

BACKGROUND PAPER FOR THE ITALIAN NATIONAL POSITION PAPER ON THE ROLE OF SSH IN THE "HORIZON 2020 - THE FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION".

The EU has recently concluded a consultation process directed at discussing key issues to be addressed in the future EU research and innovation funding programs. The results of the consultation will feed into the preparation of the Commission's formal proposals for these programs, which are due to be adopted by the end of 2011. In this context, several initiatives have been undertaken in Europe to reflect and recommend lines of actions for the next Programme in the area of Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH). As part of these activities, the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MIUR), with the support of the National Contact Point APRE, has promoted a one-day meeting to discuss possible themes and actions, on which SSH might be focusing under the next Programme. The meeting was held in Rome, on June 15, 2011.

All individuals, professional and scientific associations participating in the meeting have agreed on the need to strengthen research in the Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities area, especially in a period as the current one, in which European institutions and policy-makers are facing a variety of major challenges, precisely in SSH-related areas such as demographic changes and migrations, democracy, participation, European identity, social and cultural cohesion, peace and international cooperation, economic growth and social inequality and many others.

The EU needs strong and independent research, providing evidence-based support for political decision-making. Social sciences should be strengthened as a mainstream contribution to other research areas, but also in the European Research Council and as an independent set of distinct societal challenges. This clearly calls for the reinforcing of research in SSH, through the combination of (i) a dedicated research effort to increase and improve the scientific knowledge in the SSH domain (new methodologies and tools, new data, better understanding and interpretation of societal issues), (ii) the systematic integration of the socio-economic dimension in disciplinary research addressing all other research domains. Only through the combination of these two approaches will socio-economic sciences succeed in providing the expected input to policy making. Moreover, the social science component should be kept distinct from the security and innovation dimensions of the challenge. The EU should not only continue to finance SSH research as well as integrated collaborative projects on both smaller and larger scale, but also better adapt these projects to social science standards, such as setting effective ceilings for large scale projects (e.g. not over 5 million Euros per project), promoting also smaller projects up to 1 million Euros; strengthening the SSH component of the Marie Curie Programme; stressing partnering not only with industry, but also with the public sector and the civil society. These efforts should make clear the importance of SSH in each of the three main areas of research funded at the EU level: mainstreaming research, ERC and Collaborative Projects. A better understanding of these societal challenges through both analysis and policy-oriented research will contribute substantially to the innovation capabilities of societies and to meet the goals set out in the EU 2020 Strategy. Indeed, all core objectives of EU 2020 – Education, Employment, Fighting Poverty and the 20/20/20 climate targets will highly benefit directly from the research expected to be conducted in these areas.

In line with the ongoing discussion at the European and national level, we argue that a theme tentatively called **“Understanding Europe in a global context: towards inclusive, innovative and secure societies”** would produce European-level, socially relevant, cutting-edge research, focusing on transformation processes and producing fundamental support for evidence-based decision-making by political, social and economic actors. To this end, attention should be paid to both the fundamental processes and the applied contexts of real life, at the different levels covered by SSH: cultural, educational, political, psychological and socio-economic, political, educational and cultural. The research activities would include in-depth and longitudinal comparative studies with a global scope,

projections and scenarios based on long-range empirical data, specific projects aimed at updating educational content and structures and at a better understanding of global processes,.

More specifically, we suggest that the following specific SSH Research Themes should be promoted in the next Programme.

Democracy, Governance and socio-political Equality

This theme aims at identifying economic, social, cultural, institutional and political elements needed to design democratic societies and institutions based on social and intergenerational equity, political and economic participation, and tolerance. The goal is to achieve a better understanding of the deep causes and long-lasting consequences of social inequality, with a special attention to the conditions of minorities in democratic societies, taking into account the interplay between the changing global context and the EU's internal developments. Particular emphasis will be on the overall process of democratization of governance, its prerequisites and its consequences in terms of social organization and attitudes, citizens empowerment and the instruments (also technological) to enact it. Research would examine socio-economic inequality, poverty, gender, migration and integration issues, educational strategies, prejudice and intergroup relations, stereotypes and cognitive processes underlying social relations, conditions promoting and hampering socio-political integration, all factors affecting political and social participation. More specific issues of growing importance such as the normative-legal foundation of pluralism and the new inequalities caused by trans-nationalisation should also be addressed.

