IMPACT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES FOR A EUROPEAN RESEARCH AGENDA – VALUATION OF SSH IN MISSION-ORIENTED RESEARCH[1]

RETHINKING SOCIETAL IMPACT – COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

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ABSTRACT

Projects funded by "Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation" should increasingly involve citizens and create societal impact. In particular, Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) researchers focus on societal challenges and collaborate with different stakeholders. The involvement of stakeholders in proposal development and project implementation is needed to secure citizens involvement. However, successful stakeholder involvement in proposals and projects is time consuming and needs a strong management structure, which should support and monitor activities, which can lead to societal impacts. Furthermore, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe indicators should place greater importance on the involvement of stakeholders.

1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Close collaboration with stakeholders has been a demand for "European Framework Programme" projects for many years. The "Fourth Framework Programme" (FP4, 1994 – 1998) already contained a specific programme called "Targeted Socio-Economic Research" (TSER). The TSER programme encouraged the involvement of stakeholders in research projects to achieve a better uptake of project results by policy makers and civil society: *"In line with the Commission's White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment, the research activities aim at rationalising future decision-making at decentralised, national or Community levels in order to develop a shared knowledge base on the socio-economic challenges facing Europe."*[2] Also in the "Fifth", "Sixth" and "Seventh Framework Programmes" collaboration with civil society was valued.

With Horizon 2020 (FP8), the involvement of stakeholders and the discussions on societal impact of research projects increased. Yet, the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 (H2020) showed that one main area for improvement is bringing results to citizens and involving them more. *"There is a need for greater outreach to civil society to better explain results and impacts and the contribution that research and innovation can make to tackling societal challenges, and to involve them better in the programme co-design (agenda-setting) and its implementation (co-creation)."* (EC, DG RTD 2017a, p.21). Also, the report from the *"High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU Research & Innovation Programmes"* calls for mobilising and involving citizens through co-design and co-creation of programmes and projects at European, national and regional levels (EC, DG RTD 2017b).

Consequently, Horizon Europe (FP9) will demand even further citizen involvement[3]. However, it is often forgotten that citizens speak different languages and sufficient funding needs to be available for interpretation and translations. Policy reviews, published by the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, provide tools and analysis to policy makers, but they are often not wide enough distributed and discussed and only available in English.

Close collaboration with stakeholders could be one way of involving citizens. In this regard, it is important to remember that people working with research policies, programmes and projects are citizens, as well.

To increase citizens' involvement in Horizon Europe, a critical reflection on stakeholder involvement in H2020 projects and a discussion on tools for achieving societal impact is necessary. Here, societal impact is

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defined as *"social improvements e.g. via the use of project results by policy makers or other societal actors"* (Net4Society 2017, no page number). Such 'use' often happens after the end of the project and is very often not part of the project evaluation. For example, *"ASIRPA* (Asian Society for International Relations and Public Affairs) *found that the average time lag for impact that comes from applied research was 19.9 years. For fundamental research, much longer time lags are needed."* (Science Europe 2017, p.17).

2. METHODS AND ACTIONS TO INCREASE STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The following methods and actions have been developed and used by the author and colleagues for drafting proposals and implementing projects since FP4. The focus is on proposal development and project implementation.

2.1 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT FROM THE BEGINNING AND "CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS" AS CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

Successful proposals on call topics in H2020 Societal Challenge 6 "Europe in a changing world – Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies" contain a clear description of impact. They outline the project's contribution to the scientific/academic impact, societal (incl. political) impact and economic impact. In order to develop a project proposal that convinces evaluators and, at the same time, is feasible, it is vital to involve stakeholders from the beginning of the proposal development. Discussions with representatives from organisations, which should work with the research results, are needed to develop the research questions, the concept and the work packages to produce the promised outputs and to contribute to the expected impacts, which are described in the call topic text.

