

Towards the Europe we want: A Vision for SSAH-led research

Introduction

As the EU prepares to connect challenge-based collaborative research and innovation (R&I) closely to the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), it is crucial that it develops a compelling vision not only for economic success but also for the Europe we want to see. In this paper, The Guild emphasises that the Society component of Horizon Europe's (FP10) proposed Pillar 2 must be anchored in a strong vision for R&I to address the uncertainties, change and fragmentation that European societies face. By producing evidence for public policy, improving understanding of social changes, and developing cutting-edge insights into the human dimensions of technological and global political shifts, the Society component of Horizon Europe must strengthen Europe's ability to adapt and prepare for the future. It must support R&I that will strengthen competitiveness through a broader commitment to inclusive cultural models of citizenship, democratic participation, the cultural and creative industries and the performing arts, as well as social cohesion grounded in human rights, equity, and cultural pluralism. We call for a clear vision of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities-led (SSAH) collaborative R&I that will help ensure Europeans feel more grounded in their distinctive heritage(s), embedding the need for competitiveness in a positive, holistic vision for our common future.

Strengthening SSAH-led research in FP10

Transparent budget

The Guild calls on the European Commission and co-legislators to provide a transparent budget allocation per instrument within the Society component, specifying the resources dedicated to SSAH-led research. The FP10 regulation must include a specific budget allocation for the Pillar 2 Society component to ensure that SSAH-led R&I is measurable and subject to monitoring. Without a transparent financial framework, there is a significant risk that large-scale instruments, such as the European Missions or the New European Bauhaus Facility, will absorb disproportionate resources, leaving insufficient space for collaborative SSAH-led research. As currently proposed, the Society component brings together instruments with distinct objectives that have very little in common under a single budget heading, without specifying how resources will be allocated among them. This lack of clarity must be addressed.

Thematic priorities

To ensure strategic coherence, visibility, and policy impact, FP10 should establish a limited number of flagship SSAH-led research areas that build on past priorities to address future concerns. Continuing funding for these areas would consolidate the knowledge base needed to understand and address global societal challenges. For each area identified below, we set out the scientific rationale, the policy relevance, and the case for why Europe needs to continue funding them, while stressing that researchers should be those defining research questions and methodologies.

It is crucial that FP10 empowers researchers to freely pursue their most promising ideas to solve the identified challenges, and this must include research focused on the challenges felt most acutely not by policymakers, but by communities in their distinctive local and regional contexts. The Guild reiterates its [call](#) for non-prescriptive calls in Pillar 2 and for dedicated funding opportunities for collaborative curiosity-driven and low-TRL research. We contend that, within the Society component as well as the policy windows more broadly, experts, including researchers, are best placed to determine how to make the greatest impact on Europe's competitiveness, resilience, and prosperity.

Shaping transformations

The transformations currently rupturing European societies, including geopolitical instability, accelerating climate change, digital disruption, and demographic transition, require rigorous and urgent analysis. These transformations are experienced, interpreted, and contested through cultural frameworks, historical contexts, and social contexts.

Social and institutional responses to change differ across countries, and even regions and communities. These responses are shaped by various dimensions, such as cultural backgrounds, historical experiences, legal frameworks, and institutional trust. Understanding how societies respond to geopolitical pressure, the dynamics of climate adaptation, how the development of AI could be used for the benefit of societies, and how migration is managed requires sustained and methodologically rigorous research. This will build anticipatory capacity, allowing institutions to act before crises become unmanageable.

FP10 should build on the progress achieved in FP9 by ensuring that calls within this thematic area enable SSAH expertise to significantly boost research capacity to address these fundamental challenges in an impactful way. The examples below show how SSAH research is essential in navigating global societal challenges.

[BuildERS project](#) (Building Resilience in Europe) has developed tools and innovations to increase social resilience and disaster responsiveness, working alongside first-aid responders, citizens, and key actors. The project has demonstrated that reducing social vulnerability in disasters requires behavioural and societal knowledge alongside technical capacity. It illustrates how SSAH research is instrumental in the effective implementation of crisis response.

[REMIT project](#) (Reignite Multilateralism via Technology) produces policy-relevant knowledge on how technologies are governed globally, with the aim of enabling greater international cooperation on multilateral governance. The project covers the governance of AI, cybersecurity, biotech, and defence technology. It demonstrates that technology governance is fundamentally a problem of political science, international law, and institutional design.

Sustaining democratic, inclusive and secure societies

The erosion of democratic norms, the decline of institutional trust, and the growing fragmentation of European political cultures, exacerbated by fragmenting patterns of (social) media consumption and

production, represent some of the most serious challenges the EU faces. FP9 has already funded substantial research in this area and produced critical knowledge about the conditions under which democracies weaken. Yet, the challenges have intensified, considering the growth of populist movements, increasingly sophisticated disinformation mechanisms, and declining trust in institutions. Democratic resilience must remain a research priority in FP10 that requires sustained, long-term investment.

