



## SSH Experiences with FP7 - a Commentary

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## NET4SOCIETY

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## NET4SOCIETY

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## Executive Summary

Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH)” of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) is the world’s largest research funding programme for the socio-economic sciences and the humanities – while at the same time being the smallest of the 10 theme-oriented programmes within the specific programme *Cooperation*. SSH is still a “youngster” in comparison to the majority of *Cooperation* Themes such as “Health”, “Food” or “Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)”. SSH only received programme status as recently as FP6, while the humanities have just been targeted in FP7.

The broad scope of projects being funded in Theme 8 “SSH” range from “*Competitiveness, Innovation and Intangible Investment in Europe*” to “*Religious Education in Multicultural Societies*”. The scope of the topics in the SSH Work Programme reflects the complexity of EU policies. SSH research is designed and deemed to provide policy-makers and stakeholders with the evidence-based knowledge required to maintain and enhance Europe’s competitiveness and the well-being of its people.

With a total budget of € 623 million over seven years, more than 1,700 proposals have been submitted and 134 projects have been funded by the midterm stage of FP7 in 2010. In addition to Theme 8 “SSH”, socio-economic and humanities research questions are also integrated in the cross-cutting issues of other Themes of the specific programme *Cooperation*. Moreover SSH research is also funded in the specific programmes *Ideas* (ERC), *People* (Marie Curie Actions) and *Capacities* (e.g. “Science in Society”).

Given the “youthfulness” of the European SSH community, the particularities of SSH research, the high over-subscription of Theme 8 and the marginal involvement of SSH researchers in the different evaluation and monitoring processes of the FPs, a need for a SSH-focused commentary became apparent. Within the context of the EU-funded project NET4SOCIETY a survey-based report entitled: “SSH Experiences with FP7 – a Commentary” was launched in the summer of 2010.

The overall learning objective of the *SSH commentary* is to capture a vivid picture of SSH researchers’ opinions and – if possible – experiences on the general structure of Theme 8 “SSH” and on the integration of SSH aspects in the other nine research Themes of the *Cooperation* programme. In addition, the appeal of the ERC approach (principal investigator scheme) compared to Theme 8 “SSH” (collaborative scheme) is examined. SSH researchers’ experiences with involving policy-makers, stakeholders, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in their FP7 projects as well as the outcomes of SSH FP7 projects in terms of results and internationalisation are further foci of the *SSH commentary*. Given the strengthened international focus of FP7, the survey also depicts the FP7 experiences of SSH researchers from “Third Countries”<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of EU Research Framework Programmes, the term “Third Countries” refers to countries that are neither European Union member states nor countries associated to FP7.

The *SSH commentary* was conducted at the midterm stage of FP7 – reflecting four years of experience with FP7. The *SSH Commentary* is part of a work package in the NET4SOCIETY project, funded by the European Commission. Its objective is to improve the tools of SSH funding and to provide policy-relevant recommendations.

## Conclusions

### Conclusions on Incentives and barriers to participation

- The main reason for SSH researchers to participate in FP7 is the strong desire for international cooperation and the conviction that an international approach increases the quality of research results. The general need for research funding is also an important incentive.
- The main barrier to participation is the complexity and the strain of the application procedure particularly in combination with the very low success rate in Theme 8 “SSH”, which is the second major barrier. The difficulty of international consortium building is a third important barrier. Additionally, the administrative burden of project management is stressed as a barrier by FP-experienced researchers.

### Conclusions on Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities”

- In general, SSH researchers are aware of the relevance of FP7 as the largest programme for SSH research worldwide.
- SSH researchers believe that Theme 8 “SSH” is effective in supporting international cooperation and cross-disciplinary research, that the programme is attractive for the best-qualified researchers and that all in all it focuses on the most relevant issues for the SSH community.
- The success rate of Theme 8 “SSH” is perceived as too low to guarantee the participation of excellent researchers in the long run.
- In the perception of the SSH research community, aspects of humanities research are not adequately included in the Work Programmes.
- The majority of researchers would welcome the inclusion of more openly-phrased research topics (bottom-up) within the FP7 *Cooperation* specific programme and Theme 8 “SSH”.
- A large majority of SSH researchers prefer small and medium-scale research projects over large-scale projects.
- Researchers advocate the funding of more than one project per topic to ensure a variety of perspectives on a given topic.

- In general, most SSH researchers stress the benefits of integrating stakeholders and Civil Society Organisations into research projects. However, the funding instrument “Research for the benefit of specific groups - CSO” is seen as problematic.
- All in all, the EU Commission’s efforts to promote the Societal Challenges approach can be considered a success.
- Researchers remain divided in their assessment of the Societal Challenges.
- The practice of funding only one project per Societal Challenge is criticised.
- Consortium building and project management are assessed as problematic due to the size of the “Societal Challenge” projects.
- Survey respondents reveal polarised opinions on the quality of the evaluation process. The ranking of proposals with identical evaluation scores is perceived as not transparent. The feedback from the Evaluation Summary Reports is assessed as not detailed enough.

