

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



**Policy implications of INTERCO:
More information for scholars and more
data for researchers needed**

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INTRODUCTION

Internationality and interdisciplinarity are central concerns in the research done within INTERCO SSH (International Cooperation in the Social Sciences and Humanities). Exchanges between disciplines and countries have become increasingly important in the daily work of SSH scholars and are generally seen as a motor of scientific excellence. Scholars, administrators and students lack particular information on the working of scholarly cultures abroad whose supply would make it easier to increase the participation in the European Research Area. Researchers investigating ERA bemoan the lack of data to proceed successfully with their comparative research about the diversity in the social sciences and humanities in Europe.

The two related but distinct phenomena of international and interdisciplinary cooperation are poorly understood. The main reason for this is the faulty assumption that the field of SSH is internally homogenous. Our research into SSH reveals that the different disciplines from the SSH constitute fundamentally different scholarly cultures that react differently to the calling of international and interdisciplinary cooperation. Promoting both kinds of cooperation faces a dual problem:

- (1) On the level of research into the forms and workings of cooperation in the European Research Area, scholars bemoan the lack of data on a disciplinary level to proceed successfully with their comparative research about the diversity in the social sciences and humanities in Europe.
- (2) On the practical level, those interested in cooperation across countries and disciplines lack particular information on the working of scholarly cultures abroad.

Both of these problems point to the necessity of bettering the collection and availability of data on the SSH in order to improve the chances for SSH scholars to engage in fruitful international and interdisciplinary cooperation in Europe.

Disciplines remain prominent but missing in data

INTERCO SSH decided from the very start to focus on academic disciplines as the unit of investigation. We investigated in detail the field of seven selected academic disciplines of the social sciences and humanities (anthropology, economics, literature, philosophy, political science, psychology and psychoanalysis, sociology and demography) in nine countries (seven European, one South American, and one North American). Besides all rhetoric about the end of disciplines and the upswing of transdisciplinarity, academic disciplines remain crucial for the training and promotion of the next generation and for the self-identification of scholars. Both in everyday and professional communication disciplines serve to form we-groups to which someone belongs and which function as institutional structures at several levels. Students select study programs which, even if they are of interdisciplinary orientation, are built on the shoulders of disciplines. Trained professionals of such studies identify as members of one or more disciplines or locate their doing on the crossroad of distinct disciplines. Furthermore, the organizational structures of universities and also research centers are often representations of the disciplinary organization of the academic world. In a word, scholarly disciplines are similar to occupations, licensed vocations, or can be seen as tribes, epistemic cultures, thought collectives, etc. – the very existence of such we-group identifications are further proof of the persisting significance of disciplines.

Peculiarity of SSH

International and interdisciplinary cooperation in the SSH shares most opportunities and obstacles with other branches of the scholarly world, but has some specificities too. Among the universal obstacles are, above all, the differences in the academic labor markets of the EU member states and the fact that academic prestige is still overwhelmingly acquired within disciplinary arenas. Specifically for SSH, one has to add that the chances to cooperate across borders and disciplines are distributed very unevenly among, but also within, the disciplines. This is mainly related to the kind of knowledge produced by disciplines. Disciplines like economics and psychology with their emphasis on internationally shared quantitative methods and the prevalence of English-language publications engage more easily with researchers in other countries. They also obtain access to interdisciplinary research projects with natural sciences more easily, as is for example the case in environmental research. Most branches of the humanities and part of social sciences, on the other hand, find themselves more concerned with local, context-bound knowledge that does not travel easily into other historical, linguistic, or epistemological contexts.

Heterogeneous longitudinal data

Considering this stable structure of disciplines as institutions one would expect to find data on disciplines in statistics on research, higher education etc. Our research demonstrates quite the contrary. Several EU member states do not have data available about the size of scientific disciplines with regard to the number of professors teaching it, or being employed in universities or extramural research units. Data at the level of disciplines are available for enrollment of students or graduates at different levels (BA, MA, and Ph.D.) but corresponding numbers for their instructors are seldom available. In most cases the reason is quite simple. Employees are counted according to administrative units. For instance sociology and political science are very often put into one category of an aggregated statistic. Moreover, professors and other parts of the staff are regularly counted according to rapidly changing organizational units, as faculties, schools, etc.

A similar confounding happens in the census. The International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) does not pay attention to well established entities as scholarly disciplines, therefore a researcher interested in a comparative study about the number of e.g. philosophers or sociologists in a particular population cannot tell with certainty what is being compared.

