

Boosting multidisciplinary in Horizon Europe: *the creation of a Societal Platform*

The alliance of universities in countries marked as 'leading in SSH' by the European Commission (EC), recommends the set-up of a Societal Platform in their ['Call on the European Union to create high-quality dedicated and embedded SSH research opportunities in FP9'](#). This call received more than 70 institutional and almost 500 individual expressions of support. The platform this alliance has in mind is an European Technology Platform (ETP)-like organisation, in other words an 'ETP for SSH' or Societal Platform, that forms the structural communication line between the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) community and the EC. This paper outlines the idea for a Societal Platform and proposes to publish a call for tender under Horizon Europe as a first step towards the set-up.

The aims of this platform

Once this communication line is installed, this 'ETP for SSH' should above all aim at supporting the strengthened multidisciplinary approach of Horizon Europe. It will help translate the new understanding that the social dimension of the challenges we face should be tackled at the same time as we seek to use technological advancement to solve problems, as mentioned in the ['Guidelines on how to successfully design, and implement, mission-oriented research programmes'](#).

As part of these activities, the platform aims to facilitate discussions between the EC and relevant stakeholders on the implementation of Horizon Europe amongst others in dossiers like the European Partnerships. In the list with proposals for Horizon Europe Partnerships discussed by the Horizon Europe Shadow Programme Committee in its Strategic Configuration, not one single Partnership for the second cluster 'Culture, creativity and inclusive society' is foreseen. The fact that global [tech companies are hiring SSH profiles and training staff in liberal arts and humanities](#) illustrates the momentum and need for an 'ETP for SSH'. Considering its ambitions, Europe cannot lag behind.

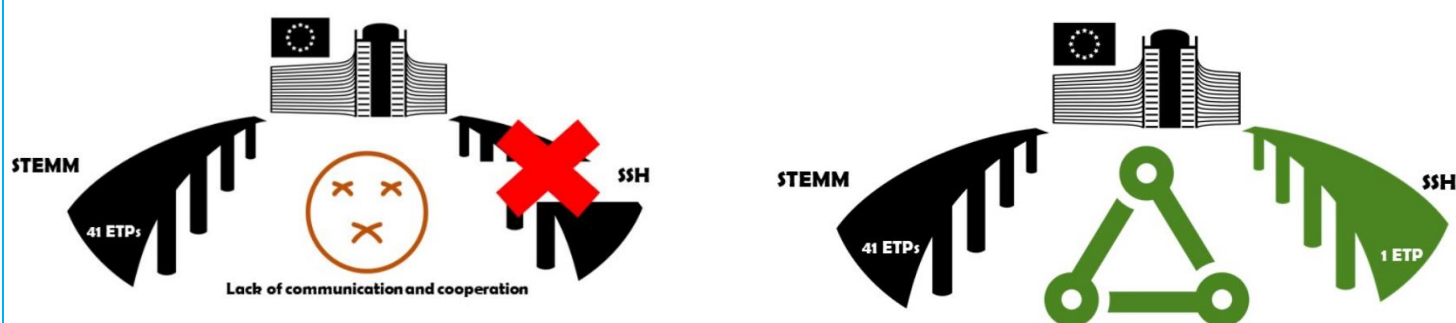
Ensure implementation of the multidisciplinary approach

The platform will help to implement the second principle of the Horizon Europe programme (Regulation, art. 6a) i.e.: 'Horizon Europe shall ensure a multidisciplinary approach and shall foresee, where appropriate, the integration of social sciences and humanities across all clusters and activities under the Programme, including specific calls on SSH related topics'. The platform will thus strongly support the implementation of this strengthened multidisciplinary approach and therefore the integration of STEM and SSH. It will mobilise STEM and SSH together to help find solutions to the challenges Europe faces. Subsequently, it will lead to the involvement of a larger variety of SSH disciplines in Horizon Europe. As a

result of this improved involvement of SSH researchers, the platform will also – mostly indirect – facilitate the involvement of citizens. The SSH disciplines and their societal stakeholders are vital to procure holistic and better solutions for the priority issues of citizens. In other words, the platform will improve the underlying knowledge base for the activities of Horizon Europe.

The starting point: the European Technology Platforms framework

For fifteen years (2003) now, the EC has engaged with European Technology Platforms (ETPs) to boost strategic technological research and innovation and to advance the industrial uptake of R&I results. The ETPs are self-sufficient fora of stakeholders, recognised by the EC (granting of label), and active in different sectors of technological research, development and innovation, organised around the themes of bio-economy, energy, environment, soil & food, ICT, production & processes, and transport. The collaboration between the European institutions and the ETPs has proven invaluable for the overall economy and competitiveness of the EU and for tackling specific ‘big ticket’ challenges such as ageing, food & water, energy, and security (external evaluations and status reports). Since FP6, industry has thus grown accustomed to taking the lead in international R&I networking and cooperation, in aligning desiderata and in drafting roadmaps for the future. Crucial features of the ETP system are the sustainable internal and external knowledge exchange and the contribution to the design of the European Research Agenda. The 41 individual and cross-cutting fora that exist today have the mandate, together with the Expert Advisory Groups, to provide DG RTD with external advice for the programming (scoping papers) and implementation (work programmes) phases of Europe’s multibillion Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. This mandate has been crucial to the success of the fora, in research as well as the world at large.