In successful research proposals, submitted by the Norwegian Social Sciences research institute (NOVA)[4], "Civil Society Organisations" (CSOs) were involved in the project design and have been members in the project consortium from the beginning of the project. Since H2020, they can be a project partner under the same financial conditions as higher education institutions and research organisations. In most cases, their involvement demands more openness and leads to more discussions during the proposal process and the project implementation. Different ways of working need to be discussed and agreed upon. This influences re-

search methods, as well as communication and dissemination activities. Developing the proposal and implementing the project becomes even more time-consuming, but brings the proposal and the projects closer to the expected impacts described in the call topic and enhances the possibilities for the uptake of research outcomes by stakeholders.

2.2 INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

In addition to involving CSOs as full consortium members, we contacted possible members for an international or European advisory group supporting the implementation of the project already during the proposal phase. The members came from academia, public, private and social partner organisations, industry or CSOs. Some of them reviewed the proposals before submission and in this way contributed to excellent proposals. If a proposal was approved, members from the advisory group were involved in the implementation of the project, for example in discussions of methods and research questions and in supporting dissemination activities. In most cases, the project covered their travel and hotel costs to attend project meetings (max. twice a year), but did not finance any working time. These limited funding options make it difficult to convince people working at CSOs to join advisory groups at project level. Their involvement needs to be approved by their boards and many board members and directors of CSOs would like to see some financial compensation for their involvement, which makes it less likely for them to approve such involvement.

An even more important tool for stakeholder involvement has been the set-up of stakeholder groups or committees at national levels. The members of these groups can again come from academia, public, private or social partner organisations, industry and CSOs. Their involvement in projects has contributed to more publicity of the research projects. Group members have not only supported dissemination actions; they have also helped in finding interviewees and drafting "Policy Briefs" describing research findings relevant for stakeholders[5]. "Policy Briefs", translated into national languages, have been very useful for the work of CSOs. In all projects, some members from the national stakeholder groups were also invited to project conferences. In projects, coordinated by NOVA, national stakeholder groups have not received any funding, only travel costs and, if necessary, translations were covered by the project budget.

Furthermore, stakeholders can be involved in the research projects though different activities, like advocacy meetings, focus groups and thematic workshops[6].

2.3 DEDICATED IMPACT MANAGEMENT

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4   Since 2007, the author has been employed at NOVA, which merged with the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) in 2014. In 2018, HiOA was granted the status of a university and changed its name to Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet).

5   Examples for Policy Briefs from H2020 SSH projects can be viewed at
     http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index.cfm?pg=library&lib=policy_briefs.

6   The H2020 project DANDELION – "Promoting EU funded projects of inclusive, innovative and reflective societies" described several different tools for dissemination and stakeholder involvement, http://www.dandelion-europe.eu/en/infobase/guides-to-maximise-impact-of-ssh-projects/guides-to-maximise-impact-of-ssh-projects1.html, viewed October 27, 2018.

Since 2016, we include, an impact manager in the implementation of the H2020 research projects due to the many project management tasks. We found that it works best if it is already clear during the proposal phase who will have this position in case the proposal is approved. Our experiences show that the involvement of an impact manager can ease the communication between the consortium members and leads to a stronger focus on achieving impact.

2.4 CASE STUDY DARE - TOOLS FOR ACHIEVING SOCIETAL IMPACT

In the ongoing H2020 project "DARE" (Dialogue About Radicalisation and Equality)[7], the impact manager has been involved from the beginning of the proposal process, which started in the summer of 2016. Together with the coordinator, the impact manager invited CSOs to the project during the proposal development. This affected the project description and implementation in, among others, the following three ways:

1. The "Plan for Exploitation and Dissemination of Results" (PEDR) is very detailed and specific. In the proposal, we already included a detailed plan describing dissemination and exploitation activities in each work package, the target audiences and users, as well as related output and impact measures. The PEDR is regularly updated throughout the project duration (May 2017 – April 2021).