In ISCO 88 we find for instance “2442 SOCIOLOGISTS, ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND RELATED PROFESSIONALS” defined as

“Sociologists, anthropologists and related professionals investigate and describe the social structure of societies, the origin and evolution of humanity, and the interdependence

between environmental conditions and human activities, and make the knowledge obtained available as a basis for policy decisions.”

Nearby “2443 PHILOSOPHERS, HISTORIANS AND POLITICAL SCIENTISTS” are defined as “philosophers, historians and political scientists work, mostly by reasoning, in the field of epistemology, metaphysics or ethics. They conduct research and describe past events and activities, including the development of social and economic structures, or cultural and political institutions and movements, and make the knowledge obtained available as a basis for political, diplomatic and related policies.”

Both groups are ambiguously combined, to say the least, but they remained the same in the next edition of ISCO 08, changing only the coding from 2442 to 2632, and 2443 to 2633.

In trying to establish time series data on these two groups back in time one finds the first mentioned group in ISCO-68 as “1-92 Sociologists, anthropologists and related scientists” but cannot identify the second group, which has not been classified back then. In ISCO-58 both groups are not represented but might be counted as “0-61 University Teachers” or “0-Y Other Professional, Technical and Related Workers”.

This short digression into historical statistics of occupation corroborates what the French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu stressed some years ago as the unwillingness of those who classify to be classified. On top of that it makes the assessment of changing academic fields almost impossible.

Opaque academic labor markets

One of the most explicit aims of the Lisbon strategy was to establish a unified labor market for academic workers. For such a labor market to work efficiently one would expect easy access for people interested to apply for job offer abroad about, for example, salaries. Even experts are unaware of existing sources of information about ERA, as e.g. EURAXESS. Our detailed descriptive data found confirmation in a recent comparative investigation about the income of the professoriate: Philip G. Altbach et al., *Paying the Professoriate: A Global Comparison of Compensation and Contracts*, Milton Park: Routledge 2015 show that the only data resources available stem from national statistics bureaus. These are aggregated at a very high level or are based on questionnaires with small sample sized that make analysis at the level of disciplines impossible.

Unsatisfactory data on journals and translations

Looking at the academic journals one finds inappropriate data which results in distorted international comparisons. The leading database Thomson Reuter’s Web of Science classifies journals according to the residence of the publishing house instead of the affiliation of editors. Only via the addresses of the authors of single papers national allocation is possible. Several publications in international comparative research published results based on these wrongly classified entities

(cf. Christian Fleck, The Impact Factor Fetishism, in: *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 54.2013: 327-56). Before being able to draw any conclusions on the state and obstacles of cooperation existing resources of data-gathering need to be questioned.

For decades UNESCO backed a database on (scholarly) translations of books – the *Index Translationum*, which was first established in 1932. Instead of dealing with some shortcomings (comparability of data, categorizations etc.) it stopped this endeavor some years ago, probably for lack of resources. Furthermore most national library catalogues are not equipped to differentiate books by whether they are translations or not. Since the discontinuation of the *Index Translationum* any structured and openly accessible information on this crucial aspect of internationalization and the international circulation of ideas is missing. This is particularly problematic as the strength of European academic research certainly derives from some of its diverse forms of internationalization that go beyond offering publications in English.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To reach the goal of a more integrated European Research Area some policy implications of our research are obvious. They result either from scrutinizing the behavior and attitude of ordinary members of the academia or from suggestions from the side of experienced experts in doing research on SSH in Europe. The first mentioned group would need better *information* whereas the other group long for *data* of higher quality.

At present the amount of mobility of academics within the ERA is less than satisfactory. According to the Progress Report 2014 only a few Member States have introduced legislation for mandatory use of EURAXESS jobs announcement. Findings from questionnaires about subjective satisfaction with the openness of the academic labor market report similarly discouraging messages. Besides these less than encouraging results, such publications present their data regularly at a too highly aggregated level, e.g. “Humanities and arts” and “Social sciences, business and law” as “fields of science.” Our data show that in practice scholars and researchers form their opinions by comparing themselves with their reference group, and the relevant reference group are disciplines and not aggregated “fields of science.”

The *first* recommendation is therefore to improve the quality of services like EURAXESS by persuading more member states to join this service, by marketing it better to fulfill its mission as a genuine portal for scholars on the move. If we are right with our observation that real scholars form their judgements at the level of disciplines, then the better the information at this level the more SSH scholars would be able to develop further collaborations both, with other disciplines and

colleagues abroad. To overcome the parochialism of academic communities of the size of a single nation state more information about what is going on in other European countries and their academic communities is needed. News services and magazines devoted to cover the world of academic research and the universities exists for the United States (Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed) and the United Kingdom (Times Higher Education) but not for Europe as such. It would be good to have something of this sort, but we do not know at this moment who might be the appropriate addressee of this suggestion.

