

ARTICLE

Thematic Research Funding in the European Union: What is Expected from Social Scientific Knowledge-making?

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Abstract

This article investigates how the European Union contributes to the academic fields of social sciences through its major research funding instrument, the Framework Programme for Research. It does so asking two principal questions: How does the EU research Framework Programme (FP) work? And what are this funding programme's ambitions concerning the social sciences? These programmes provide the largest targeted funding for these fields, bring together researchers throughout Europe and producing a sense of “belonging” for a larger scholarly community. Yet the underlying economic policy aims, and the marginal position of “SSH” labelled programme, within larger structures treat the social sciences as a residual category. Thus there remains a certain ambiguity as to what can be expected from these programmes for the social sciences.

Keywords

SSH—Social Sciences and Humanities; European Framework Programmes; European Research Funding; Sociology of Social Sciences

Introduction

There can be little doubt that the European integration project has contributed greatly to the development of science and research in Europe. It has fostered and institutionalized scientific cooperation (e.g. Krige 2002; Strasser 2002; König 2016), established an inter-national space for scientific expertise (e.g. Barry 2006; Felt and Wynne 2007), created a major research funding instrument (e.g., Muldur et al. 2006; Schögler 2014), and, as several accounts have claimed, turned into a policy area in itself (Guzzetti 1995; Krige and Guzzetti 1997; Krige 1997; André 2006, 2008, 2009; Madsen 2010). This is also true for the social sciences. Research in this domain has been funded in programmes dealing with technology assessment, as well as in matters concerning health,

environment, employment or energy. Parts of the social sciences, and to a limited extent also the humanities, are being funded in institutionalized forms; through the intergovernmental implementation of the European University Institute in Florence or the creation of a European statistical agency—Eurostat—or the establishment of European survey programmes, for example. Since the early 1980s, multiannual EU funding programmes—such as FAST (standing for “forecast science and technology”)—were established, aimed at making specific social scientific knowledge available to policy-makers (Guzzetti 1995: 99–101).

This article is concerned with the political and administrative processes of establishing funding schemes for research projects at the EU level. It deals with those parts of the European Union’s major multi-annual research funding instrument, also referred to as Framework Programmes (FP), that explicitly address the social sciences via thematic calls for projects. How is this particular kind of EU research funding policy towards the social sciences formulated?

To answer this question, we will seek to understand the formulation of social science foci by investigating the broad intentions of the multiannual programmes as well as taking into account technicalities of micromanagement and related decision-making procedures. We aim to explain the complex interplay of underlying structures and policy principles that, to researchers—as addressees and, sometimes, also beneficiaries of funding opportunities—often remain opaque. A further aim is to investigate the ambitions of the programmes set up under the FP format to fund research in the various fields of social sciences.

“Clouded-sky” research funding refers to funding programs that define thematic foci, which are used by scholars to generate detailed research proposals. It is usually called “mission-oriented” research and has been the mainstream approach for the FP format to fund research (at least until the European Research Council was set up, which is explicitly addressing blue-sky research). The metaphor of “clouds” draws on at least two elements shared by thematic funding and clouded-sky programmes (see also Schögler 2014: 5–6). First, clouds (missions) hide the blue sky, which can, nonetheless, be imagined as existing behind them. Also, clouds are literally closer to the ground and therefore represent less ambitious research. Yet the blue keeps shining through and represents the intrinsic research interests scholars may incorporate into project proposals. Second, politically predefined missions need to be interpreted and call texts leave space for diverging disciplinary perspectives, just as clouds are often perceived subjectively to represent imagined, different shapes.

In this article, we first provide some fundamental information on how the FP format works in section 2. Then, in section 3, we look at the political procedure of negotiations that delineate the broad intentions of various editions of the FP format and the role of social sciences therein. Section 4 examines “Work Programmes”—i.e. strategic documents containing calls for proposals—as documents that shape the content of knowledge-making. In an effort to trace the effects of micromanagement, we analyze successful project bids and the institutions participating in these programmes in section 5.¹ In our conclusion, we return to more fundamental questions concerning the relationship between the social sciences and the EU research funding programmes.

¹ This article does not examine what sort of research is actually funded; and it does not look into the results of research projects (for a take on evaluating projects see the FP7 funded project IMPACT-EV). While those would have been interesting research questions, they were outside the scope of this article.

Preliminaries of EU Research Funding Policy

Two main proponents of European research policy once provocatively stated: “Europe today has no research policy” (Ruberti and André 1997: 325). The quote aimed to highlight that, at the time, there was no primary policy interest in research as a long-term and disinterested means of knowledge-making. Yet, the same two proponents also acknowledged: “research was present from the very early stages of European construction” (Ruberti and André 1997: 331; see also Banchoff 2002: 7–8). With the 1986 Single European Act, research policy turned into formal European policy, though still restricted to certain fields.

Since the mid-1990s, research policy at the European level taken off with the political and programmatic implementation of the European Research Area and the Lisbon Declaration at the European Council in 2000 being important early milestones. The construction of a “knowledge-based society” at the center of the European Union’s aims (Madsen 2010: 44) put knowledge, research and research policy firmly on the political agenda. The 2007 Lisbon “Treaty on European Union” put science and research officially on the European stage (TEU Art 3(3), and TFEU Art 179–190).

To a fair extent, these political ambitions revolve around the Framework Programme for Research (FP), a multi-annual research funding programme run by the European Commission. Since 1984, it has developed into a powerful instrument for research funding in different areas of science policy. It has been, and still is, perceived by politicians as an important lifeline to support the establishment of a “knowledge-based European Union”, ultimately with the purpose of contributing to economic growth.

The FP budget developed from on average €640 million per year in the first edition, to about €7 billion per year in FP7, reaching €9.6 billion in 2012 (European Commission 2012a) and €9.9 billion in 2015 (European Parliament 2016: 11–12). It should increase further, although cuts are planned at some point (see EUA—European University Association 2016). This impressive growth in the research budget exceeds even the general increase in financial means available to the European Union. In 1970, the research budget only accounted for 1.8% of total EU expenditure, while figures in FP7 are closer to 7% (6.1% in 2011 and 6.9% in 2012). The numbers for the first years of Horizon 2020 are at 6.1% in 2015 and 6.5% in 2016 (for budget number see European Commission 2016b).