2. The management structure contains an "Impact Sub-Committee" (ISC), which supports and monitors the dissemination, exploitation and impact activities and is chaired by the impact manager. The ISC meets regularly online and approximately three times face-to-face each year. The ISC also writes internal impact reports every nine months.

3. By October 2018, nearly all consortium members had established "National Stakeholder Groups" (NSGs), with whom they discuss the development of the project and which they involve in dissemination activities. For the DARE consortium, it is important that all DARE partners create the NSG they require and meet with their NSG to reflect on their tasks in DARE and their national context when it fits (approximately two times each year). The types of stakeholders and size of the NSG therefore differ, with most NSGs having between six and 12 members. All partners write minutes of their NSG meetings, which are available for all consortium members and which are a very important resource for the impact management and monitoring.

In April 2018, the project published its first "Policy Brief" written by members of the ISC and the coordinator. During the third project meeting in May 2018, the ISC organised an impact workshop for all DARE colleagues discussing their experiences, questions and ideas related to working with societal impact. Already now, it is evident that the involvement of an impact manager and an "Impact Sub-Committee" has created a stronger focus on impact for all consortium members.

3. FINDINGS AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 IMPACT MANAGEMENT AT ORGANISATION LEVEL

The good practice example resulting from DARE leads to the question of whether impact management should also have a more prominent role at organisation level: Could an impact manager, employed at the management level of an organisation, ease and enhance the collaboration with citizens, stakeholder involvement in projects and the uptake of research results by individuals, organisations and institutions?

Several universities, especially in the UK, already employ impact managers. Among other tasks, they support and collect the descriptions of impact case studies. Excellent impact case studies can lead to additional funding by national authorities[8]. Impact case studies are used for collaboration with the media and enhance the communication with citizens. Of course, the creation of an impact manager's position requires further personnel resources. Establishing impact management at organisation level would help to advance the project outcomes after the end of the project and would furthermore give time and resources for impact assessments.

3.2 REVISED INDICATORS FOR SOCIETAL IMPACT

Involvement of stakeholders in research projects should count not only for evaluators dealing with proposals but also for the overall evaluation of research projects and the programme evaluation.

A public debate on revised indicators for Horizon Europe (EC, DG RTD 2015) is therefore needed. The orientation on the "Technology Readiness Levels" (TRLs) of a project needs to be questioned and broadened. For measuring societal impact, a longer timeframe after the end of a project is needed, and, instead of TRLs, programme evaluators and developers could consider the "Societal Readiness Levels" (SRLs) of a proposal and project. Cooperation with stakeholders could be one indicator for societal impact and be included in the description of the SRLs. This is reflected by the "Innovation Fund Denmark", which has published a description of SRLs. SRLs are already considered for the development of indicators for Horizon Europe (EC, DG RTD, 2018a). Table 1 below examines the differences between TRLs and SRLs. It demonstrates the relevance of SRLs when measuring societal impact.

Levels	TRL[i]	SRL[ii]

7   DARE has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 725349. http://www.dare-h2020.org/.

8   This is for example the case in UK, where "Higher Education Institutions" can receive additional state funding based on their impact cases. Further information can be found on the website of the "Research Excellence Framework": http://www.ref.ac.uk/.

1	Basic principles observed.	Identifying problem and identifying societal readiness.
2	Technology concept formulated.	Formulation of problem, proposed solution(s) and potential impact, expected societal readiness; identifying relevant stakeholders for the project.
3	Experimental proof of concept provided.	Initial testing of proposed solution(s) together with relevant stakeholders
4	Technology validated in lab.	Problem validated through pilot testing in relevant environment to substantiate proposed impact and societal readiness.
5	Technology validated in relevant environment.	Proposed solution(s) validated, now by relevant stakeholders in the area.
6	Technology demonstrated in relevant environment.	Solution(s) demonstrated in relevant environment and in coĐoperation with relevant stakeholders to gain initial feedback on potential impact.
7	System prototype demonstrated in operational environment.	Refinement of project and/or solution and, if needed, retesting in the relevant environment with relevant stakeholders.
8	System complete and qualified.	Proposed solution(s) as well as a plan for societal adaptation.
9	Actual system proven in operational environment.	Actual project solution(s) proven in relevant environment.

