SSH contribution to assess the social impact of research

European Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH) research funded under Horizon 2020 and previous Framework Programmes has served to respond to the growing concerns among policy makers, enterprises, social agents and citizens on how to show the multifaceted benefits of public investment in research in different ways. As President Juncker points out that all EC funding should guarantee "the maximum performance and value added."[1] Different essential initiatives have been taken place in the last two years, like the "Budget for Results" (BFOR) exercise and "the Better Regulation Package." However, there is still a long way to go in the field of research assessment. This is the reason why **SSH research play an important role in supporting these initiatives, as Excellence, Openness and Impact have been announced as three of the pillars of the upcoming FP9.**[2]

SSH research have demonstrated to have influenced policies at the European level and have had actual social impact since the beginning of the Framework Programme. Social impact refers to the multiple benefits derived from the implementation of research results that contribute to meet the EU agenda goals. Examples of success stories[3] are found throughout the large spectrum of funded projects. For instance, the projects MIGROM and MYPLACE have created job opportunities for Roma and young people respectively, INCLUD-ED has contributed to the prevention of early school leaving in European schools and the projects TENLAW and SAMPLE have provided potential effective responses to reduce poverty and social exclusion in different domains like housing.

Given that Europe faces major old and new challenges, the EU needs research to contribute to better face these major current problems, for instance the rise of xenophobia, radicalization, unemployment, the EU integration, climate change, migration or poverty, just to mention some. Data from the Special Eurobarometer[4] dedicated to assess the public perceptions of science, research and innovation indicates that according to the respondents the three most important priorities that should be given to research are "Health and Medical Care," "Job creation" and "Education and Skills" being the two latter fully located in the core SSH domain. Collaborative research across member states and research teams from different realities, backgrounds and disciplines generate the required scientific knowledge to support effective answers to these challenges that we all have ahead. Therefore, H2020 should continue tackling these societal challenges and provide the necessary funding to SSH research to take the lead in these endeavours. However, as previous FPs, H2020 is far from giving a satisfactory answer to the many questions raised about "What is the impact of the budgets given to European research?" **H2020 lacks a systematic, comprehensive and overarching system to assess research**

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[1] President Juncker, Mission letter to Vice-President Georgieva, 1 November 2014.

[2] Commissioner Moedas, Speech "Embracing an ERA of change", Berlin, 10 October 2016.

[3] IMPACT-EV Coordination Team. (2015). *Ex-post evaluation of the FP7 Cooperation in Socioeconomic Sciences and Humanities (2007-2013)*. Retrieved from: http://impact-ev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/D3.2-Report-3.-Impact-evaluation-of-FP6-last-call-and-FP7-SSH-research-projects.pdf

[4] Special Eurobarometer 419, Public perceptions of science, research and innovation, 2014.

impacts. In its last phases, H2020 should thus develop new ways of assessing and making visible social impacts of research from all sciences.

However, **the challenge of how to assess and measure the social impact of publically funded research is not only delimited into the SSH in Europe** but it goes much beyond, touching across disciplines all around the world. The second contribution of **European funded SSH research has been in advancing in the global state-of-the-art**, for instance, shedding light on the different types of impacts of research, that is differentiating social impact from scientific impact, the transference of research results into policy (political impact) or research results reaching out beyond academia (dissemination). SSH research has also contributed to distinguish between social impact and innovation, since the creation of new knowledge or particular uses of it do not mean that important societal defined goals are met through these creations. The innovative dimension is present in most of the projects in SSH research but innovation itself is not enough to ensure that the use of research results leads to social improvements to society. Taking into account these distinctions, social impact is considered when there are sufficient evidence that research results lead to social improvements (according to the societal goals) that have taken place in society.

Furthermore, beyond conceptual clarification, **SSH research is pioneering to the development of monitoring systems of the social impact of research from all sciences**. Today researchers from all sciences are required to show not only what they publish as a result of a research project, but also what the social and political impact of the results of their research are. There are not many systems to do that, but the SSH are ahead and have created systems to gather these impacts from the UK based REF system, the Dutch based ERiC, the *Science Europe* case studies on tangible impact of Humanities[5] to more innovative systems like the *Social Impact Open Repository (SIOR)*[6] to mention some. These initiatives are all based on the premise of requesting the research community **to self-report their own research social impact, similar to the way they are used to do with the evidences (e.g. citations) of the scientific impact achieved**. In the case of SIOR, it allows researchers to upload qualitative and quantitative evidences of the social impact of their research, and it includes indicators to measure social impact. These systems also allow funding agencies and citizens to consult the ways in which research impacts society positively, for instance, through the development of a new vaccine, the reduction of early school leaving to the development of more precise systems of protecting the environment. Therefore, they permanently makes visible a) evidence of the contributions from SSH to policy and society, b) those innovations that SSH research are leading to as well as contributing to other sciences, and c) indicators to collect these evidences. The fact that this information is made available also provides guidelines for SSH research groups and projects to achieve increasing political and social impact, as well as the evidence that demonstrate this. Finally, they serve to the purpose of showing what comes from the joint work of researchers and research groups of the highest level in SSH and from the different EC member states.

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[5] Science Europe. (2013). *Humanities in the Societal Challenges*. Retrieved from:
http://www.scienceeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/SE_broch_HUM_fin_web_LR.pdf
[6] SIOR is briefly presented in the article in Nature: Flecha, R., Soler-Gallart, M. & Sordé, T. (2015). Europe must fund social sciences. *Nature, 528* (7581): 193. DOI: 10.1038/528193d

These are resources that if appropriately scaled up, should constitute a valuable contribution from SSH research to H2020 and to FP9. In other words, they open the possibility to launch an efficient permanent platform to start gather systematically information about the social impact achieved by the EU funded research in all disciplines. Based on the work of the IMPACT-EV FP7 project and other endeavours in the domain of impact analysis, we believe that Social Sciences and the Humanities, if properly harnessed, can bring the tools the FP need for reviewing its social impacts in the future as from FP9.