In his analysis of the European research area, Nikos Kastrinos (2010) makes two observations. The first is that, despite the emphasis on research priorities and thematic orientations, European research funding is, by and large, moving towards a “diffusion-oriented model”, prioritizing capacity building over fulfilling a distinct mission (Kastrinos 2010: 301). This is also the case with the recent, eighth Framework Programme, better known as “Horizon 2020”, which consists of three pillars: “excellent science”; “industrial leadership”; and “societal challenges”. In other words, the FP has been moving to an all-encompassing policy instrument by funding research. Yet within this policy instrument thematic foci have proliferated, some of which are also directed towards the social sciences.

Kastrinos’ second observation is that, as the FP format has been amassing weight, as well as layers, of goals its various sub-programmes have emerged as points-of-reference for the member states, both in terms of themes (such as prescribing “societal challenges”) and orientations (diffusion

instead of mission).² This, too, is a trend that has only increased with “Horizon 2020”. The role of FP funding schemes and themes is of particular importance here because, despite the limited means available for the social sciences compared to the overall FP budget, and despite several national funding schemes targeting research in the social sciences and humanities, “in comparative terms this has been the largest targeted programme in Europe” (Kastrinos 2010: 304) for “SSH”.

Kastrinos’ article focuses on the social sciences and humanities in the analysis of research funding policy in Europe, and it concedes that so-called challenges are “politically defined” (Kastrinos 2010: 308). However, it says little about the ambitions (if any) behind the programmes created and then assigned to fund research in the social sciences. Given that the entire EU research policy is dominated by the objective to generate “innovation”, how do the social sciences fit in? Dual ambitions can be distinguished. The first one, related to mission-oriented research policy, is to exploit social scientific knowledge making to advance certain political goals (such as, better policy decisions). The second, related to diffusion-oriented research policy, is to bolster a social-scientific knowledge base with the expectation of indirect effects (such as better-trained experts).

Before delving into the technicalities of EU research policy-making, it is first important to understand how the FP format “works,” that is, how it is crafted in the political realm of EU institutions, and then operationalized in the bureaucratic space of (mostly) the European Commission. Basically, two layers of legal text can be distinguished, each negotiated in different realms, at different times, and by different participants.

First is the “policy layer.” The key text here is the Decision by the EU Member States that establishes an edition of the multi-annual Framework Programme (initially, an edition ran for four years, but since the seventh edition it has run for seven years to fit budgetary planning), in addition to “Specific Programmes”, that is, subsets of the programme carving out the aims and goals of those subsets in greater detail. There are other important texts in this layer, such as the “rules for participants” (in earlier versions, these were not always separate texts but annexes to the main text). This is also the level where, metaphorically, the clouds are hung in the sky.

The texts in the policy layer result from negotiations, starting with a number of public consultations triggered by policy documents, stakeholder events and bottom-up mobilization. The European Commission also relies on a range of advisory boards dealing with strategic questions at different levels that reach from call texts to overall research strategies (see VERA 2012: 9; Schögler 2014: 166). In the last three editions, negotiations alone lasted for over two years, not least because they take place in two arenas. One is the Competitiveness Council and the ITRE Committee of the European Parliament (the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy), in which the national ministers of research and science and Members of the European Parliament negotiate the draft (and supplements) of the FP Decision. The other arena is made up of heads of government, who broker a deal about the EU’s multiannual financial framework, which—inevitably—entails a budget line for spending taxpayers’ money on research.

Once the first layer of texts is adopted and the edition of the FP format is up and running, the rather general objectives in the texts describing the subsets of the programme are interpreted. Metaphorically, this is the space where the clouds are formed into recognizable shapes. This work is continuous and mostly carried out by European Commission services, with support of deliberately

² Various editions of the FP use the term “priority” and later “challenge” to describe the programs dedicated to clouded-sky research funding. For the rest of this article, we will use the term “program” in order to avoid misunderstandings.

appointed advisory boards consisting of scholars and other experts, as well as representatives of national ministries gathered in a so-called “Programme Committee”. Technically speaking the Commission drafts so-called “Work Programmes,” texts that transfer the—often lofty—policy layer descriptions into more detailed calls for proposals.

Projecting Social Sciences on the Policy Layer

The Council of the European Union adopts each “Decision” concerning an edition of the FP. The policy layer, where the scope of a certain funding line or programme is decided, does not reveal discussions about the intention of this given programme. Instead, we are left simply with legal texts, which are by definition a compromise, rather abstract, full of legal annotations, and not easily accessible.

The easiest way to assess the role and relevance of social sciences as the object of a separate funding programme within a given FP edition is through budgetary allocations. [Table 1](#) provides an overview of absolute and relative budgets allocated to programmes dedicated to the SSH. However, even simple numbers referring to the budget available for project funding within programmes directed at clouded-sky research are only comparable to a certain degree. The length of the FP editions has changed and the number of EU member states and associated countries has grown, which leads to a higher overall budget. Further, new forms of funding instruments (e.g. funding networking instead of research projects in FP6), various so-called “horizontal actions”, or plans to “embed” the social sciences in other parts of the programme (the fifth and eighth editions) make such comparisons tricky.

The table, however, does provide an angle on how social scientific research funding is designed within these programmes. It shows three important issues. First, even though the overall research budget has increased with each, successive edition, the share of money allotted to thematic programmes is decreasing, from more than 80 per cent to less than 40 per cent. While shrinking in comparison to the development of the overall programme, the budget allocated to clouded-sky research funding has increased in absolute terms. Second, until the seventh edition, funding for social sciences—or as it is termed from the sixth edition onwards, “SSH” (more below)—has remained rather stable in absolute terms, and also in its share, where it has been pegged to between 1% and 2%.

Table 1: “SSH” programme budget from fourth to eighth edition of the FP, in million ECU/EUR, current prices (own calculations)³

	FP-budget	Thematic programmes Budget	% budget for thematic programmes	“SSH”-thematic programmes	% of FP-budget for “SSH” programme	% of thematic priority budget for “SSH” programme
FP4 1994–1998⁴	13,215	10,946	82.83%	147	1.11%	1.34%
FP5 1998–2002⁵	14,960	11,987	80.13%	165	1.10%	1.38%
FP6 2002–2006	16,665	12,026	72.16%	244	1.47%	2.03%
FP7 2007–2013	55,806	32,743	58.67%	623	1.12%	1.90%
Horizon 2020	77,028	29,700	38.56%	1309	1.7%	4.40%
Horizon 2020 (estimate)⁶				420	0.54%	1.14%

Third, the financial contributions made to the social sciences show that, while it is only a small slice of the cake, the research budget explicitly allocated to the social sciences has steadily grown within the overall Framework Programmes’ budgets, and even slightly outgrown the average increase in budgetary allocations made inside the thematic funding programme. The most significant growth seems to have taken place in the eighth edition (“Horizon 2020”), which—at least in numbers—indicates a doubling of the budget. However, this number contains manifold elements that are not directed towards funding research projects in a narrower sense, and the Commission itself has emphasized that the programme is not directed towards the social sciences in particular. By extrapolating the budget dedicated to research projects that do target the social sciences in the first four years of Horizon 2020, a total of about €420 million is to be expected (in contrast to the €623 million allocated in the seventh edition of the FP7). Simultaneously, the social sciences are supposedly being “streamlined” into other parts of Horizon 2020, meaning that, in theory, more researchers can become part of interdisciplinary endeavors.

³ Horizon 2020 budget, based on Factsheet (European Commission 2013a); FP6 (European Commission 2008b); FP5 and FP4 on CORDIS data (CORDIS 2009; 2015).

⁴ The numbers refer to the budget allocated to FP4 after the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden (plus 115 million ECU) and include EURATOM funding.

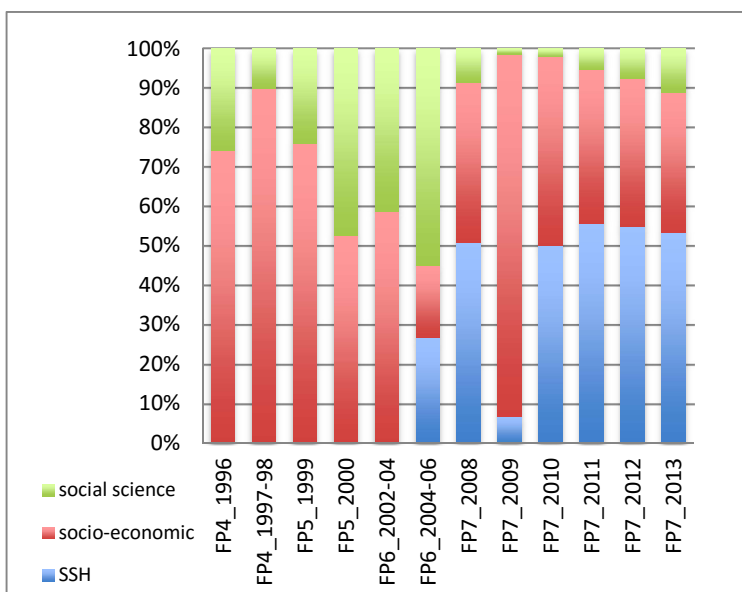
⁵ This budget is part of a larger section in FP5 called: “Improving human research potential and the socio-economic knowledge base” (European Commission 2010).

⁶ This extrapolation is based on the addition of budgets dedicated to calls targeting the SSH in the Work Programmes 2014–15 and 2016–17. This includes the calls abbreviated as: EURO, YOUNG, REFLECTIVE, INT, REV-INEQUAL, ENG-GLOBALLY, and CULT-COOP. The budget for research projects thus amounts to about 127 million EUR in 2014–15 and 115.5 million in 2016–17. For the Work Programmes see: (European Commission 2017).

⁷ Of which €580 million was spent on research projects, which excludes expenses incurred by the Commission for administrating and running the programme (see European Commission 2016c).

Another approach towards the policy layer relies on investigating the terminology used, which can give an indication of what exactly policy-makers are thinking when addressing social scientific research. The first time “social sciences” were specifically addressed in a separate subset within the FP format was in its fourth edition, from 1994 onwards, and immediately following the Maastricht Treaty (Kastrinos 2010: 300). Since then, the terminology has varied. [Figure 1](#) depicts the various denominations used to address social scientific research, revealing some interesting patterns. In the beginning, the notion of “socio-economic” research prevailed, but this was soon evened out by the term “social science”. Since the FPs sixth edition (FP6), the humanities were also officially included in the FP and added to the social sciences (Smith 2003). From then on, social sciences and the humanities were represented together under a crisp acronym, “SSH” (“social sciences and humanities”) (European Commission 2002: 2). In the seventh edition (FP7) “social sciences” is only used occasionally. The term “socio-economic” now stands on an almost equal footing with “SSH”.

Figure 1: Denominations for social sciences in the Work Programmes of fourth to eighth edition of the FP, own calculations. Data based on word-frequency analysis



One should not expect too much from a hermeneutic interpretation of the use of “social science”, “socio-economic science”, and “SSH”. Nevertheless, it should be noted that putting social sciences and economics in one programme must have posed an enduring problem about what is actually to be addressed, and what is to be expected from research funded under this programme. As is commonly agreed, the boundaries of what constitutes “social sciences” and neighboring fields are necessarily quite loose.⁸ The issue must have become even more protracted when the humanities

⁸ Discussion about what constitutes “the” social sciences can be followed back at least to the 19th century, with the famous *Methodenstreit* between Gustav Schmoller and Carl Menger, but also the attempts of Dilthey (“two spheres of knowledge”) and Windelband (“idiographic” vs. “nomothetic” approach) to characterize a distinctive *geisteswissenschaftliche* (humanistic) epistemology. Later, Snow’s attempt to distinguish between “two cultures” (Snow 1959) would embark on a similar narrative. And even later, Lepenies (1985) and Kagan (2009) would speak of “three cultures”, i.e. natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

were formally introduced to the same programme. A solution was found with the acronym “SSH”, which can probably be interpreted as a bureaucratic attempt to aggregate a broad field of different, and quite heterogeneous, scientific activities (epistemologies, methodologies, and research topics).

“SSH” is similar to another popular acronym in the same area, STEM (“Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics”) in the sense that, instead of classifying epistemologies along methodological questions, it groups scientific knowledge using ontologies, the content of what certain fields of scientific knowledge are (supposedly) concerned with.⁹ Unlike STEM, however, which has become a preferred object for policy-makers to increase the quality of human resources of a nation, the context and “etymology” of SSH in EU policy insinuates that it is a rather residual category.

As the dedicated funding programme became better endowed, the later editions of the FP have become the largest single programmes dedicated to research in the social sciences and humanities under the label “SSH”, whatever that may entail. Vested interest in this funding opportunity increased and expanded, and members of various communities now readily perceive themselves as part of the label “SSH”. For example, empirical evidence has been collected to prove that projects funded under the label “SSH” have similarly relevant results as those in the sciences (Olmos-Peñuela et al. 2014). Representatives of “SSH” have also become increasingly vocal about securing their stake in the FP. For example, public discussions on the SSH-part of the eighth edition of the FP (“Horizon 2020”) started in 2010, three years before its actual launch (cf. Young 2013).

Institutionally, too, the case remains unresolved. In some national contexts, economics is perceived as a separate domain. In Germany, some faculties have the names of “Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften” (i.e. social- and economic sciences), which hints at a differentiation of the two. The situation is similar in France, although they are categorized together. In the UK, the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) only knows social sciences as one category (‘management and business studies’ is not included in their funding schemes) (ESRC 2017). In contrast, in the Universal Decimal Classification used for libraries, economic sciences are treated as a sub-unit of social sciences, and the same goes for the OECD Frascati Manual (OECD 2015). Our aim is not to decide which of these is right or wrong, rather it should be clear that, while they have to be understood as “historically contingent construct that does not correspond to ‘ontological features’ of knowledge” (Sala 2013: 85), they became—and remain—a powerful tool to classify research in terms of institutional organization, self-perception and assigning of resources and career trajectories.

⁹ In the USA, the label STEM was formally introduced in the early 2000s to strengthen education in the fields of “science, technology, engineering, and mathematics” (Bybee 2013). Similarly, the label “HSS” (standing for, unsurprisingly, humanities and social sciences) has emerged in the U.S.A. of late (Brodhead and Rowe 2013). Various reports and studies reveal that even those who are asked to transfer the (political) idea behind STEM and HSS into (academic) practice do not really understand the meaning of these labels (Breiner et al. 2012; Brodhead and Rowe 2013; Fairweather and Paulson 2008; among others). To our best knowledge, no study examining the meaning of SSH in Europe exists. The few studies that are concerned with “SSH” explicitly take the label at face value (see, for example, Remøe 2005; Kastrinos 2010; Olmos-Peñuela et al. 2014).

Table 2: Structure of “SSH” programmes from fourth to eighth edition of the FP.

FP4	FP5	FP6	FP7	Horizon 2020 (FP8)
Targeted Socio-economic Research Programme	Improving the Socio-economic Knowledge Base	Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge Base Society	Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities	Europe in a changing world— inclusive, innovative and reflective Societies
Evaluation of science and technology policy options in Europe Research on education and training Research into social integration and social exclusion in Europe	Societal trends and structural changes Technology, society and employment Governance and citizenship New development models fostering growth and employment	Knowledge based society and social cohesion Citizenship, democracy and new forms of governance Horizontal programme	Growth, employment and competitiveness in a knowledge society Combining economic, social and environmental objectives in a European perspective Major trends in society and their implications Europe and the world The citizen in the European Union Socio-economic and scientific indicators Foresight activities Strategic activities	Inclusive societies Innovative societies Reflective societies

A third inroad to understanding the intention of funding the social sciences is to interpret the sub-structure of the dedicated programmes (Table 2). It shows that three elements remain stable pillars over time. First, the economic dimension is dominant, which reflects the aims of the European Commission to use the Framework Programme to analyze and enhance economic development in Europe. Similarly, aspects of the European integration process also remained central. Second, the main topics that have been continuously addressed in those editions were on science and technology, education, and social exclusion. These, then, seem to be the key areas in which policy-makers expected the social sciences to provide relevant new insights useful for the overall EU integration process. It’s also noteworthy that the relationship of knowledge, science, technology and society is an explicit topic in these programmes, although separate “science in/and society” programmes were also launched. This reflects the emphasis on interdisciplinarity, which has been an important feature of European research funding policy in general. Third, adding the humanities to the funding slot did not change this perspective dramatically, even though “culture” became a more important point of reference from the fifth edition of the FP onwards, where the topic of citizenship, a “European” society, a European public sphere etc. was introduced.

The brief history of the social science programmes within the various FP editions shows that the social sciences have become a stable component of these programmes, even though the name and meaning has changed from socio-economic sciences to “SSH”, and even though budgetary allocation

indicates their continued peripheral position. This is further emphasized by the successful introduction of the label “SSH”, which functions as a residual of various and heterogeneous fields. Also, the overall scope of the various programmes in this layer indicates the policy-based nature of these programmes. But how has this been transformed into questions for scholarly research?

Work Programmes Shaping Social Scientific Knowledge

Work Programmes are the “most political texts” of European research policy. Michel André (2013) argues that they are even more important than the legal material instating the Framework Programmes, as they contain the formulations referred to in research proposals, peer evaluation and ex-post evaluations of the funding programme itself. Moreover, by predefining relevant topics, methodologies and discourses, these documents delineate the ambitions of social science research funding, which are also visible in the kinds of institutions interested in participating (see section 5). To get a better understanding of the processes that lead to the formulation of Work Programmes, the malleability of topics, and the influence of Work Programmes on (successful) project proposals, this section will follow the journey from a “keyword” to a successful bid for project funding.

Work Programmes are made up of call texts, specific research targets, technical specifications concerning funding instruments, and the scope of participants eligible for a call (e.g. small and medium-sized enterprises, non-governmental organizations, associate countries etc.). Wording is decisive in who responds to a call; who feels that they have the expertise to contribute to the further development of a certain subject area and, more importantly, who wins a bid. The material available to us offers the opportunity for a longitudinal textual analysis of calls within the seventh FP. Based on four subsequent versions of the text, we identified alterations made over time. The winning bids and their project descriptions were compared to the calls and the most decisive changes made within the latter.¹⁰

The technical procedure in FP7 started with the European Commission as the responsible institution taking the initiative.¹¹ In an informal consultation phase, expert groups, results of consultations, plans from prior programmes etc. were processed by administrators to produce a first draft, which was then open to “inter-service consultation”; i.e. comments of relevant units within the European administrative body. Then the “Programme Committee”, consisting of representatives of every member-state, commented on several draft versions of the document. Usually, the committee pre-debated their positions informally as majorities are necessary to implement changes to the documents in official meetings. In addition, officially appointed expert advisory groups provided formal feedback on draft versions. The aim was a balanced position that was the outcome of negotiations, which tried to accommodate manifold stakeholder requests. A policy officer of DG Research puts it thus:

Then [...] from the initial text to the last text there is sometimes a huge difference and sometimes you feel: OK this adjective this is the German adjective, this is the Italian flavour,

¹⁰ The specific process leading to, and agents involved in, every single alteration of the final call text observed here cannot, however, be traced back due to a lack of empirical material. In any case, an observation would only be possible for a mere fraction of negotiations, especially as the centralized and formalized interaction is only part of the deal. In every member state the Programme Committee members interact with stakeholders, some stakeholders have direct access to administrators and the interaction within the Commission would also be difficult to monitor over a longer period of time.

¹¹ See André (2008) for a detailed mapping of the administrative procedure in FP7.

this is Polish flavour and in the end this is not Shakespeare, Dahl, Dante or Goethe, but a topic, which is at least European. Maybe not wonderfully written, but at least which covers all the EU stakeholders. The academic communities through the advisory group, the Member States through the committees and the different policy interests through the inter-service consultation of the DG. (IW-Schögler/Commission 2013 minute: 02:00)¹²

These procedures help pool the heterogeneous group of social scientific disciplines and topics into governable units. The experts, engaged as helping hands, reflect this as they are mostly appointed in their role as representative of their disciplinary field (see European Commission 2016a). In other domains, such as energy, expert groups are not solely comprised of academics, but also representatives of non-governmental interest groups, industry and so on.

In FP7 every research project funded in the thematic “SSH” programme started its development from a list of keywords reflecting the main policy aims of the programme. Then several drafts of the text were produced. In what follows, two calls will be scrutinized: a call on economic underpinnings of social innovation; and a call on temporary migration and mobility in Europe. In each case four items were available: the list of keywords; extracts of a first draft (DV1); the second draft (DV2); and the published version (FV). The material offered here is only an extract of these calls issued in 2013 to exemplify the kinds of alterations possible during the drafting process and linking these to the projects—or better project proposals—winning the bid. Breaking down changes on a textual, or word-for-word, level makes visible content-related and syntactic or structural modifications. We are interested in highlighting changes within the boundaries of a topic, or in methodological perspectives as such shifts represent negotiations of the ambitions of the social science programme on a micro-level.

Example 1 is from a call that was later placed under “Activity 8.1: Growth, Employment and Competitiveness in a Knowledge Society”, with an overall maximum budget of €14.5 million.¹³ The first entry of the table shows a list of topics to be included in the first activity. It delineates certain topics or dimensions, but it does not provide any information on the perspective to be taken by researchers. In DV1, the basis for further negotiation is set. Unfortunately no information on the process leading to DV1 is available, the Programme Committee meeting (and other instances named above) offer room for negotiation, however.¹⁴ Example 2 deals with temporary migration and

¹² In 2012/13, six semi-structured interviews were held with policy administrators from the European Commission, national-contact points and experts dealing with European research policy in the domain of the SSH. The interviews lasted between one and three and a half hours. These interviews were accompanied by a recurrent study of policy-documents and the participant observation of a stakeholder event aimed at SSH representatives (Vilnius, 09/2013). This material was also used for Schögler’s PhD dissertation (Schögler 2014).

¹³ List of topics dated 18/10/2011; Draft 1 (DV1) dated 16/02/2012; Draft 2 (DV2) dated 25/05/2012; Final version (FV) dated 09/07/2012. The Programme Committee held a meeting on the 16/02/2012, where most discussions were based on DV1. Another meeting was held on 04/06/2012. Available minutes of the meetings offer discussions on the topics only for the first meeting.

¹⁴ Draft Minutes of the Programme Committee meeting do provide some insights into the discussion concerning the topic laid out here: “The discussion then turned to the topic “Economic underpinnings of social innovation” (Activity 1). Two delegations felt that the concept of social innovation was too vague. One of delegates proposed that the definition or reference to the definition of social innovation should be made more explicit, while keeping other aspects of terminology, such as social transformation and social changes, in mind. Making a general remark on the SSH WP 2013, the same delegate felt that there was a need to shed some light on the issues around multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. Another delegate requested that the main conclusions from the Vienna declaration should be included in the introduction to document SSH WP 2013. On the other hand, one of delegations welcomed the proposal of combining the issue of the public sector and of the market in this topic. The Commission then briefly presented the coordination aspects of social innovation within the Commission. Several DGs are members of the specific interservice group, which

mobility in Europe. It is from a call later placed under “Activity 8.3: Major trends in society and their implications”, which was allocated a total maximum budget of €11 million. There the keywords already mention the economic-policy dimension that has been identified above as a constant element of the social science programme.

In the examples 1 and 2 the underlined parts illustrate additions and the scored-out elements removals from previous versions of the Work Programme text.

Example 1: SSH.2013.1.1-1 Economic underpinnings of social innovations

List	<p>4. Economic underpinnings of social innovations—strengthening innovation towards European societal challenges</p> <p>Variety of social innovations and their economic properties and specificities; economic characteristics of social innovation in comparison to non-technological and technological innovation; economic aspects for institutional and organisational diversity in providing societal innovations (business/market, public sector, civil society, networks..); variety of financial models; role of public policy.</p>
DV1 to DV2	<p>Research dimensions</p> <p>To <u>Research is needed to</u> understand what works, how and why for successful social innovations research should: <u>and how public policy, including European perspective can facilitate them:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaborate how institutions (<u>including incentives, norms, laws</u>), <u>public sector</u> and markets function (or not function) for the weak <u>poor</u>, marginalised and vulnerable in the society and economy by taking into account the gender dimension • d<u>Develop</u> stronger concept(s) of social innovation in comparison to the economic, (<u>purely profit-oriented</u>) technology based innovation and non-technological innovation models; elaborating differences and similarities between technological and social innovations as well as the specific (economic and social) drivers of and barriers for social innovation; • t<u>The</u> nature and co-evolution of technology based growth and social innovations, including institutional and organisational innovations to facilitate systemic change; taking stock about the past—successful and less successful—models providing social innovations (microcredit, mutual self-help, corporations co-operatives) and identifying their economic underpinnings; • t<u>The</u> changing importance of various <u>actors</u>, factors like skilled and creative people and <u>creative entrepreneurs and technologies</u>, incl. <u>networking</u> as well as the relative roles of state, business, including creative industry and civil society in the provision of social innovations along its life cycle; as well as economic conditions for pilots or prototypes to scale up; • d<u>Development</u> for public policy instruments for effective <u>financing and self-financing</u>, public-private partnerships, networks to support social innovations; in particular to identify what role EU level initiatives and instruments can play in comparison to the Member states and regional; • <u>Developing indicators to measure social innovations (inputs, outputs) and measuring their contribution to well-being as well to smart growth, new economic activities and employment (economic rate of return) across countries and regions by taking into account the development of National Accounts;</u> • Evaluation methods for the economic and social impact of social innovation initiatives, programmes and policies in European and/ or global cross-country comparison.
DV2 to FV	<p>Research dimensions</p> <p>Research is needed <u>in order</u> to understand what works, how and why <u>it works</u> for economically successful social innovations and how public policy, including the European perspective, can facilitate them:</p>

includes DG RTD, DG ENTR, DG REGIO and DG MARKT. The aims of the group are to exchange information and avoid overlaps. The aim of DG RTD on this issue is to provide support to both research and policy in order to develop political initiatives.” (European Commission 2012b).

- ~~Elaborate~~ Explain how institutions (including incentives, norms, laws), public sector and markets function (or not function) for in looking after the poor, marginalised and vulnerable in the society and economy by taking into account the gender dimension; and the economy, taking the gender dimension into account

There are a few important issues in these examples. They show how the cloud is shaped and that this is done differently from case to case. In Example 1, content-related changes from DV1 to DV2 mainly relied on adding further information to the text. First, “institutions” are defined more specifically, opening the call for approaches not necessarily dealing with organizational forms of institutions. Then, the understanding of “economic innovation” is specified as purely profit-oriented and “creative people” are transformed into “creative entrepreneurs.” In both cases the rewording entails a semantic change relevant to the definition of the research object at stake. Further, a new research dimension is added to the topic, dealing with the development of indicators. Between May 2012 and the final version published in July the same year, changes remain lexical and syntactic.

In Example 2, the most notable difference found between DV1 and DV2 is where the insertion “migrant-centered, multi-disciplinary” specifies the call.¹⁵ In contrast, the changes between DV2 and the final version (FV) remain syntactic and stylistic. The first addition targets the methodological approach to be considered in project proposals. Where “comparative perspective” covers anything from a statistical analysis of migration-flows to a comparison of migration-laws and policies in different countries, such studies become more difficult to conceive once the descriptor “migrant-centered” is also to be taken into account. The second major insertion in “Part II” spins the call text in a similar direction by refining the object of research.

Example 2: SSH.2013.3.1-1. Addressing European governance of ~~transnational mobility: assessing forms of temporary migration and mobility to Europe~~

List	3. Origins, impact and governance of short term seasonal and circular migration in the EU Evaluating governance of migration flows and patterns at EU and national level in the area of seasonal labour in agriculture and other fields; links with current economic crisis and future implications; exploring links with circular migration as well as evaluating scope and future prospects of existing instruments and mechanisms such as mobility partnerships; links with irregular migration in seasonal labour; (fundamental) rights of seasonal migrant workers; comparative dimension across countries; link with global approach to migration and role of third countries.
DV1 to DV2	Research dimensions Building on and advancing previous EU research in the field, the analysis should be conducted from a <u>migrant-centred, multi-disciplinary and</u> comparative perspective, both between European countries, as well as with other regions of the world. The following research dimensions should be considered when addressing the topic.
DV2 to FV	Building on and advancing <u>taking forward</u> previous EU research in the field, the analysis should be conducted from a <u>perspective that is</u> migrant-centred, multi-disciplinary, as well as and comparative perspective, both between European countries, and with other regions of the world. The <u>When</u>

¹⁵ Again, the draft minutes of the Programme Committee meeting offer some insight in the discussions, however, no explanation for actual changes that were decided is given: “One of delegations took the view that the topic ‘Addressing European governance of transnational mobility: assessing forms of temporary migration’ (Activity 3) should also include medical migration aimed at obtaining the care available in another country or at less cost. There was also the issue of seasonal migration of ageing people to the southern regions.” (European Commission 2012b).

	addressing this topic, the following research dimensions should be considered when addressing the topic:
Part II	
DV1 to DV2	The analysis should finally identify the main drivers of different temporary forms of mobility for individuals and their subsequent migratory patterns, contributing to the understanding of their social, cultural and historical dimensions. Existing studies provide conflicting accounts.

The various stages of consolidating the call text can also be interpreted as an attempt to strike a difficult balance between openness and specification. This is particularly obvious in the changes between DV1 and DV2 in [Example 1](#). These changes indicate a broadening of the topic, including special foci, such as “gender dimension”. Simultaneously the approach prescribed as being acceptable is considerably narrowed to developing indicators.

The two examples also show that there is a strong connection between call-text and project bids. The call resulting from the text in [Example 1](#) funded two projects (out of 13 submissions) (European Commission 2013b). The first “aims at establishing best practice metrics for capturing the impact of social innovation” that will help the Commission to build “smart economies that reduce inequality and socio-economic marginalization” and takes a country comparative perspective. In the call-text these elements are mainly found in the first two bullet-points of relevant research dimensions, which were both subject to alterations. The second project takes a hands-on approach by promising to create “concepts, models and instruments for policy makers, innovators, investors and intermediaries”. This reflects the call’s specific aim for developing indicators. This project also takes a very materialistic/economic perspective, stating that it “investigates how social innovations can enable the most vulnerable in society to become economic assets.” This reflects the major addition to the call text that emphasizes the economic dimension of social innovation (next to “well-being”) (quotes see project description, CORDIS).

For the second call (resulting from [Example 2](#)), two projects were also funded (from 15 submissions to this specific topic) (European Commission 2013b). Again both are closely related to the specificities of the call text, and importantly also to amendments made during the negotiation process of its wording. Tracking alterations in the work programmes thus makes visible that specific (disciplinary and policy-related) interests may have been lobbied into the documents, which ultimately had an impact on the winning project proposals. This strong connection needs to be understood in contrast to earlier programmes. For example, the fifth FP edition preceded the calls with the annotation that

These [descriptions/research questions] are intended to be illustrative of the scope and content of the work to be undertaken within a particular Task. However, it is not excluded that a proposal may not directly respond to a specific research challenge or question; it may address parts, combinations of these parts or closely related issues. (European Commission 1999)

The fourth edition included a similar preface. Later editions no longer provide this leeway. In other words, they make stronger efforts to pre-define the research topics that are adequate for a project proposal. From the examples given, we can take that even minor adjustments in keywords are sufficient to influence the design of research (proposals) funded in these programmes and such changes also affect the kinds of social science research funded. In contrast to blue-sky research, negotiations to define topics take place between policy-makers, administrators and scholarly experts at the stage of *drafting* the call text, which eventually leads to a decoupling of advances in

disciplinary fields that are then used by researchers to orient themselves when writing a project proposal. As the wide variety of member states participating in these projects has shown, and as will be discussed below in more general terms, this is also reflected in the types of institutions participating in, or rather in those not responding to, clouded-sky research funding.

Participants and Funding Instruments

CORDIS, a database by the European Commission, contains all projects funded under the FP format and allows us to extract those entries found under the SSH (and precursory) labels (see [Table 3](#)).¹⁶ The different funding instruments can be re-organized in three types: (1) research project funding, i.e. the allocation of funds is used for funding researchers and their work; (2) networking activities, which can take various forms and be restricted to short-time events or long-term recurring meetings, workshops etc. and (3) support actions, which include flexible forms of additional funding for certain projects or networks, cooperation with companies and also funding for supporting institutions and stakeholder events.

Table 3: Number of “SSH” projects per FP (Calculations based on CORDIS data)

	CORDIS		Research projects	Networking	Support actions
	Σ	Y/average			
FP4	168	33.6	156	12	
FP5	237	47.4	147	38	52
FP6	144	28.8	83	17	44
FP7	253	36.1	215		38

The number of entries increases from the fourth to fifth edition, decreases in the sixth edition and increases again in the seventh edition (FP7). It is worth remembering that FP7 was operative for seven years, whereas the other FPs only lasted 5 years. Nevertheless, the trend is also stable on a year-to-year average. In FP5 and FP6, a large number of non-research project actions were funded. This included the rather cost intensive “Networks of Excellence” in FP6. Their aim was to coordinate existing research efforts throughout Europe over a longer period and offered support of up to €5.5 million. In some cases this included well over 20 participating institutions in the SSH domain. Funding of research networks is a paramount example of the efforts of the European Commission to distance itself from becoming a traditional research funding body. Within the “SSH” programme, project funding was reinstated as the main funding instrument in FP7. Support actions were principally used to prepare Horizon 2020 and fund the ongoing organization of the programme.

¹⁶ For FP4-FP7, data could be allocated quite easily to the respective “SSH labelled” programme. For H2020 a data-set is also available for ongoing research and other activities, however, its organisation leaves too many uncertainties—especially concerning networking and support actions that are run within the SSH labelled challenge.

The coordinating institution that communicates with the European Commission and takes a particular responsibility in organizing the project is a key actor in every project. The second group of actors are participating institutions, also referred to as “partners”. The suggested analysis of FP7 should be taken with a pinch of salt, not least because the database does not provide the names of affiliated researchers, which makes a more detailed analysis of participating individuals impossible¹⁷. However, trends regarding the types of institutions and the orders of magnitude for the number of institutions involved can be deduced from the data. The number of coordinating institutions being considerably lower in FP7 than the number of participating institutions, we have attempted some comparisons for FP7 and FP6 (no data is available for the coordinators of FP5 and FP4).

In FP7 most coordinators (50) are based in UK institutions, followed by 38 from Germany and 29 from Italy, sharing third place with the Netherlands. This produces a clear “East-West” divide in coordinators. Of the 253 projects, only two were led by Hungarian institutions, two by Polish and one was based in Lithuania. As associated countries, Switzerland (8), Norway (5) and Turkey (1) hosted more coordinating institutions. Comparable countries in size and geographic location such as Austria (13), Finland (9) or Denmark (5) could also host more project coordinators.

Breaking down the data at the organizational level shows a representation of central institutions only taking place to a limited extent, and by far less than in other funding schemes. Taking the case of the UK as an example, it is the University of Manchester (6), which tops the list, followed by the University of Birmingham and the Centre for Economic Policy Research (3 each), the latter being a non-profit think tank established in 1983. Six more institutions coordinated two projects, all others only one. In total, 34 UK institutions were involved in coordinating social scientific EU research projects in FP7. Next to Manchester, other institutions at the top of the list include the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), which is made up of different national institutions, the University of Utrecht (5), the Universities of Antwerp, Amsterdam and Rotterdam (Erasmus) (4). Universities otherwise dominating the field, such as Oxford or Cambridge, which are also the top two independent institutions coordinating projects (about 400 each) in FP7 overall (see also Massih-Tehrani et al. 2015: 64), are not strongly represented as coordinators in the SSH domain.

Two further insights concerning the institutions involved in coordinating projects can be obtained by going back in time. First, coordination is even more equally distributed amongst participating countries in FP6 than in FP7. In the UK, five institutions host two projects, already the maximum co-ordinations per institution there. Manchester does not coordinate any project at that point and Oxbridge does not take a special position here either. Second, the hierarchy of countries hosting coordinators remains relatively similar over time. Germany, the UK, Italy, France and Austria are the top five nations with ten or more co-ordinations in FP6. In FP5 Italy is sixth and replaced by Belgium in the top five. With the exception of Austria, which only hosted three projects in the first SSH specific programme TSER in FP4, the list is identical there as well.

Institutions participating (as partners or coordinators) in FP7 under the “SSH” programme also diverge from the overall picture. In total, about 2600 institutions were registered as participating (incl. coordinators) in collaborative research projects. A 2013 monitoring report ranks participating institutions. In higher education, this list is topped by the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Imperial College London, University College London, the Universität Zürich and the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, followed by the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, the Denmark

¹⁷ Unfortunately, the non-standardization of names of institutions within the CORDIS database makes an analysis of participating institutions over the course of several FPs highly problematic.

Teknische Universitet, the Technische Universiteit Delft and the University of Edinburgh (European Commission 2015: 96). In the overall account, two umbrella organizations, the French CNRS followed by the Fraunhofer Gesellschaft top the list.

In the social sciences (and humanities) the number of participating institutions remains high, with 1200 institutions for 253 projects. 279 institutions are named as participating in three or more projects, 180 in two and about 750 in one project only.

Table 4: Participating Institutions SSH-FP7 (incl. coordinators; own calculations based on CORDIS data; SH-ERC Grants see European Union 2015: 57)

Participating Institution	FP7-SSH	Country	Ranking of Institutions by Number of SSH-ERC Grants 2007–2013	Number of SSH-ERC Grants 2007–2013
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven	24	Belgium	16.	10
London School of Economics and Political Science	23	United Kingdom	10.	13
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique	19	France	2.	33
Kozep-Europai Egyetem	19	Hungary	NA	NA
Universiteit van Amsterdam	18	Netherlands	4.	26
Fondation Nationale Sciences Politiques	16	France	NA	NA
Universita Commerciale Luigi Bocconi	15	Italy	16.	11
Université Libre de Bruxelles	15	Belgium	NA	6
Universiteit Utrecht	15	Netherlands	NA	8
Aarhus Universitet	14	Denmark	NA	1

Leuven and the CNRS are the only institutions named in both top 10 lists. In comparison, the overall list is dominated by traditionally high-ranking UK institutions, which—with the exception of the LSE—is not the case for the social sciences programme. Involving seven different countries, the geographical distribution of institutions associated with SSH project participants is also more diverse than in the overall trends. Adding the rank of European Research Council grants as a comparative item to the list—which are excellence-based, blue-sky project funds—shows that a large proportion of the Universities regularly involved in clouded-sky research funding are not necessarily successful in acquiring ERC grants in the domain of social sciences and humanities.

Conclusions

This article aimed to investigate the ambitions and formation of EU social science research funding policy. We sought explanations in the complex relationship of overarching policy aims rooted within

the European integration process, legal structures framing the agency of different stakeholders and micromanagement procedures used to formulate calls for proposals.

Within the European Union's multiannual research framework, the thematic programme dedicated to the social sciences and, to a lesser extent, humanities, continues to have an ambiguous and fragile relationship with these fields. This becomes apparent in the processes shown above leading up to Horizon 2020. Yet, on a long-term trajectory, given the increasing relevance of the FP format for research policy in Europe at all levels of this polity, the overall role of the social sciences programme within the recent FP editions has been significantly raised. In the 1990s, the policy-turn towards a knowledge-economy transformed research-policy into a more central element of European concern. More recently, fresh funds were made available for the sciences, but also for social sciences and humanities in the form of blue-sky funding. At the same time, the design and implementation of clouded-sky research funding dedicated to the social sciences became of greater importance within discussions of austerity programmes and cuts in research funding throughout Europe.

The formation procedures and structure of a dedicated social science funding programme impact those agents interested and able to participate in research projects. As we have shown, institutions involved in the clouded-sky social science programmes of the various FP editions do not (fully) correspond to the overall picture of institutions receiving funds through the FP format. Nor are those institutions dominating the "SSH" programme those with the highest reputation and score on research-oriented rankings. It shows that participation in the social science parts of EU clouded-sky research programmes is (apparently) not as important in the competition for national and international recognition as other parts of the programme. This sets the social sciences and humanities programme aside from the overall trends shown for the Framework Programmes, as well as from funding offered for the social sciences and humanities within the ERC. It can be concluded that research funds are allocated to social sciences according to the watering can principle; only a small number of institutions repeatedly participate in these kind of research projects, which results in a broad distribution of funds amongst possible participants. This produces an inclusiveness and reach that the ERC cannot attain, and, consequently, clouded-sky social science funding serves as a link between more and less research-intensive regions in Europe. Nevertheless, new member states (the "East") are less likely to coordinate projects than institutions based in countries that have participated in the FP format for a longer period.

From a policy-maker perspective, the acronym label "SSH" seems perfectly suited to make heterogeneous fields of scientific knowledge addressable for certain policies under a single label and to achieve a concentration of possible stakeholders and interested parties. Ironically, however, it has made attempts to make the programme dedicated to "SSH" more complicated. The (self-declared) spokespersons of the various disciplines and fields that are supposedly covered by the label accepted "SSH" as the common denominator in order to claim a stake and 'get a seat at the table' when negotiating the distribution of scarce resources. In the forerun of the eighth edition of the FP, they achieved the reinstating of at least a limited SSH focus within the funding programme and diffused the risk of being even further marginalized as an "embedded" supporting measure.¹⁸

¹⁸ Initially, the Commission had planned to discontinue the "SSH" research funding track under the eighth edition of the FP. In December 2010, researchers from HU Berlin mobilized against what they perceived as the "thematic and financial" "downsizing of Social Sciences in the EU" (Börzel et al. 2010). It was followed by an Open Letter to the European Commission by the newly and hastily formatted "European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities" (EASH 2011; Klein 2011). The Open Letter was signed by almost 26,000 people, and the EU research ministers were successfully mobilized to express their concerns "whether the role of social

Tracking alterations in the work programmes supports the claim that specific (disciplinary and policy-related) interests can be lobbied into the programme on a continuous basis. Over time, the label “SSH” has gained some legitimacy as representing diverse fields and activities in the realm of the social sciences and humanities. Interestingly, this has had repercussions on how the Commission handles the social sciences.

Finally, there are also important (unintended) features achieved by the social science programme. As marginal as it might be in relation to the overall scheme, it reunites expert groups, allows for networks of otherwise unrelated institutions to emerge, makes the diffusion of social thought possible on a European level and might even entail a certain feeling of affiliation and concern for this programme in the “SSH” community. Moreover, European research policy has become an entity to which national policy-makers turn, emulate, or at least orient their policies towards. For the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche (see ANR 2013) this is especially true, but other national funding agencies also reproduce strands of the programme. Thus discussing the social sciences at the European level, even under the disputed acronym label “SSH,” not only affects the respective programmes but translates into a trickle-down effect at the national scale.

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science and humanities will be adequately reflected in the tackling of the grand societal challenges” (Myklebust 2012; see also Science Europe 2013; van den Doel 2012). Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn herself had to assert publicly “that future funding at the European level will provide significant space for social sciences and humanities research.” The Commission compromised by adding another dedicated challenge, and by “embedding” the social sciences and humanities into all societal challenges “to work beyond the ‘silos’ of different disciplines” (Geoghegan-Quinn 2011; see also Young 2013).

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