

**ENRESSH POLICY BRIEF**

# Autumn 2018

## Communication, evaluation and impact of Social Sciences and Humanities

### COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Key to developing sound evaluation practices for SSH research is appreciating the communication practices in these fields. These practices entail interaction with academic peers as well as societal stakeholders.

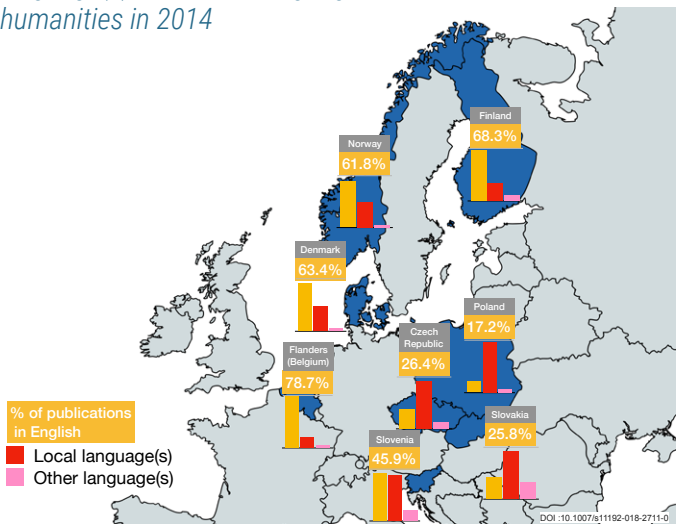
#### Communication within the academic community

SSH publication patterns in North, South, West and East Europe differ as much between countries as they do between disciplines. The share of local language publications, for example, differs greatly between countries, indicating variation in regional focus and outreach.

#### Communication with society

SSH scholars use a wide variety of pathways to communicate with society to have maximum impact. Some introduce new perspectives into societal debates, others engage in the anniversary of important historical events, or share their findings through consultancy. ENRESSH found that there are differences between countries in the diversity of stakeholders that academics collaborate with and the communication channels they use to do so.

*Percentage of peer reviewed publications in English, local language(s) and other languages in the social sciences and humanities in 2014*



### NATIONAL RESEARCH EVALUATION SYSTEMS: QUALITY AND IMPACT OF RESEARCH

ENRESSH made an inventory of 32 national evaluation systems in Europe. Many systems only superficially take into account differences between research production and communication in diverse disciplines and fields. But some do give room to variety, for instance by adapting the metrics in use, or by widening the peer review system, or via bottom-up procedures that differ per institution. These approaches can also be combined.

ENRESSH classifies the European evaluation systems along three dimensions: organizational structure, sensitivity to SSH fields and attention to societal impact.

#### Organization of evaluation

The European countries show a wide variation in research evaluation systems. They range from mainly metrics-based, top down from the national level, to a mainly peer review-based evaluation at the institution level. Some countries work with national databases, but these can vary in the degree of using metrics, the degree of performance based funding room for SSH specific databases, and the pressure to publish in English.

#### Sensitivity to SSH fields

While evaluation mechanisms often follow the communication practices of the STEM fields, and focus on publications in international journals, many SSH fields have different communication practices and thus need to be evaluated according to these practices. Clearly, book publications are important for SSH fields, both scholarly publications and those for wider audiences. But the variety of output is much larger and for example includes audio-visual formats, exhibitions and serious games.

#### Evaluation of impact

ENRESSH found that at the national level impact is increasingly being regarded as part and parcel of evaluation procedures. Some countries use metrics seeking to enumerate activities associated with impacts, for example altmetrics to capture social media activity. But countries that seek to evaluate impact are primarily choosing either research organization reporting based on a selective suite of indicators and qualitative measures or impact statements linked to individual research projects. Some of these approaches include stakeholders as well. We found that impact evaluation practices overall are gradually converging, which stimulates methodological robustness.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES TO OUR MOST PRESSING SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

ENRESSH has two aims. The first is to enhance the visibility of SSH research and its potential to address societal challenges, many of which are also or even mainly in the area of SSH. Think of the instability of financial and democratic systems. Or global economic and political tensions. Religious tensions are another example, as are more general challenges of multicultural societies. Also more technical challenges require the input of the SSH. For instance, sustainability and health challenges include major behavioural questions. The second aim of ENRESSH is to develop evaluation methods that better fit how SSH researchers communicate with each other and with society. This supports enhancing the potential of SSH.

## H2020 AND HORIZON EUROPE DESERVE APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMICS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETAL PROGRESS

Throughout Europe, the contribution of scientific work to societal progress is high on the agenda. Governments, funders and universities develop policies to stimulate interaction between scientists and industry, governments, NGOs and the wider public. At the European level, the prime example is the Grand Societal Challenges in H2020. FP9 (Horizon Europe) continues this route, with a focus on bottom-up formulated Missions.

## ENRESSH ENABLES AND HIGHLIGHTS CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

ENRESSH strives to design appropriate assessment methods and procedures of academics' contributions to societal progress. It contributes to the EU agenda by making the value of SSH research more visible to wider audiences in science and society. Subsequently, ENRESSH is designing evaluation methods that

do justice to the variegated contributions of SSH researchers. It strives to make assessments more comprehensive, with a balanced attention for scientific and societal relevance.

## EVALUATE RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

ENRESSH concludes that to successfully select, monitor and assess research, and in particular the Missions proposed in FP9, research should be considered and evaluated in the context in which it is conducted. Therefore, EU and national level politicians and science policy makers, as well as boards of research funders and universities should:

**Respect disciplinary contexts.** Allow for disciplinary variation and for flexibility in evaluation frameworks. This will help scholars to communicate with peers and stakeholders in more productive ways. Effective communication is required for (co)producing knowledge and addressing Missions in the best possible ways.

**Respect national contexts.** Member states and associated states have developed different publication and communication patterns. Also, the organization and specialization of a specific discipline may differ per country. It is important to consider this variety as these patterns are vital to national knowledge production and exchange, and thereby to addressing Societal Challenges.

**Use narratives that take into account specific societal contexts.** Evaluate the societal impact of research on the basis of narratives, but support them by robust evidence via qualitative and /or quantitative measurements. The focus should be on the achievements and contributions in terms of the Mission, rather than on narrowing down the output to just quantitative measurements.

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*ENRESSH stands for European network for Research Evaluation of the Social Sciences and the Humanities (<http://enressh.eu>). Almost all EU countries participate in this network, plus Albania, Israel, Mexico, Moldova, Norway, South Africa and Switzerland. This policy brief was written by Stefan de Jong and Jack Spaapen, using input from Michael Ochsner, Paul Benneworth, Tim Engels, Ioana Galleron and Geoffrey Williams. Designed by Grzegorz Król.*

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