

Funding Research: Between Public and Private Resources The role of SSH research in Europe. A roundtable London

Despite the challenges posed by a decade of the economic crisis, Europe remains a global research leader and is home to some of the world's best thinkers. The Social Sciences and Humanities are part of Europe's scientific success story; close to half of the leading schools and faculties in these fields are in European universities and research institutes.

Maintaining the excellence of research requires sustained and significant investment. The globally recognised benchmark is to achieve funding for research at levels equivalent to 3% of GDP. The financial crisis punched a hole in the public finances of most of the EU's member states and prioritising spending on research over other areas of society affected by the crisis has been a challenge; the EU averages around 2% of GDP spent on research. But 3% remains an important target for the EU to achieve if it is to continue to meet the targets it set for long-term economic growth. The urgency is compounded as other countries such as China and Singapore continue to increase research investment and are narrowing the gap in terms of research capacity and global reputations.

If investing in research commands a good deal more support during years of plenty, the question is how to maintain research investment levels during times when public finances are under pressure. In the US, Marc Kastner, president of Science Philanthropy Alliance, recently wrote "With many recent high-profile announcements about science philanthropy, some may wonder if philanthropy could replace a significant portion of government funding."¹

Will philanthropy and private funding come to the rescue of the depleted public programmes which have been the foundation of research in the period since the Second World War? A recent survey of private funding for basic science in the U.S conducted by the Science Philanthropy Alliance shows that private sources contributed \$2.3 billion, representing just over 5% of the \$40 billion that the federal government invests each year. A similar piece of analysis conducted for the EUFORI project, a European survey on philanthropy, showed that foundations for research and innovation invest at least €5 billion per year, more than half the average annual budget that the EU gives to researchers and innovators throughout the Horizon 2020 programme.² It should be noted that Horizon 2020, at more than €70bn over 7 years, only represents a small proportion (less than 10%) of the overall spending for research in European countries.

¹ San Jose Mercury News op-ed

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/03/27/opinion-trump-budget-eviscerates-basic-research-a-disaster-for-u-s-economy/>

²<http://euforistudy.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Synthesis-Report.pdf>



Undoubtedly, over the last 25 years the role of foundations as supporters of research and innovation in Europe has grown significantly in scope and scale. Philanthropists and foundations continue to play a critical role in science funding. Such funding is both complementary and often distinctive; helping to accelerate research being supported by national programmes or supporting vital research which would otherwise not be funded – early stage development or risky research. They can also be more nimble than governments. But the scale of science philanthropy is not large enough to replace government funding or even to make up for cuts proposed by national governments. From a strategic point of view, the Foundations can be highly influential in shaping discussions about the long-term development of national and supra-national science policies.

The role that foundations are keen to play at national and international levels is to support a strong research base. There is a particular symbiotic relationship in the social sciences and humanities where foundations are both funders of research and users of research in support of their core charitable purposes. In both roles, foundations often play an indispensable complementary role to public funding and, more importantly, they provide support that is distinctive in emphasizing the full creative potential of areas of research that otherwise enjoy less visibility. Foundations support world-class scholarship across the landscape and this is a necessary counterweight to the increasingly narrow focus of public programmes.

Research and scholarship in the social sciences and humanities have their roots in Europe and European science continues to be world-class research in these fields. Half of the world's leading Humanities faculties, and forty per cent of the leading centres of excellence for research in the social and economic sciences are in institutions based in the EU.

EASSH would like to initiate a discussion between the research community and leading foundations so as to achieve a full and timely understanding of how social and cultural research assists in identifying and above all in responding to the challenges we face, in anticipating how the insights produced by research can help to design interventions and create solutions to those challenges. We want to support an on-going debate to design strategies for including research in social sciences and humanities in science policy and in the funding strategies for research and innovation.

EASSH is an association gathering among the most prestigious European scientific organisations in the social sciences and humanities. In 2017 EASSH opened membership to universities and research institutes. The mission of EASSH is to ensure that the SSH research community has a role in the design and development of science policy.