Social Sciences and Humanities in the Framework Programmes

COST Seminar
Lisbon, 19 January 2017

Dr. Peter Fisch
mail@peter-fisch.eu
Intro

• Personal background
  – Over 20 years in DG RTD
  – Head of Unit
    „Social sciences and humanities“ (2000 – 2007)
  – Retired since 2014
  – Publishing analytical comments on peter-fisch.eu

• The content of this presentation does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the views expressed therein lies entirely with the author...
Overview

• The past
  Short history of SSH from FP4 to H2020

• The present
  Achievements and open issues

• The future
  Challenges ahead

... (Instead of some conclusions)
  Two things I do not understand ...
Short history: FP1 to FP3
The “dark decade” 1984 to 1994

• Research as a new activity field at European level
• Key drivers
  – Political ambition (EURATOM)
  – Industrial policy (ESPRIT)
• Top-down programme logic
• Developing slowly into a comprehensive research portfolio

• No coverage of social sciences and humanities

peter-fisch.eu
The modest beginning with TSER

- “Targeted Socio-Economic Research”
- Restricted to three clearly separated areas:
  - Evaluation of science and technology policy options in Europe
  - Research on education and training
  - Research into social integration and social exclusion in Europe
- No mention of humanities ...
- No incentives for interdisciplinarity...
A painful start ...

- Hostile reaction in major parts of the scientific community
- European programme in social sciences widely regarded as “mission impossible” – bound to failure
- Almost “pre-historic” conditions
  - Applicants phoning Brussels to get basic information
  - Sending “Info Packs” by mail
  - Proposal abstracts sent by fax
  - Proposals sent as parcels
  - Evaluators selected based on recommendations ...

peter-fisch.eu
Developing a wider perspective

• Key Action “Improving the socio-economic knowledge base”

• Objective: “Define the base for employment-generating social, economic and cultural development and for building a European knowledge society.”

• Topics:
  – Structural, demographic and social changes
  – Relationship between technological development, employment and society
  – Changing role of European institutions, systems of governance and citizenship in the process of European integration

• Emerging role of the humanities

• Coordination of the “socio-economic dimension” across FP5

peter-fisch.eu
Towards new structures for SSH?

• Priority 7 “Citizens and governance in a knowledge-based society”

• Objectives: “Support and develop Social Sciences and Humanities to produce high quality research in areas of policy relevance ...while structuring Social Sciences and Humanities in such a way to fully exploit the opportunities of the emerging European Research Area”

• Large projects (Networks of Excellence, Integrated Projects)
Short history: FP7 (2007 – 2013)

ERC – A new opportunity for SSH

• “Socio-economic sciences and the humanities”

• Topics:
  – Growth, employment and competitiveness in a knowledge society
  – Economic, social and environmental objectives
  – Major trends in society and their implications
  – Europe in the world
  – The citizen in the European Union
  – Indicators; Foresight ...

• European Research Council - New bottom-up funding scheme (mainly) for individual researchers (cf. presentation by Angela)

• “Market share” of SSH in ERC around 16% - as compared to 2% in the top-down parts of FP7

peter-fisch.eu
SSH is everywhere...(!?)

- SSH research is “embedded” across Horizon 2020
- Focal point Societal Challenge 6 “Europe in a changing world - Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies “
- Systematic coverage of SSH funding opportunities in all parts of Horizon 2020 (“flagging”) (cf. presentation by Philippe)
"Quick and dirty": SSH Funding per year (M Euro)
Achievements and open issues
Funding opportunities

• Massive financial support for SSH in Europe
• Continued upward trend in SSH funding from FPs
• Accumulated amount of funding over 20 years (1984 to 2014): almost 2.5 billion €
• FP funding is in many Member States the most important (or even only available!) source of project funding

• “Market share” of SSH funding in EU research budget still below 5% - much lower than share in the “scientific population” (around 20%)
• Lack of underlying basic funding in many Member States
Achievements and open issues
Training and Networking

• Over 1000 projects
• Over 10,000 project participants
• Huge contribution to building a SSH research community in Europe
• Much improved “connectivity” of SSH across countries and disciplines
• Internationally trained young researchers ...
  • ... no longer “young”, but in senior positions!
  • Participation still characterised by huge inequalities (West – East; North – South)

peter-fisch.eu
Achievements and open issues

Standing

• SSH acknowledged as relevant part of the European research portfolio
• Research results now seen as a valuable contribution to the European policy making process
• “Mind change” underway – continuous efforts to facilitate and increase cooperation between SSH and natural/technical sciences

• No strong institutional position within DG RTD
• Interdisciplinarity at equal footing?
  – “Who is in the driving seat?”

peter-fisch.eu
Challenges ahead
Innovation

• Integration of “innovation” into a research programme more complex than initially thought...
• Introducing “direct applicability” as a selection criterion and the focus on high “technology readiness levels” seems not a sustainable solution
• Role of SSH still often reduced to a “facilitator” for new technologies or products ...

• SSH has to play a far more active role in developing a broad conceptual framework for innovation in Europe
• Do we need more innovation policy, or rather more innovation in policy ...

peter-fisch.eu
Challenges ahead

Impact

• “Impact” might become one of the most important buzz words for the next Framework Programme
• Impact has many different dimensions:
  – Not only short term tangible effects
    • New jobs, additional turnover, product improvements...
  – But also long term structural effects
    • Training, community building, disruptive ideas
• SSH will need to demonstrate their impact
• Highlight the relevance of a better understanding of societal phenomena and the importance of new conceptual approaches for better policy making...
Two things I do not understand

# 1

• If ...

SSH is the only field of research where collaborative research across countries/ languages/ disciplines generates genuine new knowledge and real “added value” ...

• Why?

... are SSH the only field of research in the Framework Programme where the funding for individual researchers (ERC) exceeds the funding for collaborative projects?
Two things I do not understand # 2

• If …

Europe is in a deep crisis and the future of the political, economic and social integration of our continent is at risk …

• Why?

… does a European research programme for the SSH not address these pressing and important issues upfront, in a strategic and comprehensive approach and as the absolute top priority? Who else, if not the Framework Programme, could do this?

peter-fisch.eu
acknowledgement