The *second* recommendation is to establish within the European Commission a routine to report research findings and other data at the disciplinary level instead of higher aggregated units even if this means thicker reports (appendices which could be made available only electronically). It should become the rule to present disaggregated data and, if one uses aggregated statistics only, this should be justified. Both, publications authored by the EU and reports submitted to any of the DGs, should adopt this rule.

In SSH international collaboration means something different than in the sciences. Scholars from the SSH seldom need infrastructures and those social scientists using services like CEESDA, ESS, etc. are just a fraction of the whole SSH community. The large majority of SSH scholars, however, most probably strives for exchange of ideas with colleagues at home and abroad. ERA policies, e.g. the one laid down in the ESFRI road map 2016, do not sufficiently take into consideration the particularities and needs of this other part of SSH. If Europe does not want to strengthen allies of “hard” sciences alone, but “softer” parts of SSH too, policies need to be developed to serve the needs of the latter group mentioned. One simple measure would be to support European organizations in the SSH. Units like the European Sociological (or other discipline oriented) Association did not receive money or any other support from the European Commission yet although these are institutionalized structures working on promoting multilingual and multi-perspectivist cooperation throughout Europe and beyond.

Our *third* recommendation is therefore to support such voluntary international organizations of SSH academics. It would improve their familiarity with other parts of ERA’s population and increase the amount of trans-border collaboration. It is well known that lobbying costs money but SSH does not have any patrons willing to pay for their representation in Brussels, nor are their voluntary organizations strong enough to establish lasting cross-border activities. To expand e.g. the European Economic and Social Committee would be a low cost solution and provide SSH scholars their own door to Brussels.

Our *fourth* and final recommendation is concerned with overcoming the poor quality of data in the field of SSH statistics. This questions concerns only a small group of researchers but the quality of their future work might feedback to the communities themselves. Comparing the quality of data in the USA with those available in Europe makes Europe look like a developing country (see e.g.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_326.10.asp). We recommend establishing a task force at the European Commission's Directorate General for Research (in collaboration with Eurostat) to develop a scheme of internationally comparable data to be included into the member states' statistical services which covers at least the following data:

- Data on graduations by discipline
- Data on HE employees according to disciplines
- Data on how many “foreigners” are in the labor force of one member states' academic system.
- Developing a database on scholarly journals with valid information about its institutional affiliation, with particular emphasis on journals of international (European) status
- Re-establish a database on translations of scholarly books.

Whereas the first three points need to be done by national bureaus of statistics the journal and the translation databases could be developed by a consortium of European (university of national) libraries, or be taken over by the library of the EUI. In the case of the translation database a cooperation with UNESCO might help to understand the biggest obstacles in building such a database.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

INTERCO-SSH set out, firstly, to assess the state of the SSH in Europe. Secondly, it aimed to outline potential future pathways that would promote cooperation across disciplinary and national boundaries. To achieve this, it was necessary to study the SSH in their socio-historical context. Under the context of this Policy Brief the following specific objectives included within the Work Package 2 “Patterns of Institutionalization” should be noted:

- to identify national patterns of institutionalization which might explain the relative isolation of national traditions in the SSH but also the operating patterns of crossed influences and international cooperation (competition, national self-assertion, efforts to 'catch-up', etc.).
- to assess the importance of the disciplinary division of labor within the SSH in order to reflect upon the historically changing power relations between branches of study, processes of professionalization of new disciplines, the reshaping of traditional forms of scholarship and the potentialities of new mechanisms of intellectual and institutional collaboration and exchange with or without consequences in terms of de-disciplinarization of disciplines concerned.

- to find out to which extent the varying institutional (or academic) division of labor within the SSH is an obstacle to cooperation among actual research branches and in which way its transformations can be a source of scientific innovation.

The finding will be summarized in a book, edited by Christian Fleck, Victor Karady and Matthias Duller which will come out as one of the first three volumes in a new series Socio-historical Studies of the Social and Human Sciences published by Palgrave Macmillan in London.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE SSH: COMPARATIVE SOCIO-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES (INTERCO-SSH)
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WEBSITE

<http://interco-ssh.eu/>

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FURTHER READING

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