### **Conclusions on SSH research in FP7 outside of Theme 8 “SSH”**

- Researchers seem to be well aware of most alternative funding opportunities outside of Theme 8 “SSH”.
- In the assessment of survey respondents, the best-known and most important programmes outside “Theme 8 SSH” are the specific programmes *People, Ideas* and other Themes within the specific programme *Cooperation*.
- Around two thirds of online survey respondents with explicit opinions are not satisfied with the integration of SSH in other *Cooperation* Themes and see particular difficulties for SSH researchers applying there (consortium building, evaluation).
- Researchers are divided on whether topics with a major SSH focus in other Themes should rather be addressed under Theme 8 “SSH” or whether the current practice of including SSH as a cross-cutting aspect in all *Cooperation* Themes (in addition to Theme 8 “SSH”) should be maintained.
- Researchers stress the importance of a distinct SSH programme within FP7.
- The specific programme *Ideas* (ERC) is assessed as attractive by a majority of researchers, mainly due to the freedom of choice of research topics but to some extent also because of the concept of funding of individual teams. However, all in all, ERC and collaborative research in Theme 8 “SSH” are perceived as complementary.

## Conclusions on Impact of SSH research in FP7

- The principle of excellence in project selection is achieved in projects funded under Theme 8 “SSH” (see “Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme”).
- In the assessment of SSH researchers, FP7 project outcomes lead first and foremost to significant progress beyond the state of the art with regard to new concepts, methodology, data, European coverage and interdisciplinarity. The relevance of outcomes for policy initiatives is assessed as less significant.
- While researchers take objectives and the expected impact as stated in the Work Programmes seriously, the project’s actual contribution to the impact is perceived as difficult to measure.
- SSH research in FP7 is effective in further connecting SSH researchers in Europe and in contributing to building a European Research Area (ERA).

## Conclusions on International cooperation with “Third Countries”

- Overall, the experiences of survey respondents with international cooperation beyond EU member states and FP7 associated countries are positive. Difficulties are perceived in the areas of FP7 administrative effort, consortium building and differences in scientific culture.
- Researchers from “Third Countries” rate the scope of topics in Theme 8 “SSH” as mostly relevant to them. As regards the objectives of the topics in the Work Programme, these are rated relevant in some cases and less relevant in others.
- The most important area where survey participants from “Third Countries” are in need of support is establishing contacts with European researchers.

## Recommendations

- The budget foreseen for SSH research in the next Framework Programme FP8 should be substantially increased to reduce the current over-subscription of Theme 8 “SSH” and allow for more excellent proposals to be funded.
- The complexity of proposal preparation and the administrative burden of project management both need to be substantially reduced. Since this is a major barrier for SSH researchers – and others – to participate in FP7, efforts should be made to implement further simplification measures.

- A new balance between top-down research topics and more openly phrased topics (bottom-up in nature) within Theme 8 “SSH” should be considered. This approach could encourage innovative project ideas within the context of collaborative research and offer greater flexibility in project implementation.
- The funding of more than one project per topic to gain a variety of different and complementary perspectives should be a general objective of all SSH calls. This might be achieved by focusing on the funding of small and medium-scale research projects (instead of large-scale projects) and by limiting the number of research topics per call.
- The integration of humanities research aspects into call topics should be improved. Emphasis should be placed on the particular contributions of humanities researchers to FP7 objectives in Theme 8 “SSH” as well as in other Themes of the specific programme *Cooperation*. The communication of opportunities for humanities research within Theme 8 “SSH” and other *Cooperation* Themes should be improved.
- Enhancement of the Evaluation Summary Reports (ESRs): The degree of detail included in ESRs varies considerably. ESRs need to be more concise, more precise and more detailed.
- Transparent ranking rules: While the evaluation criteria are transparent to a certain degree they become opaque once proposals achieve the same high scores. Ranking procedures for proposals scoring 14 points and above must be transparent and conclusive.
- There is a need for greater transparency in the selection procedure for evaluators. A closer match between the expertise of the evaluators and the content of the research proposals is necessary. Mandatory registration of proposals prior to the deadline could facilitate the evaluator selection process.
- The process of developing the Work Programmes should become more transparent and provide possibilities for the research community to interact.
- Clear phrasing of the “expected impact” in the Work Programme is required. The relevance of dissemination and the visibility of SSH research results should be better communicated by different channels – including the Commission.
- The specific policy relevance should be made accessible to the research community via early stage information events and counselling by the Commission and the National Contact Points (NCPs) for SSH in FP7.
- A distinct SSH programme in the Framework Programmes is essential and indispensable for providing opportunities for genuine SSH research and for addressing the current and future societal challenges that Europe and the world are facing.
- Complementary to a genuine SSH programme within FPs, integration of SSH in other Themes of *Cooperation* should be improved e.g. by providing appropriate instruments to facilitate the implementation of truly cross-disciplinary research. Interdisciplinary evaluation processes in other

Themes outside Theme 8 “SSH” should be improved. The role of SSH should not be restricted to accompanying research.

## Specific recommendations

### **New approach:**

- More than one project per Societal Challenge should be funded to guarantee plurality and allow complementarities.
- Societal Challenges should be less rigid and prescriptive in their approach – making way for innovative research designs.
- Providing professional project management seminars for coordinators is essential. These seminars could be provided by the Commission or NCPs at the start of the project.
- The proposal application template is not in line with the complexity of the Societal Challenges and should be adapted to the complexity of the project designs.

