

Position Paper IE H2020

The ‘SSH embedding Challenge’

1. Introduction

Four years ago, Ghent University – currently 27th on the list of Higher and Secondary Education Institutes (HES) regarding financial intake out of Horizon 2020 (H2020)¹ – created five multidisciplinary and cross-faculty Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) consortia². These consortia focus on interdisciplinary research within SSH and are increasingly reaching out to Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) researchers in Europe. By working together in and with these consortia, we have increasingly become aware of the position we have carved out as a frontrunner in multidisciplinary SSH research and innovation. Interestingly, the European Commission (COM) is moving even faster than we are, striving towards the broadest possible range of multidisciplinary across all research disciplines in H2020. In our opinion, the COM has taken an important first step in what surely will be a long, but necessary process. The COM has also made a lot of efforts and progress regarding embedding SSH research in H2020. However, much more is possible and advisable to realise its full potential.

In this position paper, we distinguish between embedded SSH and dedicated SSH. Dedicated SSH refers to Societal Challenge (SC) 6 ‘Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies’.³ Embedded SSH refers to the inclusion of SSH expertise in STEMM research projects in one of the other SCs or ICT, Space and the Key Enabling Technologies (KETs) under the second pillar.

This document is deliberately limited to SSH related questions, notwithstanding the relevance of other topics for the IE Horizon 2020 like the ones discussed during the [IE Horizon 2020 hearing in the European Parliament](#) and in the position papers of [the Belgian Universities](#), [EUA](#) and [CESAER](#).

2. Strengthen embedded SSH research activities

a) *Make qualitative integration of SSH activities possible*

To make embedded SSH research and innovation work, recognising SSH as an integral part of research activities is key. The potential added value of SSH expertise is not limited to an add-on for STEMM research. Given their sophisticated tools of analysis – designed to tackle complex societal challenges pertaining to all aspects and domains of human activity – SSH researchers aim much higher than merely being invited somewhere along the way in the formation of a consortium to do an impact-, market-, or feasibility study, being considered as one of the less crucial parts of a project. Furthermore, the contribution of SSH research might support evidence-based policymaking and could generate new insights in understanding societal, political, economic and technological issues. Similar to co-creation processes with stakeholders in order to increase research impact, SSH researchers should be more fundamentally and effectively involved from the start in the processes of defining the Societal Challenges and of drafting Scoping Papers, work programmes and project proposals. Analogous to European Technology Platforms, an SSH platform, consisting of researchers and representatives from policy and civil society, might provide input for SSH activities in H2020. However, despite the much appreciated efforts of the COM in the previous years at paving the way for an improved integration of SSH, the involvement of SSH researchers in Scoping Papers and work programmes often does not exceed the level of mere add-on work. Moreover, around 20% of the projects funded under SSH flagged topics, do not demonstrate any involvement of SSH disciplines.⁴ It goes without saying that this will not help the integration of SSH in H2020, nor will it boost Europe’s

¹ [Horizon 2020 Monitoring report 2015](#), p. 243

² The link to these “Research Consortia Social, behavioral sciences and humanities” can be found [here](#).

³ This is in line with the vision of most stakeholders. We are aware of the fact that the COM does not consider SC6 as the SSH Societal Challenge.

⁴ [Horizon 2020 Monitoring report 2015](#), p. 214



competitiveness and capacity for effective innovation in response to complex societal challenges. High quality, fully embedded SSH activities should become the standard in any Framework Programme.

In creating these embedded SSH research opportunities, it is essential, as indicated in the Monitoring Report 2015⁵, to significantly broaden the range of SSH disciplines that are contributing to H2020. A lot of the available SSH-expertise incorporates high societal value creation demonstrating cultural, social, policy and economic impact, but this research has hardly been tapped into. Bottom up approaches involving citizens, civil society, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) and civil services or government agencies – referred to as the quadruple helix – that aid to solve complex societal challenges, could and should be strengthened by the expertise available within SSH disciplines.

At this moment, the more easily connectable STEMM and SSH research fields already find each other relatively smoothly. For example, at Ghent University, an Art, Music and Theatre scientist works together with ICT researchers in an ICT project like [BEAT HEALTH](#) or a psychologist collaborates with bio-medicine researchers in a Health project like [DOLORISK](#). And thanks to the efforts of the COM, we also have SSH experts in the Expert Advisory Groups (EAG). Unfortunately, these are often experts from the SSH-disciplines that are 'easier' to link up to from a STEMM-perspective. For example, in the EAG for SC7, 5 out of 7 SSH experts are STEMM focussed, i.e. chiefly ICT focussed.

