpinned by robust and generous financial instruments. Every new Framework Programme, just as the on-going Horizon 2020<sup>14</sup> was hailed by policy makers as major innovation, utterly new, game changer. Fortunately, careful analysis shows continuation of what worked well in the past. Along the time-line of more than three decades Framework Programmes have contributed significantly to the cumulative effects of SSH research. Over years the way SSH do science has changed for the better in terms of internationalization, interdisciplinarity, the way comparative projects are implemented, how science is communicated, and how it is achieving scientific, policy, and social impact by informing policies.

During the ERA process, more particularly in recent years, SSH have lost the prominence and visibility they had in the “golden years” of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (during FP6 and FP7). SSH have now been assigned the role of cross-cutting issues. The way SSH will continue doing research will no doubt be impacted by the way EU research funding will be steering research. For accessing funding, but even more importantly for meeting the global knowledge challenges it may be necessary for SSH to reinvent themselves.

ERA and European research framework programmes are young in comparison to nationally funded SSH research. When the Institute of Social Sciences (IDN) was founded 60 years ago, it was seen in policy circles as kind of a “brain trust” that was going to be on “stand by” for supporting long term political vision and specific policy initiatives. The rationale for creating a robust social sciences hub (humanities were a later add on via the establishment of the Department for Philosophy) by the Federal Executive Council of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia in 1957 was laudable in its forward looking. Still today one of Institute’s missions is to contribute to applying research results in public policies. In that respect it is modern in its underlying vision and mission. As a national research institution it is unique in its kind. Yet, it shares the global research landscape that requires outgrowing national and disciplinary borders. Challenges are embedded also in needs for disbanding the dated model of SSH multidisciplinary epitomized in pillarised discipline-based structure of IDN’s research Centres. It may need to start working systematically towards interdisciplinarity within the institution, so that researchers can become equipped to embrace transdisciplinarity internationally.<sup>15</sup> In that respect the nature of challenges are no different for

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<sup>14</sup> Disbanding the research programme’s name “Framework Programme” and branding the research programme “Horizon 2020” was important to policy makers to support their innovation vision.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Bernard\_Choi@phac-aspc.gc.ca whereby: Multidisciplinary draws on knowledge from different disciplines but stays within their boundaries; Interdisciplinarity analyzes, synthesizes and harmonizes links between disciplines into a coordinated and coherent; Transdisciplinarity integrates the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context, and transcends their traditional boundaries.

See also the EU definition “Trans-disciplinarity refers to approaches and methodologies that integrate as necessary (a) theories, concepts, knowledge, data, and techniques from two or more disciplines, and (b) non-academic and non-formalized knowledge. In that way, trans-disciplinarity contributes to advancing fundamental understanding or solving complex

the Institute of Social Sciences from those faced by research institutions in other European countries. What we do observe in Europe is that the national engagement to embrace change operates on the basis of variable geometry.

### Post scriptum

Just as there are numerous examples on non-use of research evidence by policy makers at the EU level, there is plenty of evidence of a deaf ear for research undertaken in the Institute of Social Sciences. One example is the study commissioned to the Demographic Research Centre in 1988 by the Regional Bureau for Social Planning of Kosovo. The report “Demographic Development and Population Policy in Kosovo” was delivered to then policy makers and created a space for knowledge-based policy actions they could have taken, had they wanted to, 30 years ago.

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