### **International cooperation:**

- To facilitate the participation of “Third Country” participants, efforts to support partner searches and consortium building need to be intensified. The administrative burden for participation should be further reduced for “Third Countries”. Additional efforts should be channelled into disseminating information on FP7 in “Third Countries”.



Economics  
**Finance** Geography  
Development Philosophy **Arts and**  
**Culture** Education Religion Political  
Sciences Sociology Archaeology and History  
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**ies** International relations  
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**geography** Statistics Demography Anthro  
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**Relations** Gov

# Introduction

## | • Introduction

Within the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7, 2007-2013), Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH)” provides funding for research on topics relevant to economics, political/social sciences and the humanities. Theme 8 “SSH” of FP7 is the world’s largest research funding programme for the socio-economic sciences and the humanities – while at the same time being the smallest of the 10 theme-oriented programmes within the specific programme *Cooperation*. SSH is still a “youngster” in comparison to the majority of *Cooperation* Themes such as “Health”, “Food” or “ICT”. SSH only received programme status as recently as FP6, while the humanities have just been explicitly targeted in FP7. Theme 8 “SSH” is now an established programme with a broad scope of projects ranging from “*Competitiveness, Innovation and Intangible Investment in Europe*” to “*Religious Education in Multicultural Societies*”. The overall objective of the programme is dedicated to “promoting and investing in world-class, state-of-the-art research based primarily upon the principle of excellence”. Moreover, SSH research is designed to provide policy-makers and stakeholders on a national and European level with the evidence-based knowledge required to maintain and enhance Europe’s competitiveness and the well-being of its people.

Theme 8 “SSH” aims to obtain an in-depth, shared understanding of the complex and interrelated socio-economic challenges confronting Europe.

The annual Work Programmes place emphasis on the following areas of Theme 8 “SSH”:

1. Growth, employment and competitiveness in a knowledge society
2. Combining economic, social and environmental objectives in a European perspective
3. Major trends in society and their implications
4. Europe in the world (covering a.o. migration, poverty, crime and conflict)
5. The citizen in the European Union
6. Socio-economic and scientific indicators
7. Foresight activities, such as the future implications of global knowledge, migration and ageing.

With a total budget of € 623 million over seven years, more than 1,700 proposals have been submitted and 134 projects have been funded, associating over 1,500 institutions by the midterm stage of FP7 in 2010. A total of 14,702 partners have participated in proposal submission and 1,169 partners have been funded. Scholars from all over the world are participating in the “SSH” Programme – the current count includes 67 countries.

In addition to Theme 8 “SSH”, socio-economic and humanities research questions are also integrated in the cross-cutting issues of other Themes of the specific programme *Cooperation*. Moreover, SSH research is also funded in the specific programmes *Ideas* (ERC), *People* (Marie Curie Actions) and

*Capacities* (e.g. “Science in Society”). The *Ideas* and the *People* programmes both have a bottom-up approach in contrast to the top-down approach of the *Cooperation* programme.

Given the “youthfulness” of the European SSH community, the particularities of SSH research, the high over-subscription of Theme 8 and the marginal involvement of SSH researchers in the different evaluation and monitoring processes of the FPs, a need for an SSH-focused midterm evaluation became apparent. Within the context of the EU-funded project NET4SOCIETY a survey-based report “SSH Experiences with FP7 – a Commentary” was launched in the summer of 2010. NET4SOCIETY is the first transnational network of SSH National Contact Points. National Contact Points (NCP) are the main providers of advice and individual assistance to researchers and stakeholders in all phases of the proposal preparation process in all EU Member States and FP7 Associated States – they are in constant communication with their respective SSH communities. In addition, numerous International Cooperation Partner Countries (ICPC) have established National Contact Points to assist their researchers. With 63 partners from 58 countries, the network of SSH NCPs cooperating under the NET4SOCIETY umbrella has the necessary direct access to the international SSH community – the prerequisite for conducting an international survey on SSH in FP7 – making such a commentary a viable and valuable undertaking.

The *SSH Commentary* is intended to give the SSH community in Europe and beyond a voice – particularly at a point in time when the foundation for FP8 is being laid. The *SSH Commentary* includes recommendations based on the results of an online survey and 100 face-to-face interviews. The *SSH commentary*, highlighting specific SSH experiences with FP7, complements other FP7 monitoring and evaluating activities. A major focus of the *Commentary* is to shed light on barriers and incentives for SSH researchers to participate in the 7th EU Research Framework Programme.

The overall learning objective of NET4SOCIETY is to capture a vivid picture of SSH researchers’ opinions and – if possible – experiences on the general structure of Theme 8 “SSH” and on the integration of SSH aspects in the other nine research Themes of the *Cooperation* programme. In addition, the appeal of the ERC approach (principal investigator scheme) compared to Theme 8 “SSH” (collaborative scheme) is examined. SSH researchers’ experiences with involving policy-makers, stakeholders, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in their FP7 projects as well as the outcomes of SSH FP7 projects in terms of results and internationalisation are further foci of the *SSH commentary*. Given the strengthened international focus of FP7, the survey also depicts the FP7 experiences of SSH researchers from “Third Countries”<sup>2</sup>. These different aspects provide a valuable database from which NET4SOCIETY derives its recommendations for FP7 and for future Framework Programmes.

