

Horizon 2020: Struggling with Interdisciplinarity. The 3rd SSH Integration Monitor Report Reveals the Truth about Top Down Interdisciplinarity (June 2018)

If we take the integration of Social Sciences and Humanities as the best effort to foster interdisciplinarity in Horizon 2020, the third EC monitoring report demonstrates that largely the programme is struggling with the implementation of the interdisciplinarity approach.

The European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH) thanks the European Commission for its continued commitment to evaluate the [Integration of Social Sciences and Humanities \(SSH\) in Horizon 2020](#). We welcome this effort and urge that this annual exercise can be continued throughout the remainder of Horizon 2020. Transparency is a powerful tool for improving the implementation of H2020 and **EASSH encourages transparency through the release of annual evaluation reports and the larger availability of data on the implementation of the H2020 programme in the hope that we can learn the lessons in time for implementation in Horizon Europe.**

We are convinced that this annual monitoring of the integration of SSH offers a valuable tool to the European Commission to assess the broader challenge of encouraging interdisciplinarity across the Societal Challenges.

Overall the results of the third report confirm that the scientific integration of SSH is not working. As we have acknowledged in previous responses, interdisciplinarity is difficult to achieve. What we find to be of great concern is that after two previous reports, we are still not aware of any changes made specifically to the call design or evaluation processes, which could have improved the outcomes.

EASSH has been monitoring the data since 2014 and we refer colleagues in the Commission to our responses to the monitoring reports in [2014](#) and [2015](#) and the recommendations made at that time as these continue to be relevant.

Three reports in comparison 2014-2016

EASSH has reviewed the results of the three reports on SSH integration between 2014 and 2016. Unfortunately, not only do we find no evidence of progress but even some backwards developments.

The most worrisome issue is that – as the report states *“In 2016, 70 projects out of 239 projects funded under the SSH flagged topics **had no SSH partners (29%)**. This is a negative trend since 2015 when as little as 16% of the projects financed under the SSH flagged topics had no SSH partners.”*

Besides the disappointing result, this shows that **a third of the projects awarded did not fully comply with the call requirements**. This is not a failure of SSH research to be integrated, but a fundamental **failure of the evaluation system**.

Applications that do not meet all of the major call requirements should not be funded.

Of equal concern is the fall in the funding supporting the contribution of SSH in the flagged topics. The report very clearly documents a substantial decrease from €236m to €181m, a decline of nearly 25%. This is all the more disappointing when we note that €60m of this figure comes from awards made under SC6. **This demonstrates that if there was not a challenge with a real focus on social Europe and on understanding European societies, crucial concerns of the EU would have been left largely unsupported.** Furthermore, the low investment in this challenge has so far undermined potential achievements and impact as this challenge remains the one with the highest number of excellent projects unfunded. A trend that seems to be repeated in horizon Europe if there is no equal weight to all the clusters.

This is highly worrying as it shows a fundamental failure of European investment in understanding the changes to European society and a failure to support and sustain the intellectual and philosophical framework of European values and the European project. More importantly because it demonstrates a failure in responding to what EU citizens themselves identify as their biggest concerns. This is why, in our most recent papers, **EASSH calls for a strong cluster on [Democratic and human values](#) and the [People's Union](#), which needs to be [equally resourced](#) alongside the other clusters or challenges. Horizon Europe proposal has failed again to respond to this plea and we fear that the problems which prevent better integration in Horizon 2020 will continue into Horizon Europe.**

This report helps to highlight a more fundamental problem for Horizon 2020 and its successor programme Horizon Europe: **How to achieve a consistent implementation of more interdisciplinary approaches** in Europe's flagship research programme?

The report also highlights the alarming disappearance of some research fields like the broad field of humanities, including a discipline such as history – which means that we miss the researchers who may provide long term perspectives or assess the impact of individual and social transformations, and help us deal with changing European identities and integration of different cultures. Also missing are contributions from legal scholars, which seem to have left no trace in the projects awarded. **We are concerned that future policy discussion about emerging innovation, which is not co-designed with the legal and ethical frameworks necessary to protect individuals, means that this innovation is doomed to fail.**

Therefore we need to ensure that legal and regulatory frameworks to protect citizens are integral to technological innovation, as recently illuminated by the cases of Cambridge Analytica and social media misuse in our democratic elections. As researchers are encouraged to work more and more across scientific fields and with non-research partners there will be greater need to ensure that common frameworks for research ethics can be applied, and that responsible research practice is applied universally.

We also feel compelled to repeat our concerns over the methodology adopted in the report which we believe cannot accurately detect whether SSH research perspectives are involved in core activities of projects. EASSH analysis of many project work package descriptions suggests that many projects funded under the SSH-flagged topics place SSH research at the periphery and so the results shown in the report are likely to overstate the level of SSH research integration.

The results of this third report highlight major concerns that must be addressed immediately before the end of the programme with some fundamental changes. EASSH has already made **a list of recommendations in a previous [report analysis](#) and we remain open to collaborate for encouraging changes to improve results.**

We repeat this call more vigorously in light of the failure to address the integration of social and humanistic research across Horizon 2020.

Recommendations for Horizon Europe

With a focus on the development of the new framework programme, EASSH would like to make the following urgent recommendations:

- A solid and **strong focus in Horizon Europe on research in societies, democracy, culture, social transformation** as a self-standing cluster, which has comparable resources as any other cluster
- A **redefinition of the concept of integration** through the co-design of the clusters which have a relevant socio-economic, historical, legal framework
- **Appropriate participation of relevant scholars** and parties in advisory groups for the definition of clusters and calls, which will set clear criteria for integration of contributions from different scientific fields – not only social sciences and humanities
- **A thorough review of the evaluation processes and panels**, which must be capable to assess proposals in line with all call requirements and embed crucial expertise to fully assess research and innovation impact on societies and individuals.