Setting up a multidisciplinary project, crossing disciplines and national borders at the same time is indeed no mean feat. We do understand it takes time to change old habits, especially since this multidisciplinary policy choice of the COM for H2020 has only been encouraged since early 2014. Neither can we forget that the history of cooperation between STEMM disciplines, almost forced to work together due to their need for often very expensive Research Infrastructures, is completely different from the environment of many SSH researchers, whose financial needs are less substantial. Yet, bringing embedded SSH research activities to the next level of high-quality integration, requires to look at all stages of the process, from EAG, through Scoping Papers and work programmes, to the project proposal phase.

Recommendations

- In work programmes, **aim for fully embedded SSH research opportunities**, not for SSH add-on, consultancy tasks
- **Broaden the range of SSH research disciplines and areas of expertise** that are contributing to H2020
 - in Expert Advisory Groups, Scoping Papers, work programmes, projects, etc.
- **Support the creation of a SSH Platform**, analogous to European Technology Platforms, **which provides input for defining Societal Challenges and for SSH activities in Scoping Papers and work programmes** for the entire Framework Programme

b) *Increase the quality of the ESR*

As indicated in the position paper of [the Belgian Universities](#), the quality, the length and the level of detail of the feedback in the Evaluation Summary Reports (ESR) in H2020 generally decreased compared to FP7. Looking specifically into SSH, ESR often show a lack of SSH expertise, more specifically for SSH embedded project proposals. We do understand that striking the right balance within evaluator panels taking into account all kinds of equilibria is not easy. However, if the range of SSH disciplines active in H2020 will be broadened, the problem of not having integrated SSH evaluators in the evaluator panels will become alarming and will undermine the efforts made in the Scoping Paper and work programme phases. After all, if evaluators do not know enough about SSH approaches and perspectives, it will be difficult to evaluate the added value of SSH research and innovation activities in project proposals.

⁵ [Horizon 2020 Monitoring report 2015](#), p. 214

Also work has to be done within research institutions themselves. The internal SSH – EU working group of Ghent University has developed a policy to encourage researchers to help the COM with the evaluation of project proposals. Therefore, we drafted a set of guidelines with information as well as best practices for all phases: from becoming an evaluator for the COM, up to putting this experience as an evaluator to use in the writing process of new European project proposals.

Recommendation

- **Encourage the COM to take serious action on selecting SSH researchers to help evaluate STEMM project proposals with embedded SSH research activities**

c) Take societal/social impact into account

The use of Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) is common in H2020. TRLs are used to measure impact and follow an economical logic. However, the TRL approach is a linear model that is rarely applicable to SSH research projects. For instance, policy influence, a typical form of impact for many SSH researchers, is not created in a linear way. Thus, using the TRLs frustrates the COMs own wish to make high-quality embedded SSH work. And although SSH research includes technology related studies and contributes to an efficient technologic impact, its impact cannot be reduced to technological knowledge transfer. Furthermore, the T in TRL does not allow for the kind of societal value creation and complex, non-linear processes that are inherent to the societal impact of SSH research.

At Ghent University, we therefore were very pleased with funding available for H2020 projects as [ACCOMPLISSH](#) or [ENRESSH](#) and with the announcement of the COM that they have started to work on developing a more sophisticated definition of impact together with a High Level Expert Group. We have good faith the COM will soon take into account much more easily other kinds of impact, notably societal impact while working with new models. We also hope the new definition of Impact will do justice to the wide variety of societal impact created by SSH research and that assessment tools will not be limited to quantifiable indicators, but will include qualitative descriptors, like the ones that will be developed in the H2020 [ACCOMPLISSH](#) project in which Ghent University is involved as a partner. More specifically, within [ACCOMPLISSH](#), researchers from Ghent University are developing an SSH value creation concept that accommodates the diverse nature of SSH research impact. Guidelines for optimisation of collaborative research methods and co-creation processes will be developed. This will forge a more optimal use of available expertise. The societal challenges Europe is facing are by definition extremely complex, and taking into account sophisticated tools of analysis and nuanced results of SSH research will lead to better and more effective evidence-based policy-making. And that is exactly what European citizens need, what SSH researchers aspire to contribute to the implementation of the EU2020 policy via H2020, and what will strengthen Europe's competitiveness and capacity to respond to the societal challenges.

Recommendation

- **Make sure the more sophisticated definition of impact, that the COM is currently working on, takes into account Societal/Social Impact**

d) Add a target budget to the SSH KPI

In the annual H2020 Monitoring reports, progress on the cross-cutting issue SSH is being closely monitored. However, no target budget is fixed for SSH spending as is the case for other cross-cutting issues like the 20% target budget⁶ for SMEs or the 60% target budget⁷ for sustainability and climate

⁶ SMEs are expected to receive funding amounting to 20% of the total combined budgets of the Societal Challenges and the specific objective LEIT. See the [Horizon 2020 Monitoring Report 2015](#), p. 53.