These general aspects are enhanced with a specific look at the first reactions of the SSH community to the recently introduced “New Approach” of the SSH Work Programme. In the summer of 2009, the Commission announced the so-called “New Approach”, which was immediately introduced to the 2010

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of EU Research Framework Programmes, the term “Third Countries” refers to countries that are neither European Union member states nor countries associated to FP7.

SSH Work Programme (published in July 2009). The Work Programme translates the “New Approach” into “Societal Challenges” which are implemented via large-scale integrating projects. Societal Challenges mandate a minimum budget of € 6.5 million and a consortium of at least seven partners from seven different countries. While the timing of this survey is such that researchers could only base their assessment on experiences made during the proposal preparation phase of the Societal Challenges scheme, the survey is able to give a “snapshot” of these first encounters with the “New Approach”.

The *SSH commentary* was conducted at the midterm stage of FP7 – reflecting four years of experience with FP7. The *SSH Commentary* is part of a work package in the NET4SOCIETY project, funded by the European Commission. Its objective is to improve the tools of SSH funding and to provide policy-relevant recommendations.

## Socio-economic sciences and humanities in EU Research Framework Programmes

Socio-economic research was first introduced in the 4th EU Research Framework Programme in the context of “Targeted Socio-economic Research” (1994–1998), with a small budget of €130 million. Socio-economic research saw increases in budget and prominence in the following Framework Programmes. Under the 5th Framework Programme (1998–2002) socio-economic sciences were funded under the key action “Improving the socio-economic knowledge base” (budget € 165 million). With the 6th Framework Programme (2002–2006) SSH obtained programme status, being the seventh of seven thematic priorities (“Citizens and Governance in a knowledge-based society”) with a budget of € 245 million. SSH maintained its programme status in FP7, while for the first time explicitly addressing the humanities and encouraging their participation. The steep budget increase from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> FP (€ 623 million) is not as spectacular as it may appear: FP6 lasted for a duration of four years, while FP7 covers seven years. Given the overwhelming participation of the SSH community in Theme 8 “SSH”, the top-notch quality of SSH applications and the overall relevance of policy-oriented research, there seems to be sufficient evidence-based reason to increase the budget of SSH research in FP8, so that funding and research potential are no longer so starkly mismatched.

## Approach and data base of the survey

This *SSH commentary* was conducted via an online questionnaire and face-to-face interviews with SSH researchers in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Online Questionnaire and interview questions are part of the Appendices to this document.

The purpose of the **online survey** was to collect a substantial amount of quantitative data as a sound basis for analysing SSH researchers' experiences with, and assessments of, FP7. The online survey questionnaire was designed and promoted on a European level by NET4SOCIETY coordinator DLR (Germany). Furthermore, all NET4SOCIETY partners disseminated and promoted the online survey in their respective national research communities. It targeted socio-economic and humanities researchers and stakeholders who have either submitted proposals in FP7 or gained experience in FP5 or FP6. Researchers who follow European research yet deliberately decided against participating in FP7 were also welcomed to share their insights. The results were analysed by DLR.

The online questionnaire was accessible between June and September 2010 and received 466 responses. All in all, online survey respondents come from 39 countries. 9% of respondents are based in "Third Countries"<sup>4</sup>. 16% of participants hail from new member states that joined the European Union in 2004 and 2007 (Fig. 1). Online survey participants from the five countries with the highest participation rates in FP7 Theme 8 "SSH" (UK, Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands) are well represented and account for 41% of all answers.

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<sup>4</sup> In the context of EU Research Framework Programmes, the term "Third Countries" refers to countries that are neither European Union member states nor countries associated to FP7.