EU in the World

This theme aims at analyzing both the context in which the European Union will be moving in the short, medium and long-term at the global and at the regional level and the institutional, political, social and cultural adjustments and changes EU has to make in order to cope with global and regional challenges. Research in this field should be conducted through a variety of methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives. Specific attention should be given to the problem of geographical and cultural borders to take into account the development occurring in areas close to the EU and the Mediterranean Basin, as well as the Caucasus, Central Asia and Russia. One of the topics should be the conditions that could enhance or reduce the level of conflict in these areas. Likewise, attention should be devoted to the EU's engagement both with non-state actors, which represent key actors in 21st century international relations as well as with global and emerging powers in today's increasingly multipolar world. More generally, this line of research should explore the conditions for enhancing the EU's actorness on the world scene, notably its capacity to promote and contribute to global governance and effective multilateralism.

Governance and Institution-Building

This theme aims at analysing governance, management and coordination processes within all structural levels of politics, society and business/economics. Research undertaken under this heading would employ normative, institutional and analytical approaches and provide a basis of reflection for the evolving of EU's normative framework on a mid/long term. Research will be informed by the working hypothesis that the global competitiveness of governance and strategic synergies will be decisive for the course that innovation processes, economic growth and social and political participation will take, and for the ways in which competing agendas can be negotiated. Research under this heading will be about division of powers and responsibilities and about coordination and cooperation among the levels of government. By preventing power accumulation and dividing government among all relevant actors, essential elements of good governance (democracy, efficiency, transparency and accountability) are increased. Research will enable to better protect legitimate differences (ethnic, cultural, economic, political, social, geographic) among territories and to single out policies tailored to local needs and preferences. These include the enhancement of learning capacity from the multiplication of centres of

government: policies and governing techniques experimented elsewhere and at different levels of government can provide solutions to specific problems. Research will be necessarily comparative and problem-solving oriented. This due to a twofold reason: to enable scholars, policy-makers and ultimately citizens to compare the performance of their governments with that of governments in other jurisdictions and to ensure the application of innovative techniques of governance to policy in an inclusive and participatory manner, especially in sensitive fields where a plurality of actors is involved (e.g. financial relations, educational systems, environmental issues, cross-border cooperation, fiscal systems).

Finally, the problem of a lacking citizen-proximity in EU has become a focus of political and strategic debates. To reduce the gap between the Union and its citizens, research and scholarly study of territorial cooperation as a new and innovative form of European governance is definitely required. In the aforementioned areas the focus should be on public awareness, fair exploitation of the raw materials, the level of public aid in infrastructures-building and in their management, new job and income possibilities for EU and non-EU citizens, free access and fair media system. Another priority should be to research the ways to understand the guidelines of EU citizenship, in order to better protect minority rights all around Europe, and to evaluate and benchmark the member States' policy in this field (even by comparing policies regarding EU and non-EU minorities).

Inclusive, Smarter Growth

Europe also faces the challenge of creating the conditions for a well balanced, sustained and sustainable economic growth, which can ensure the population's well being as well as the protection and preservation of the environment, also in light of the recent migration flows and demographic movements. Indeed, there is an increasingly widespread sentiment that though economic growth is a crucial indicator for human development, other environmental, psychological and social dimensions play a decisive role. Hence, investigating modalities of societal progress and prosperity where growth of GDP may not play the main role will have to be matter of serious consideration. Competitiveness of the European firms and industries will be crucial for growth, and a fundamental factor to enhance it is innovation. Finally, the efficiency and stability of the financial sector will be key to driving the European economy along a sustainable and reliable growth path. Research in these areas would hinge on a variety of themes and methods, theory as well as data driven, aiming at examining the wide range of factors, at socio- psychological and -economic levels, able to affect the actual expression of decision making, risk management, employment issues and innovative processes. The main topics would include intellectual property rights, GDP and other measures of economic growth and population well being, innovation and incentives, banking and financial system structure, market and firm organizational structure.

Explore the complementarity between well-regulated financial markets and government actions, both in the labour market and in the conduct of macroeconomic policies. Beyond the provision of a standard safety net, fulfilling this task may stimulate flexibility and risk-taking behavior, necessary to foster innovation and growth. Research in these areas should also focus on core-periphery relations both within EU and member countries, in the face of persistent economic dualism. Efficiency of EU multi-level institutional arrangements in dealing with these issues should also be investigated.