⁷ The Regulation 1291/2013 establishing Horizon 2020 specifies that 'it is expected that at least 60% of the overall H2020 budget should be related to sustainable development. It is also expected that climate related expenditure

related expenditure. If the European Institutions are really serious about the importance of SSH research and innovation for Europe, they could demonstrate it by (i) monitoring overall H2020 dedicated and embedded SSH expenditure, but most importantly, by (ii) introducing a sufficiently high target budget for SSH research and innovation expenditure. We propose a target budget for SSH spending of 10%⁸ within H2020.

An important point of attention for the composition of the overall SSH KPI is that SC6 'Europe in a changing world' should not be considered as an SSH budget in its entirety, since the biggest share of the SC6 budget is spent on COST. See annex I. We would also like to simply point out that the share of 'Other Actions' – COST taken out of the calculations - within the SC6 (around 10 % in 2014), is twice (!) the size of the average percentage overall the Societal Challenges (around 5 % in 2014). If we keep COST into consideration as part of the 'Other Actions', like the COM does, this percentage is even around three (!) times higher. These figures are in the same order of magnitude in the other years of H2020. See annex II.

Recommendations

- **Start to measure SSH expenditure in H2020**, embedded and dedicated SSH separately as well as added up
- **Introduce a target budget for SSH spending in H2020**
 - a. Please take into account that COST is partly part of SC6, and cannot be considered as SSH budget.
 - b. Please note the budget for 'Other Actions' in SC6 is twice (!) the size of the average percentage
- **Set this target budget for SSH spending overall H2020 at 10%**

e) *Introduce Research Actions*

As indicated during the Hearing in the EP on the IE H2020 of 29 November 2016, a shift from Research to Innovation took place between European programmes, from H2020 to EFSI, but also between the successive Framework Programmes. To present this in a very simplified manner: FP6 and FP7 were about Research, while H2020 is about Innovation, at least in the first four years. Ghent University definitely supports increased attention for Innovation. However, we have gone too far; the pendulum has swung from one side (Research) completely to the other side (Innovation). Low-hanging fruit – research and innovation activities in the highest TRLs - are picked by the COM to get innovations to the market, while SSH researchers in H2020 should also be allowed to generate new knowledge. To help find a better balance between Research funding and funding for Innovation, we propose to introduce Research Actions in the second and third pillars of the Framework Programme to complement the existing 'Research and Innovation Actions' and 'Innovation Actions'. Research Actions will provide funding in the first place for researchers from universities, RTOs, University colleges, etc., but the Actions will of course also be open to Innovators. After all, it's only by working together that knowledge exchange can take place. All three types of projects should then receive around one third of the Societal Challenges budget. This will not only help (i) to obtain a better balance between Research and Innovation within H2020 and (ii) respond to recommendation 4 in the Study on Network Analysis not to make multidisciplinary mandatory⁹, but it will also (iii) support SSH integration, seeing the full potential contribution of SSH to society.

Recommendation

- **Introduce Research Actions (RA), to foster**

should exceed 35% of the overall H2020 budget, including mutually compatible measures improving resource efficiency'. See [Horizon 2020 Monitoring Report 2015](#), p. 226.

⁸ We know that the share of budget going to SSH partners in the second and third pillars is around 5 %, see the [Horizon 2020 Monitoring Report 2015](#), p. 213, and our best guess is that, around 10 % of the first pillar budget is going to SSH partners.

⁹ [Study on Network Analysis of the 7th Framework Programme Participation](#), page XV.

- SSH integration in H2020 and
- broadening the range of SSH disciplines contributing to H2020

f) Transform the SME Innovation Associate scheme

The SME Innovation Associate pilot in the H2020/pillar II is about financing a one year appointment of a researcher within an SME to bring an innovative idea into practice. SSH researchers nevertheless often work more closely together with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's, civil society) than with SMEs. We propose to allow this kind of non-academic partners to benefit from this scheme as well. This will strengthen SSH-integration in H2020 and it will support social innovation.