Fig. 1 National background of survey respondents

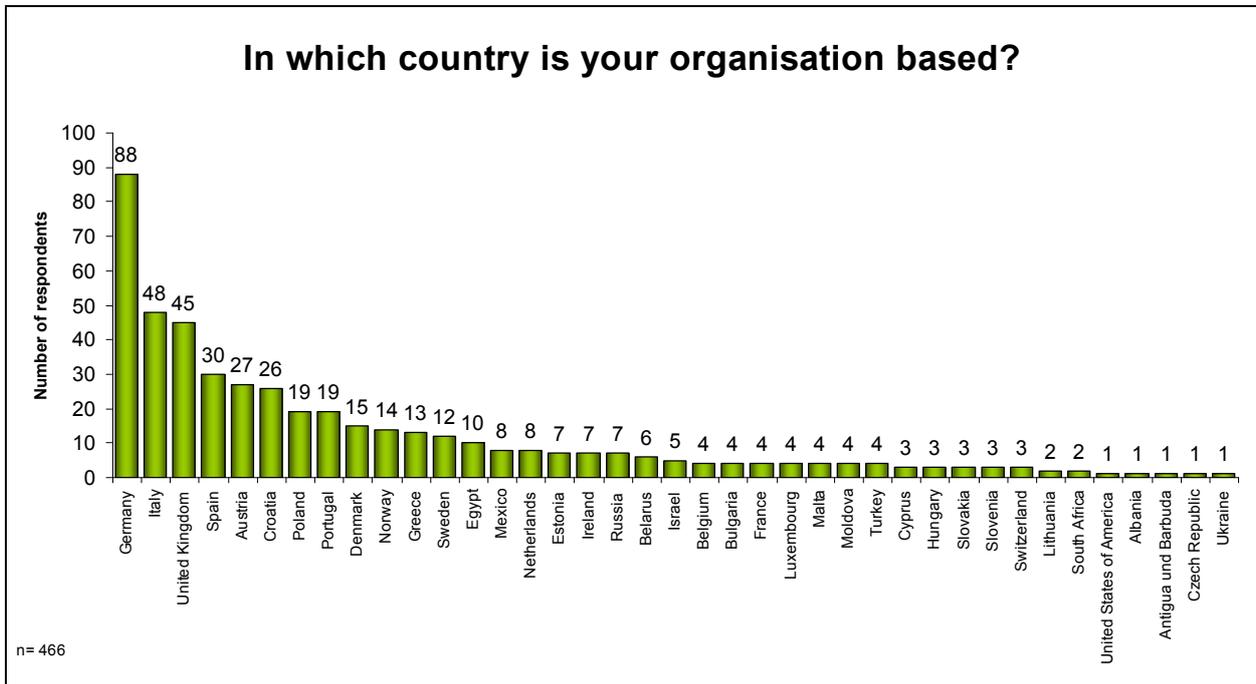
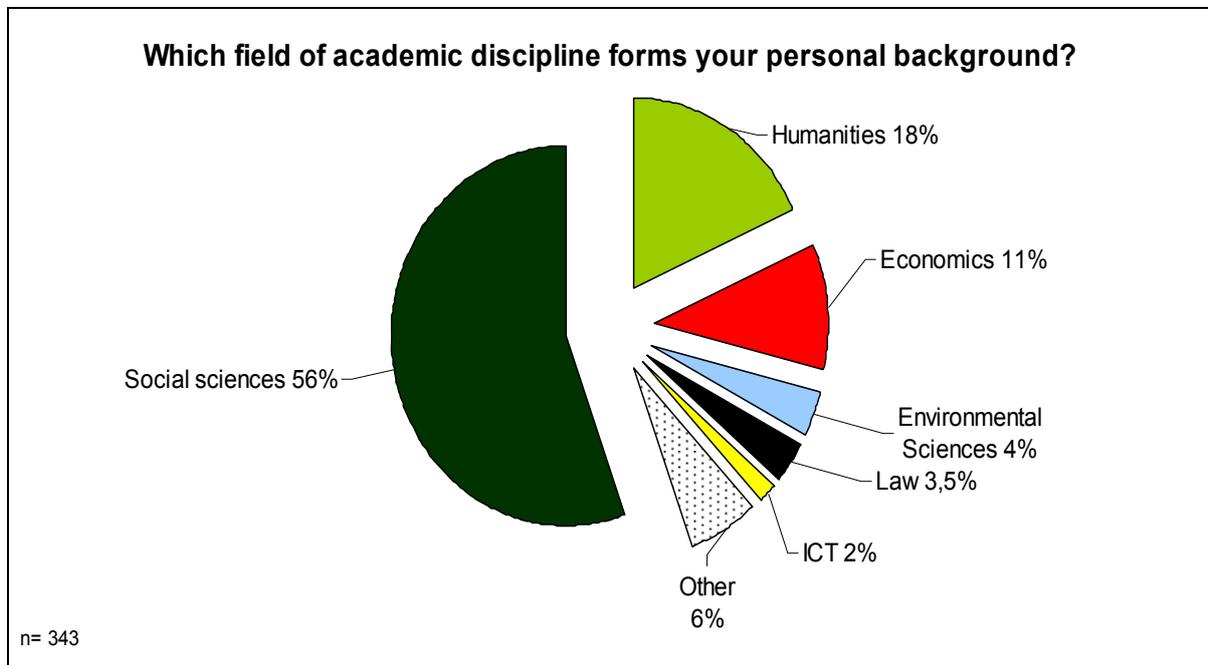


Fig. 2 Academic background of survey respondents



The majority of online survey respondents are experienced researchers (i.e. professors or senior research fellows). While more than half the participants are social scientists, approx. 18% have a background in humanities and around 11% are economists (Fig. 2). Two thirds have direct personal

experience with European Research Framework Programmes and have either participated in funded projects or submitted proposals in FP7.