SRLs and stakeholder involvement should be linked to the "United

i   See EC, DG RTD, 2018a, page 10.
ii   "Innovation Fund Denmark" (n.d.). Societal Readiness Levels (SRL) defined according to Innovation Fund Denmark, Copenhagen. Retrieved October 27, 2018 from: https://innovationsfonden.dk/sites/default/files/2018-08/societal_readiness_levels_-_srl.pdf.

Table 1. Comparison of TRLs and SRLs.

Nations Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs). In particular, SDG 17 'Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development through capacity building' could be studied to improve stakeholder involvement.[9]

3.3 FUNDING FOR COMMUNICATION, DISSEMINATION AND IMPACT MANAGEMENT AFTER THE END OF A PROJECT

To secure the focus on project results, future "Framework Programme" projects should receive additional funding after the end of the project to continue with communication and dissemination activities (see also 3.1), which can lead to societal impacts. The interim evaluation of H2020 made clear that *"the projected social and economic impacts, for example on the creation of spin offs, on employment or the development of new innovation, are difficult to measure (in terms of causality with the projects financed), in particular because they might happen at a point beyond the lifetime of the project. This needs to be taken into account in future impact evaluations. It is also difficult to predict if stakeholder collaboration across different types of organisations will last beyond the duration of the projects."* (EC 2017, page 969).

3.4 COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT

Citizens' involvement, as demanded by the members of the "*High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU Research & Innovation Programmes*" (EC, DG RTD 2017b), should be discussed in detail. Studies published by the European Commission (EC) and academic networks describe many different possibilities involving citizens in EU policies and research programmes (Van den Brande 2017; Science Europe 2018; CIMULACT 2018). Collaboration with stakeholders, as described above, creates several possibilities for citizens' involvement. How this can be organised could be discussed with CSOs, which have experiences with FP projects.

Furthermore, and bearing in mind the rise of populism, it is important to reflect on the challenges created by citizens' involvement. It could be important to agree on joint values before starting any form of collaboration. Here, it could be useful to refer to the fundamental values of the European Union and the Council of Europe: human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Even though, the EC organised workshops with stakeholders and implemented stakeholder consultations (EC 2018), Horizon Europe is not well known by regional and national CSOs. To change this, Net4Society[10] could, in close collaboration with for example SDG Watch Europe[11] and the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, organise "Future Search Conferences" (Weisbord, M. and Janoff, S. 1999) involving CSOs

9   For closer information on SGDs see: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/capacity-building. Furthermore, the H2020 project DANDELION contributed to the discussion of SRLs (Dandelion n.d.) and in June 2018 DG RTD published a detailed description of key societal impact pathways and progress indicators (EC, DG RTD, 2018a).
10   Net4Society is the International network of National Contact Points (NCPs) for Societal Challenge 6 in Horizon 2020, http://www.net4society.eu/.
11   SDG Watch Europe is a European cross-sectoral civil society alliance advocating for the implementation of the SDGs, https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/about-us/.

and other stakeholders to discuss the main societal challenges, which will be important for the design and implementation of Horizon Europe. Public engagement has become one of the main demands for developing missions in Horizon Europe and missions should have societal relevance (Mazzucato 2018; EC, DG RTD 2018b).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Rethinking collaboration with stakeholders in H2020 research projects and linking it to citizens' engagement in Horizon Europe, in particular in missions and projects funded under the Global Challenges, could be useful for widening the discussions on the design and implementation of Horizon Europe and the revision of indicators. Professional and clearly defined impact management could ease the collaboration with stakeholders and the work with proposals, projects and project outcomes to achieve societal impacts.

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