Recommendation

- **Transform the SME Innovation Associate scheme** in pillar II, so as to include NGOs

3. For FP9, maintain the dedicated SSH budget

g) Raise the dedicated SSH budget to a normal level

In the run-up to Horizon 2020, the legitimacy of a dedicated SSH budget in the Framework Programme was highly debated. In the COMs proposal for H2020, the entire SSH budget was to be spent on embedded research and innovation activities. The SSH community opposed this new approach – in our opinion rightly so – and obtained some result: a tiny dedicated SSH budget. Whichever way you look at it, the current dedicated SSH budget¹⁰ is very small. Even when taking into account the differences in financial needs between SSH and STEMM, there is still a huge gap with the budgets of other Societal Challenges: e.g. in 2015, the SC6 budget for the calls was around 147 million euros, while call budgets for SC7 (Secure Societies) and SC2 (Food) – the two lowest of the other SC budgets after SC6, were around 200 million euros, whereas SC3 Energy amounted to more than 600 million euros.

At Ghent University, with approximately 2.070 SSH researchers and 7.051 STEMM researchers, we see that SSH, aside from its added value in the embedded approach, has an enormous value in and of itself. This is mainly thanks to its nuanced analysis of (and historically grounded perspective on) complex societal challenges like poverty, migration, inequality, and radicalisation, to name only a few. Moreover, it should be clear that multidisciplinary is not limited to a combination of SSH and STEMM research and innovation. Within SSH also, there is a very large diversity of disciplines and research traditions: multidisciplinary cooperation within SSH has a massive added value for challenges with which the EU and the world are now facing, like the financial crises, refugee crisis, etc. There is thus no justification for this dedicated SSH budget to be that minuscule. These facts should form the basis for FP9: an end should be put to the chronic underfunding of SSH and a bigger budget share of FP9 should be accorded to dedicated SSH research and research and innovation activities. Ghent University wholeheartedly supports multidisciplinary cooperation between STEMM and SSH, but multidisciplinary SSH research and innovation is also very important for Europe to be able to address the societal challenges it is facing.

Recommendation, for FP9

- **Raise the dedicated SSH budget to a normal level**

4. Questions?

If you have questions, please contact Ms Wendy Sonneveld, Chair of the Ghent University SSH –EU working group and Sr Policy Advisor European Affairs at Ghent University, T + 32 9 264 9562 or wendy.sonneveld@ugent.be.

¹⁰ SC6 budget minus COST.

Annex I

Share of SSH dedicated budget within SC6

Year	Total budget SC6 in EUR million	of which COST in EUR million	Of which SSH dedicated budget (including other actions like public procurement, prizes and evaluators)
2014	149.07	19.21	129.86
2015	160.54	20.64	139.90
2016	154.33	20.68	133.65
2017	176.54	20.68	155.86

Annex II

Share of Other Costs (= non-R&D&I activities) within the Societal Challenges

SC	year	Total budget in millions EURO	R&D&I part (= call budget)	non R&D&I-part	% non-R&D&I
SC6	2014	149,27	131,61	15,66	10,6% ¹¹
SC6	2015	160,68	147,7	12,98	8,1%
SC6	2016	154,33	132,53	21,8	14,1%
SC6	2017	176,54	158,13	18,41	10,4%
SC1	2014	633,2	589,3	43,9	6,9%
SC1	2015	609,27	589,8	19,47	3,2%
SC1	2016	510,18	444,3	65,88	12,9%
SC1	2017	486,44	424,26	62,18	12,8%
SC2	2014	269,07	265,5	3,57	1,3%
SC2	2015	199,97	196,4	3,57	1,8%
SC2	2016	364,61	359,35	5,26	1,4%
SC2	2017	432,74	431,74	1	0,2%
SC3	2014	639,87	562,58	77,29	12,1%
SC3	2015	671,02	618,42	52,6	7,8%
SC3	2016	673,2	564,56	108,64	16,1%
SC3	2017	700,09	646,39	53,7	7,7%
SC4	2014	578,91	572,87	6,04	1,0%
SC4	2015	302,57	293,11	9,46	3,1%
SC4	2016	446,62	434,54	12,08	2,7%
SC4	2017	495,36	480,43	14,93	3,0%
SC5	2014	348,26	338	10,26	2,9%
SC5	2015	377,57	372,15	5,42	1,4%
SC5	2016	358,25	355,5	2,75	0,8%
SC5	2017	401,75	397,6	4,15	1,0%
SC7	2014	191,02	186,99	4,03	2,1%
SC7	2015	204,92	200,18	4,74	2,3%
SC7	2016	185,35	181,53	3,82	2,1%
SC7	2017	204,92	200,32	4,6	2,2%
	total	10925,98	10275,79	648,19	5,4 %

¹¹ COST taken out, otherwise this figure would vary between 20,9% (2015) and 27,5 % (2016). The average percentage of non-R&D&I is than 7,3 %.