In addition to the online survey, 100 **interviews** with FP-experienced SSH researchers from 29 countries were carried out by the National Contact Points that are involved in the NET4SOCIETY project. For this purpose, NET4SOCIETY partner IPPT-PAN (Poland) provided an interview guide in cooperation with DLR and BSU (Belarus). All NET4SOCIETY partners were encouraged to carry out interviews to ensure a broad picture based on interviews with researchers from a number of different countries. The criteria for the selection of interviewees were as follows: First priority interview partners were researchers with FP7 participation experience in Theme 8 “SSH”, ideally as coordinators of projects. Participation experience was defined as experience in funded projects (first priority) and / or submitted proposals (second priority). Besides experience with Theme 8 “SSH” the following selection criteria were used: SSH researchers with specific knowledge (participation experience) of the “New Approach (Societal Challenges)” in Theme 8 “SSH”, SSH researchers with participation experience in other Themes within the specific programme *Cooperation*, SSH researchers with participation experience in the specific programme *Ideas* (ERC), SSH researchers with knowledge on FP7 (e.g. successful coordinators in FP6) who deliberately decided not to participate in the Framework Programme. The objective of the interviews was to complement the quantitative results of the online questionnaire with more detailed qualitative insights from a group of researchers well experienced with regard to FP7. On the one hand, the interviews focus on similar aspects as the online questionnaire (e.g. incentives and barriers to participation, content of Theme 8 “SSH” Work Programmes) to complete the picture painted by the results of the online survey. On the other, the interviews also include some specific aspects that proved less suitable for the questionnaire and particularly required the possibility of open answers (e.g. best location for SSH research in FP7, integration of stakeholders in research projects, assessment of funding schemes, appeal of the specific programme *Ideas* (ERC) in comparison to Theme 8 “SSH”). Additionally, interview partners were asked to give recommendations for the improvement of SSH research funding in EU Research Framework Programmes.

In total, all interview partners show vast experience with FP7 and previous Framework Programmes. 97% of interviewees have participated in FP proposals, 78% have been partners in funded FP projects. More than half have coordinated FP7 or FP6 projects. The disciplinary background is similar to the online survey respondents: 46% are social scientists, 22% have a background in humanities and 21% are economists (several answers were possible). One third of the interviewees come from the UK, Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands (the five countries with highest participation rates in FP7 / Theme 8 “SSH”). New EU member states are represented by 20% of interviewees. To gain an international perspective that goes beyond Europe, nine interviews with researchers from “Third Countries” are included as well.





Incentives  
and barriers  
to participation

## II • Incentives and barriers to participation

The inclusion of a programme specifically dedicated to socio-economic sciences and humanities is relatively new to European Research Framework Programmes. While it seems to be a frequent perception that social sciences and humanities are not very active in EU research, the high application numbers of SSH researchers in FP7 prove that the programme in fact is rather attractive. A major objective of this survey was to shed light on this issue and to learn more about what SSH researchers perceive as incentives and barriers to participation in FP7.

### Incentives for participation

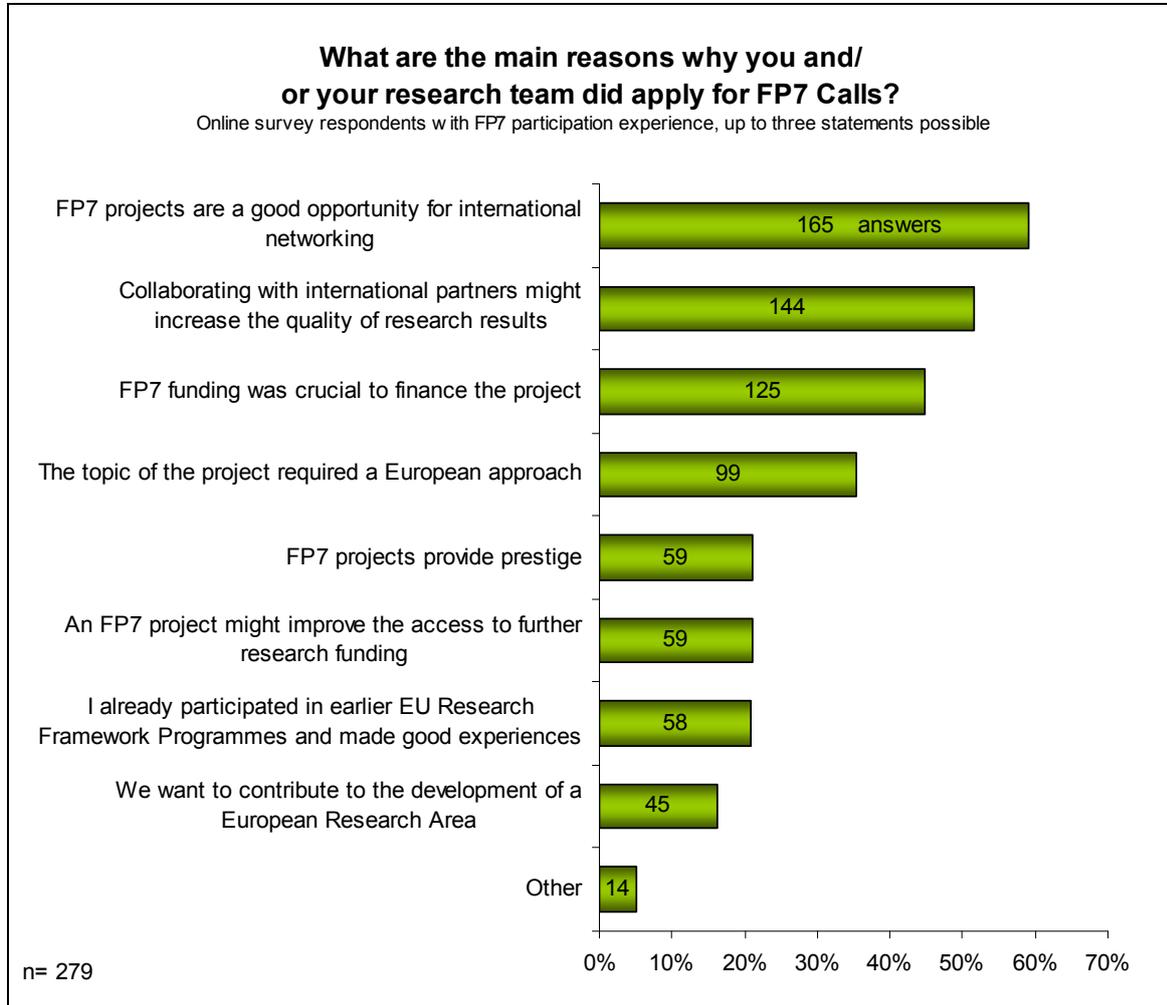
For the vast majority of online survey respondents as well as interview partners the most important motive for participating in FP7 is the desire for international cooperation in research. It needs to be highlighted that FP7 is perceived as a unique opportunity to receive funding for research collaboration across national borders. Researchers value FP7 as a good opportunity for initiating and furthering international networking (Fig. 3).

