Social Sciences and Humanities: a New Agenda for Europe's Challenges

Reporting

Project information

SK PRES SSH

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Project website

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Slovakia

Periodic Reporting for period 1 - SK PRES SSH (Social Sciences and Humanities: a New Agenda for Europe's Challenges)

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Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project

The conference “Social Sciences and Humanities: a New Agenda for Europe's Challenges” was an international event held in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, on 14-16 November 2016, during the Slovak EU Presidency with a financial support of and in cooperation with the European Commission (EC), DG Research and Innovation under the auspices of the EU Commissioner for Science, Research and Innovation Carlos Moedas and the Slovak Minister of Education, Science, Research and Sport Peter Plavčan. It was organised by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport with a support of Matej Bel University of Banská Bystrica, an International Scientific Committee and Local Programme Committee.

The preparation of the conference started in 2015 with a number of discussions with relevant stakeholders, namely the EC and communities of social scientists from Europe (such as ENRESSH, EvalHum, NCPs, PC members etc.) The teams from the ministry and university regularly met throughout
the year. The Local Programme Committee met personally and via online tools several times. The International Committee worked via Skype and Internet.

The conference showcased that Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) are indispensable for solving today's challenges. It provided an opportunity to address three main objectives:
1. To illustrate that SSH significantly contribute to the workings of democratic societies as they try to remain or become more democratic, i.e. tolerant, secure, inclusive and innovative.
2. To stress the vital role of the SSH research now and after 2020 in the European interconnected research agenda in order to address key European challenges.
3. To discuss strategies on a better inclusion of young SSH scientists in academia and research and in innovative and creative professions.

The conference brought together over 300 experts from around Europe including 45 active speakers, chairs and rapporteurs. In addition, 802 people participated in the conference via webstreaming. The conference organisers and participants wanted to ensure that the SSH research continues to receive relevant recognition and support from the EC and Member States.

The „Key Outcomes and Recommendations“ were prepared in collaboration with the Chair of the International Scientific Board Julia Stamm, repporteurs of the parallel sessions as well as the Local Programme Committee Chair Alexandra Bitušíková. They were published on the conference website (http://www.ssh2016.eu/download/output/recommendations.pdf) and sent to conference list and various groups of stakeholders. The outcomes offer an insight into some of the challenges identified by the speakers and participants, highlight key points and present recommendations based on the outcomes from thematic plenary and parallel sessions.

Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results achieved so far

Presentations emphasised an increasingly important role that SSH play in solving challenges of nowadays. Discussions stressed the role of SSH in addressing the societal challenges faced by Europe today and tomorrow, both within its boundaries and at the global level beyond. They significantly contribute to strengthening democracy by nourishing knowledge, appreciating values and teaching critical thought. In a fast changing world, no problem can be analysed and no democratic and efficient solution can be found without cutting-edge thinking and research in SSH.

Whereas there is a significant contribution of STEM disciplines to global progress, there is also a limited support to the knowledge and understanding of histories, cultures, languages, values, heritage or mentalities. The current growth of extremism and radicalisation of opinions that oppose and undermine the great idea of Europe of knowledge, values and human rights, as well as the accelerated erosion of liberal democracies in Europe should toll the bell. Only SSH can provide evidence and foster greater understanding of inclusive, secure and reflective societies in Europe.

Cross-cutting thematic sessions, plenary sessions and side events boosted the flow and exchange of
knowledge and experience. The speakers from various disciplines, including researchers, representatives of SMEs, experts from application sectors ensured that all aspects of issues were explored. With this mix, the conference showcased European research excellence in SSH and also demonstrated the state of the art through exhibition of posters of SSH projects funded through FP7 and H2020. All throughout the conference a poster exhibition took place to showcase the EC funded SSH projects. These included successful FP7 and H2020 funded projects. Conference participants had an opportunity to vote for the best poster, which was announced and awarded at the final plenary session.

There was also an opportunity for matchmaking for upcoming SSH H2020 calls by having matchmaking sessions and other pre-conference events: Net4Society Brokerage Event and the Launch of the European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities.

The organisers also attempted to ensure a significant outreach to society on the various issues, positive, critical and challenging ones in relation to SSH. The goal was to reach out to the general public, to raise awareness of its potential positive benefits for both, economy and society at large as well as the needs for safety and sustainability.

Based on the evaluation of participants by answering the survey, majority of them (approx. 94%) found the programme well-structured and paced, and useful for their profession. 79% of respondents enjoyed the opening session. The following plenary sessions of the first day (plenary 2 to 6) were rated well to very well among approx. 60% - 70% of respondents. Roundtable on young scientists got interesting and inspiring by 62% respondents. The final plenary session on the new agenda for SSH research in Europe was appreciated by 70% of respondents.

**Progress beyond the state of the art and expected potential impact (including the socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project so far)**

“The impact of the conference: „Social Sciences and Humanities: a New Agenda for Europe's Challenges“ presents a brief overview and key outcomes and recommendations addressed to all stakeholders involved in SSH research and its interaction with other sciences.

European liberal democracies are under enormous internal and external pressures and grow weaker and weaker. SSH research contributes to warn, support and renew democracies against the threats of anti-democratic populism and extremism, political apathy, "post-facts" and "post-truth", corrupt and anti-democratic leadership, ineffective policies and borderless commodification/commercialisation which affects cultures and values.

The EU needs to adopt a strong collaborative and comparative research programme on the future of European democracies and societies. This research programme will actually cover and include all the areas addressed in the conference, such as growth, jobs, inequalities, migration, radicalisation, extremism, cultures, values, beliefs and citizenship and their links to democracy.
The conference aimed at illustrating that findings and conclusions of the SSH research are highly relevant in coping with acute societal challenges and their consequences on EU and national politics. It dealt with such phenomena as migration and its consequences with serious impacts on human rights, freedom of movement, diversity and security inside and outside Europe; growing extremism and radicalisation of both migrants as well as host societies; or unemployment, which fuels social exclusion in the EU Member States."