Peace and Conflict in the 21st century

Understanding the underlying causes, manifestations and possible solutions to war and conflict has always been and remains the most critical question in international affairs. While the question is the same since the inception of international studies, its meaning has evolved over the decades. In the 21st century, understanding the micro and macro causes and manifestations of conflict, delving into their interrelated economic, political-identity, social and environmental dimensions is a pressing task. Understanding the drivers of conflict is, in turn, pivotal to any attempt at managing, resolving or transforming these, a goal that has been heralded by the European Union as a founding basis of its

internal nature and external action. In particular, exploring how hybrid peacebuilding policies emerge through the complex interplay of international, national and regional state and non-state forces remains a critical task to be tackled by the European research area.

Managing Risk, Enhancing Foresight, Fostering Creativity

Foresight activity of possible, future, socio-economic scenarios is fundamental for current decision making in EU. As in the FP7, foresight activity could select few themes of specific and strategic interest for the EU, where to concentrate attention. New and improved forward looking methods and approaches should be explored in order to better capture discontinuities and changes of paradigms that the current methodological state-of-the-art largely fails to tackle. New approaches should be construed as intrinsically multidisciplinary and based on the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and tools, thus fostering the establishment of a new, extended community of researchers. The following is only a very partial list of possible areas where research effort could be specifically focused.

The new demographic, political and socio-economic equilibria, that could arise from the present critical situations in the Middle East and Northern Africa. The evolution of EU educational systems as compared to the rest of the world, and their role in enhancing competitiveness and well being. The role and the size of the EU States, the evolution of public debt and the welfare systems, and of the public-private partnerships. The evolving media industry in EU, and its influence on social representations and culture. Innovation and discovery in the pharmaceutical and health care industry. Research in these areas, will be grounded on sound theoretical premises, as well as heavily based on data analysis and forecasting activity.

The EU Media Space and EU identity

In a time when traditional mass-media system appears closed to common citizens, the web shows itself as an alternative open system for promoting direct democracy; for criticizing the failures of the public powers and for projecting new experiences of public policy. Hence, attention should be given to European researches which could evaluate and benchmark the new media system all around EU's web space; this could be useful to growth, the public debate and the reinforcing of democracy system.

Unity in Diversity

Research should strongly focus on burning issues such as the integration of migrants and vulnerable groups, as minorities, in the mainstream society, multilingual education, and approaches to foster multilingual and mediation competences. In particular, a fundamental task for future research in Europe is the interaction and complementarities between 'old' and 'new' minority groups (national minorities vs. migrants). In EU, many states have established systems of 'old' minority rights, but have not yet developed sound policies for the integration of the growing groups originating from migration. Finally, proper attention shall be given to approaches to ethnic conflict prevention. Since the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the necessity to accommodate ethnic diversity and the way how states are treating diverse communities has gradually become a matter of international concern. This is an issue which does not only affect the intra-state dimension, rather the contrary: features of conflict resolution have broader implications for regional and worldwide security and stability.

Language Beyond Borders

Language and communication skills are also vital for the individual development of European citizens as well as for their participation in politics and business in a multilingual market. To achieve and foster social innovation, language and all aspects related to this subject deserve being considered as an independent priority in the next Programme. The knowledge of foreign languages in Europe remains weak. There is no sufficient awareness concerning the assets on the one hand and the challenges of linguistic diversity in Europe on the other hand. Language skills are important for success at school and in business, for employment market and intra-Europe mobility. Furthermore, one of the commitments listed in the European Commission's communication COM(2010) 546 final focuses on standardisation

as a means of speeding up interoperability and fostering innovation in fast-moving global markets. Language barriers and differences in legal systems are one of the main obstacles that hamper or slow down communication and business within the EU. This is a major challenge, especially for SMEs, who often lack the in-house competences and resources to overcome such obstacles.

Cultural Change and Historical Heritage

This theme would provide time-depth to an assessment of the forces of culture (values, traditions, religious beliefs, institutional practices and innovation drives) across Europe, with reference to the evolution of the cultures and to their encounter. The historic, cultural and linguistic perspectives developed in this line of research will produce, *inter alia*, a better understanding of the needs of 21st century education, and of the ways in which world views and life concepts influence the capabilities for innovation in societies (politics, business, civil society etc.). A special attention should be paid to check if and how, on the long term, cultural changes are to be conditioned by demographical ones. A better understanding of cultural, legal-institutional and linguistic diversity will serve also as a source for detecting creative and innovative potential, as a key determinant for society's adaptive capabilities in the face of change, and as a resource for successful global communication. In this framework, another couple of focuses could be the traditions' migrating phenomena, due to the migration process, and the effects of cultural change on traditional political leadership in the 'old' EU Countries.

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