About two out of three interview partners and more than half the online survey respondents state that a major motivation in this context is the conviction that international collaboration increases the quality of research results. This assessment was endorsed by a UK project coordinator who declared in an interview that *"the most important incentive for working on an FP7 project is the wealth of international contacts you develop as you're going along. It allows you to broaden your approach and look at how other countries solve social problems"*.

The general demand for funding, of course, is also a motive often stated by survey participants. It needs to be taken into account that in some countries and / or some thematic areas there are few attractive national alternatives for research project funding. Evidence from both the online survey and interviews suggests that the amount of available EU funding per individual project in FP7 is in principle seen as sufficient to implement international collaborative projects. At the same time, a number of interview partners emphasise the significant problems with the current funding rates and eligible costs (e.g. exclusion of VAT) that specific organisations like Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) or private, non-profit research institutes face. This does not pertain to the overall ceiling of the available EC contribution per project but to the specific funding models.

Around one third (35.5%) of online survey respondents give as a reason for application in FP7 the fact that the topic of their project required a European approach. Again this motive underlines the importance of FP7 for facilitating cross-national research cooperation.

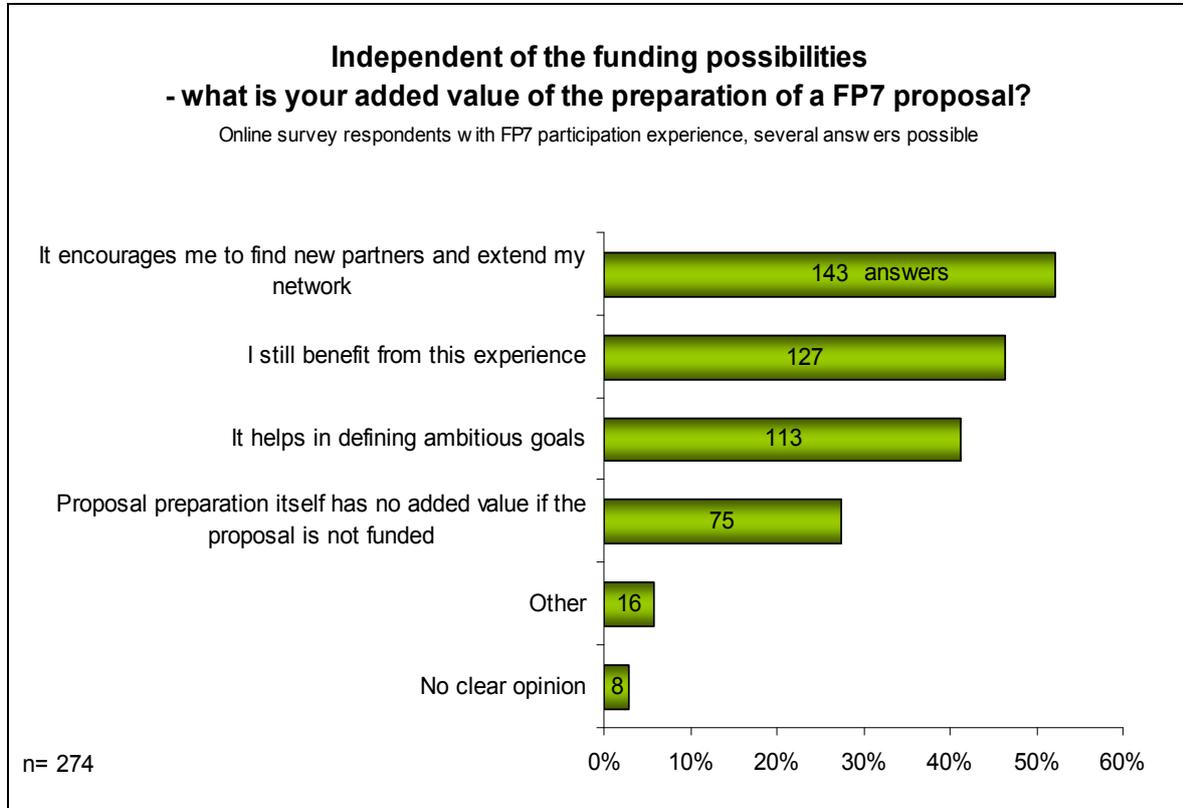
Fig. 3 FP7 participation incentives for survey respondents



Two out of three respondents of the online survey with experience in submitting proposals in FP7 state that there is an added value in proposal preparation – independent of the actual funding of the proposal (Fig. 4).