The same argument applies to inclusion and security. The consequences of the green and digital transitions have already created new patterns of inequalities that require careful analysis. Additionally, security research directly feeds into the “whole-of-society” approach, including societal cohesion, information integrity, and the governance of conflict, alongside traditional security concerns.

SSAH knowledge on democratic, inclusive, and secure societies is essential for European institutions, legal systems, and civil society as a whole to navigate current societal challenges with greater clarity and understanding. Furthermore, it deepens scientific understanding of how societies function under stress and strengthens the civil society capacity to participate in public life.

The following examples illustrate how SSAH insights are key to reinforcing democratic, inclusive, and secure societies.

[BRIDGE project](#) (Building Resilient Innovations in Democracy, Governance and Excellence) aims to strengthen R&I capacity to support participatory and deliberative democracy, with a focus on Ukraine’s reconstruction context. The project studies how digital solutions can facilitate citizens’ assemblies and participatory decision-making under conditions of acute democratic stress. BRIDGE exemplifies SSAH-led research that is directly responsive to one of Europe’s most pressing geopolitical and governance challenges.

[GAPs project](#) (Governance, Agency and Practices in Return Migration) has examined the disconnects between EU return and readmission policies and their actual outcomes. It has produced a return cooperation index, policy briefs, and an interactive data repository. GAPs demonstrates that effective migration governance requires social and legal research to address the challenge in its complexity.

Leveraging culture, identity and diversity

Cultural and linguistic diversity is a defining feature that contributes to Europe’s soft power, cultural diplomacy and international engagement. Our cultural institutions, and the cultural and creative industries more broadly, give this asset direct economic expression, as one of Europe’s most dynamic sectors¹ and a significant driver of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, at the policy level, this diversity is supported through the “Culture Compass for Europe” framework, which focuses on safeguarding cultural rights, supporting cultural actors, strengthening competitiveness, and enhancing international relations. Therefore,

¹ *Cultural and creative industries*. (n.d.). Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/cultural-and-creative-industries_en

delivering on this complex cultural environment requires a research base capable of helping Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity adapt, and thrive, at a time of fundamental challenge.

Research-intensive universities are guardians of living cultural knowledge. They preserve and critically interrogate the linguistic, legal, artistic, and historical traditions that define European identities. Through research and education, they cultivate critical thinking, strengthen linguistic and media literacy and foster shared narratives and ethical understanding capable of countering hate speech, disinformation, and manipulative narratives. Universities' support for multilingualism and mother tongues is essential not only for cultural preservation but also for democratic intercultural participation, mutual recognition, and social trust. Through their research, universities build bridges between disciplines, sectors, and countries, equipping the next generation of practitioners, curators, lawyers, diplomats, engineers, and researchers with the knowledge Europe needs.

Cultural identity must be understood as a dynamic condition that continuously reshapes the meaning of Europe itself. Hence, it is critical to strengthen research and non-technological innovation on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and peacebuilding, as these are crucial dimensions of European societies. This includes research on cultural diversity and coexistence that can help counter polarisation, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of intolerance, while strengthening mutual understanding and democratic resilience across Europe.

The examples below demonstrate the powerful role of SSAH-led research in articulating the value of culture, identity and diversity for societal resilience, cohesion and progress.

[MEN4DEM project](#) (Monitoring and Enhancing the Network for Democracy) focuses on mapping, analysing, and strengthening pro-democracy movements and narratives across Europe, with particular attention to how cultural identities and value systems shape democratic engagement. The project investigates the role of civil society actors, cultural expressions, and identity-based dynamics in countering democratic backsliding and polarisation. MEN4DEM demonstrates that safeguarding democracy in Europe requires a nuanced understanding of cultural diversity and identity-driven participation, positioning SSAH research as central to reinforcing inclusive democratic cultures.

[INFINITY project](#) (Multidimensional Knowledge-Based Annotation for Ethical Context-Aware Heritage Data Life Cycles) is designed to develop an open library of AI and Semantic Web tools that transform fragmented cultural heritage data into interconnected knowledge systems within the European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage. Working across five concrete scenarios spanning prehistoric rock art, post-war documentation, manuscripts, and audiovisual archives, the project ensures that Europe's digital heritage is constructed ethically across languages, institutions, and borders. INFINITY demonstrates that SSAH-informed digital infrastructures are critical to preserving cultural diversity, supporting inclusive knowledge production, and reinforcing shared European identity in the digital age.