While the ETP system - with its R&I strategic agendas and roadmaps - helps the EC, the Member States and societal stakeholders to build the European Research Area (ERA) and to face Europe’s challenges, it only involves STEMM disciplines with an obvious relation to industry and/or technology. Yet, the ERA is more than STEMM alone and the problems of today’s global Europe are characteristically complex and can never be solved only by

technology or industrial offshoots. This was already one of the main remarks of the 2008 - 2009 assessments of the ETP concept.

Rather, as the EC has repeatedly emphasized, significant knowledge and value is also created by the Social Sciences and Humanities. In fact, these disciplines and their societal stakeholders are often vital for holistic and better solutions of priority issues like migration, climate change and the environment, security, unemployment, democracy, European citizenship, sustainable tourism, etc. At the same time, the capacity and potential of the SSH scholarly disciplines and societal sectors remain insufficiently exploited since they have never known the kind of sustained organisation nor influence on the drafting of the R&I agenda as the EC has granted STEM disciplines through the ETPs.

As many authoritative voices, such as the Lamy report (2017), have rightfully recommended to give SSH an initiating and leading role in some of the future Horizon Europe missions, the time is now to fully marshal the expertise in these fields and to set up a structural and productive dynamic between the SSH and the European institutions for knowledge crossover and R&I programming. The ETP framework offers a likely starting point. Since there will be no Expert Advisory Groups in Horizon Europe, it becomes even more important for the SSH community to establish such a formal communication line with the EC seen the fact that they do not have another formal communication channel.

A tender as a first step

A first important step towards the set-up of an 'ETP for SSH' is the publication of a *call for tender* under *Horizon Europe*. A tender designed for building a "European Societal Platform¹" would furnish the EC not only with a SWOT analysis of a one-stop-shop for SSH research and applied expertise, to the benefit of both the EC as well as the existing ETPs and future STEM-led projects, but also with ready-to-use blueprints for setting up such a platform prior to any potential mandating.

The objectives, expected impact, type of action and indicative budget for this tender to set up an 'ETP for SSH' could be formulated as follows.

Objectives:

- **Designing and carrying out (comparative) research** to identify and draft the best way of setting up a Societal platform (i.e. studying forms of organising representation and collaboration, with immediate involvement of stakeholders)
- **Providing a SWOT (and feasibility) analysis** of such a platform for SSH research and applied expertise, including a future impact analysis
- **Providing an assessment and business plan for financial self-sufficiency of the platform**

¹ See the recommendation – and the support received for it – for the set-up of such a platform by an alliance of universities in countries marked as 'leading in SSH' by the EC: ['Call on the European Union to create high-quality dedicated and embedded SSH research opportunities in FP9'](#)

- **Drafting ready-to-use blueprints** for setting up the best-option platform prior to any potential mandating

Expected impact:

- The actual establishment of a Societal Platform, taking into account current and the results of former initiatives, that will provide
 - a. the EC with a solid partner to consult and engage with the social sciences, humanities – while broadening the number of disciplines to e.g. arts, law, etc. - for future programming in R&I. A mandate for and commitment to SSH in the lay-out (and implementation) of the FP will have significant impact on the future of the EU. All major challenges require a holistic approach with SSH either contributing or taking the initiative.
 - b. the existing ETPs with a platform to facilitate the search for / integration of SSH partners in the work at both policy (strategic programming) and project level (STEMM-led research projects)
 - c. the SSH community to organise more efficiently and have a structural line of communication with the EC to advise them on the strategic programming (scoping papers) and implementation (work programmes) of the Framework Programme
- A better understanding of the problems the EU is facing, now and in the future. And therefore
 - a higher-quality strategic programming of the R&I agenda
- More effective holistic solutions for Europe's 'big ticket' challenges, both through SSH- as well as STEMM-led R&I actions

Type of Action:

- Public Procurement - 1 direct service contract

Indicative budget:

- 0,5 – 1 EUR million

Should you, or your organisation, in any way wish to refer to/quote (parts of) the message brought forward in this paper, please do so by using the following name of the paper:

“Boosting multidisciplinary in Horizon Europe: the creation of a Societal Platform”

(<http://www.ugent.be/en/research/research-strategy/position-papers>).

Questions/remarks? Contact person: Ms. Wendy Sonneveld, Sr Policy Advisor European Affairs at Ghent University, T +32 9264 9562, Wendy.Sonneveld@UGent.be.