More than half the respondents agree that a positive aspect of proposal preparation is the encouragement to extend cooperation networks and 41% state that it helped to define ambitious goals. However, if a proposal is not funded, this added value in no way compensates for the resources connected to proposal preparation, as the following analysis on barriers to participation demonstrates.

Fig. 4 Added value of proposal preparation for survey respondents



## Barriers to participation

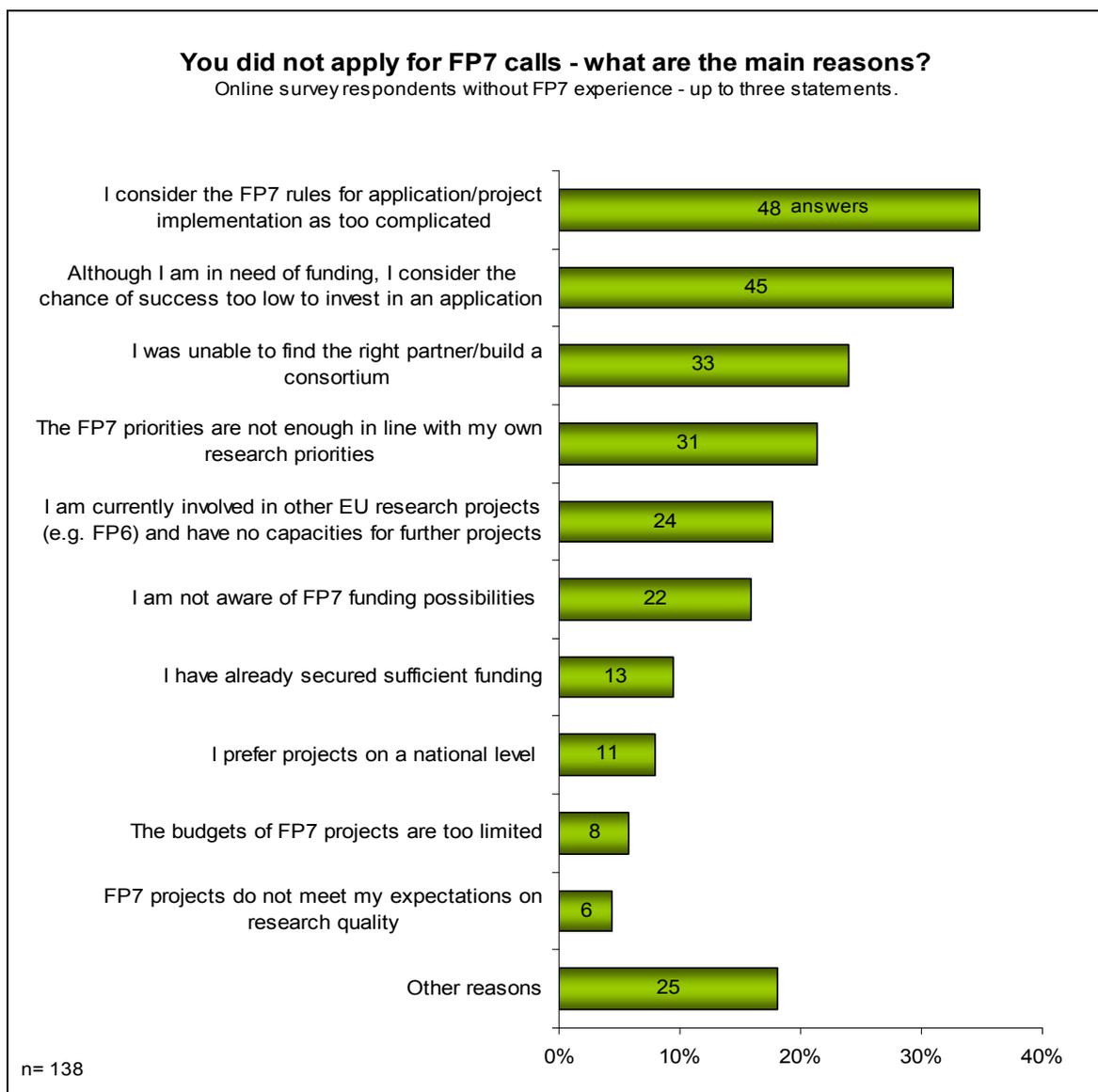
The findings of this survey on barriers to participation of SSH researchers and stakeholders in FP7 mostly correspond to other studies in this area. In the recently published “Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme”<sup>5</sup>, the administrative burdens of involvement in FP7 are named as an area of improvement, and further simplification measures are recommended. Low success rates and thus a substantial waste of research resources in applications that pass the evaluation threshold but cannot be funded due to budgetary restraints are considered areas of concern in the Interim Evaluation. These aspects are also main concerns in the specific field of SSH, as the results of this survey show. This is not surprising when one takes into account that the success rate in Theme 8 “SSH” is around just 9% and thus considerably lower than the average success rate of around 22% in FP7 in general.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> European Commission 2010, