Summary of Meeting
"Social Sciences and Humanities in Horizon Europe"

(by Thomas König, Stephanie Rammel, Matthias Reiter-Pázmándy, Klaus Schuch, Johannes Starkbaum)

On Friday, March 8, the meeting "Social Sciences and Humanities in Horizon Europe" took place on the premises of the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Vienna. It was a follow-up of the Austrian EU Presidency Conference "Impact of Social Sciences and Humanities for a European Research Agenda – Valuation of SSH in mission-oriented research",[1] which had taken place in Vienna on 28-29 November 2018. As the current EU Research Funding Program, "Horizon 2020",[2] is coming to an end, and discussions for the next edition, called "Horizon Europe",[3] have intensified, there is the need and opportunity to engage policy makers and SSH representatives at the national level, in order to open up space for discussion on how to better involve SSH expertise in the drafting process of the thematic clusters of "Horizon Europe". The clusters are gathered under the paramount title "Global Challenges and Industrial Competitiveness".

The follow-up meeting was organized by Thomas König (IHS), Stephanie Rammel (FFG), Matthias Reiter-Pázmándy (BMBWF), and Klaus Schuch (ZSI). It brought together about fifty people – representatives from social sciences and humanities in Austria, National Contact Points (NCPs) for the different thematic areas as well as policy makers and ministry officials.

Purpose of the Meeting

The initiative to the meeting was driven by two insights. One is that, as Stephanie Rammel made clear in her presentation, integration of SSH into the thematic research funding instruments of the current "Horizon 2020" is an ambitious attempt, but still far from being satisfying. Another is that representatives from SSH repeatedly complained that they are not involved in the shaping, and designing, of funding calls and work programs. Once the remit of a call is decided upon, it is difficult to bring specific SSH knowledge in – unless, maybe, as an add-on. Given the fact that the Framework Programs have increasingly become also templates for research funding programs in the member states, one cannot underestimate the role – both directly and indirectly – in shaping the status, and involvement, of SSH in European research funding generally.

The meeting kicked off with a keynote by Prof. Ulrike Felt who provided food for thought by talking about the role of SSH in coping with societal challenges. Other presentations were about providing key statistics on integration of SSH into the Clusters ("Societal Challenges") of "Horizon 2020", information on the state of negotiations regarding "Horizon Europe", and results from the November Conference. For the latter, Thomas König pointed towards the booklet "Social Sciences and Humanities Research

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[1] https://www.ssh-impact.eu/
[2] https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en
[3] https://ec.europa.eu/info/designing-next-research-and-innovation-framework-programme/what-shapes-next-framework-programme_en

Matters", a comprehensive set of guidelines addressing "research programs that set out a specific goal to tackle a societal problem through the means and opportunities provided by scientific and scholarly research – both from SSH and STEM".[4] The presenters agreed that SSH should be further integrated in future EU research funding.

Interdisciplinary and especially SSH-aspects have to be contributed throughout the whole development of a framework program, said Matthias Reiter-Pázmándy, from the initial negotiations, to the Strategic Planning and the yearly Work Programs. Special attention has to be paid to include SSH-researchers in the various Advisory Groups, in particular in the Mission Boards, but also in the evaluation panels of "Horizon 2020" and "Horizon Europe". Researchers from SSH also should register to be available as evaluators in order to provide enough choice for those who convene the panels. In addition to that, it is important to provide fora, where researchers and policy makers can meet and exchange across the boundaries of disciplines and the various sectoral policy areas. This event did exactly that.

The key element of the meeting, however, concerned the remaining 90 minutes which provided space for discussion among participants. To that end, participants were seated on one of six tables, each of which was dedicated to one of the (prospective) thematic clusters in Horizon Europe.[5] The intention was to bring policy makers (the National Delegates to the specific program committees in "Horizon 2020" and in the upcoming "Horizon Europe"), supporters (the NCPs) and SSH researchers together and discuss how to better take advantage of SSH expertise in designing and shaping the respective thematic cluster.

