

Humanities Research Seen from a European Network Perspective

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This contribution would like to address two current interrelated issues stemming from the tensions, experienced by the academic communities, between “freedom” of research and imposed research policies, at national, European and international levels: 1) that of the autonomy of the humanities, not only as a specific field of research in its own right with its wide range of disciplines, but also in respect of its underlying societal dimension, and 2) that of the tensions between top down and bottom up research, that is to say the autonomy of humanities research seen from the researchers’ viewpoint and perspective. It is very difficult to propose some general solution or conclusion as much depends on policies on which researchers have little say, but we hope that this contribution will lead to a discussion on the future of the humanities.

These topics are embedded in the many changes that have affected humanities research over the past years: the emergence of new themes or fields of research - the most obvious being the digital humanities (and the digitalization of humanities) success story - the emphasis (bordering on obsession) put on transdisciplinarity (sometimes *versus* interdisciplinarity, though without a clear definition of these concepts on which all agree), the alignment on a “hard” or “experimental” sciences model, the increasing place taken up by what are termed stakeholders (museums, associations, NGOs, etc.), the pressure put on including citizen involvement and, of course, public engagement and, more recently, artificial intelligence. These changes affect, to varying degrees, the whole process of research, from choosing a subject to publishing the findings, and also the methodology(ies) used. Not only humanities research is not done in the same way it was 40 or 50 years ago (an evolution shared by all fields of research) but there has also been a clear shift towards a more “utilitarian” objective assigned to it, with the underlying expectation of a financial and societal “return on investment”. This is particularly apparent in the different funding programmes launched by the European Commission since 2002: Framework Programmes 6 (2002-2006) and 7 (2007-2013), Horizon 2020 (2014-2020) and Horizon Europe (2021-2027), in which basic research has slowly given way to applied research and an accompanying *ad hoc* vocabulary crafted: impact, outcomes/outputs, stakeholders, cutting edge research and the inevitable “excellence driven”... At national levels this has mainly been translated into “research by project”, interdisciplinarity and impact.

We shall base this contribution largely on the work done and the experience accumulated over the last twenty years by the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) network, which represents 26 funding agencies from 25 European countries.