Summary of Cluster Tables

Before a joint lunch buffet was served, the discussions were summarized and presented to the full audience, along two sets of questions:

a) In which of the cluster's topics is specific SSH expertise required?
b) What concrete measures can help Delegates and NCPs to facilitate integration of SSH in the cluster? Here are the summaries of each of the discussion tables:

Health

a) All topics in this cluster are relevant for SSH expertise; much depends on the actual design. "Health systems" might be a focal point that works as a "catch all".

b) At EU level, more emphasis has to be on evaluation criteria, and the participant portal has to be made use of to identify potential partners. At Austrian level, thematic platforms should be made use of for

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[4] https://www.ssh-impact.eu/guidelines-on-how-to-successfully-design-and-implement-mission-oriented-research-programmes/
[5] The seventh cluster, called "'Culture and Inclusive Society'", is dealing with SSH-specific topics, which is why it was not included.

cooperation (e.g., ÖPPM[6], Netzwerk Altern[7]), policy makers should be stronger advocates for SSH, and exchange at the level of the cluster should be intensified.

Civil Security for Society

a) SSH is crucial for topics such as radicalization, terrorism, prevention, and resilience.

b) Since topics are mostly identified by governments, SSH representatives should get in contact with NCPs and ministries. Also, with the national security research program KIRAS,[8] there is already a template for integrating SSH.

Digital, Industry and Space

a) All topics were considered important for SSH expertise; this is particularly the case for AI, Big Data, Next Generation Internet, and Digital Skills.

b) The Evaluation process is critical, both in terms of skills of reviewers and the evaluation criteria, the same is true for the work programs, and the deliverables in the grant agreement. In relation to the "digital skills" topic, it was emphasized a sort of "meta-SSH", acting as a support-mechanism for a number of different research projects and dealing with their social impact, assessing also discriminatory aspects, exclusion and fears.

Climate and Energy; Mobility

a) All topics across this cluster are relevant for SSH.

b) Evaluation has to be organized in an interdisciplinary manner; move away from techno-economic, sector-specific solutions, towards integrating behavioural insights and sociocultural practices. SSH can serve as guidance for sectoral policies to implement R&D-based solutions. Researchers and sectoral policy makers should step out of their bubbles and get together more often.

Bioeconomy, Food, Natural Resources & Environment

a) There are "areas of connectivity" ("bio economy", "food systems") and also areas that would require a stronger involvement of SSH (demand and supply problem in areas such as "environmental observation", "agriculture, forestry, and rural areas") – there are social impacts, conflict potentials, and more generally, a political economy to be analysed.

b) Technological "solutionism" approaches may not be enough;[9] real problem solving requires integration of SSH in problem framing and analysis. A more holistic approach from strategy to calls is required! This also implies a cultural change, i.e. in the language used to describe a problem.

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[6] https://www.personalized-medicine.at/
[7] http://www.netzwerk-altern.at/
[8] https://www.kiras.at/
[9] Cf. E. Morozov, "To Save Everything, Click Here: Technology, Solutionism, and the Urge to Fix Problems that Don't Exist", London 2013)

Next steps

The meeting was an experiment insofar as nothing similar has ever happened before – in none of the EU member states. Albeit there was little time for an exhaustive exchange, debates were initiated and the meeting was thus widely seen as a great success. There may be three reasons for that. One is that mission-oriented research funding demands exchange of SSH representatives with policy makers in order to align calls, proposals and research towards missions. Another is that Austrian Delegates and NCPs have an interest in increasing the share of funding that flows from the EU level to Austria. So even if they represent clusters that traditionally stand for a more techno-science orientation, they share the core interest of SSH representatives. Finally, all this happens in the context of a more positive attitude towards SSH in general,[10] which provides the background for this initiative. Having said all this, there is still much to do, at national level as well as at European level.

At national level

One way forward would be for SSH experts, national delegates, and NCPs to meet regularly for further exchange. This would certainly support the uptake of SSH expertise and allow setting concrete action. It is now up to the respective Austrian institutes in their fields to take the lead and continue the work that was initiated in this meeting.

At European level

It is important to highlight this meeting to SSH representatives in other EU member states, so that they can organize similar events. Also, a shared meeting in Brussels on presenting the SSH-Guidelines later in summer would provide a good opportunity to report about the progress made in Austria.

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[10] See the Lamy Report (http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/other_reports_studies_and_documents/hlg_2017_report.pdf), and also the report by Mariana Mazzucato (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/mazzucato_report_2018.pdf)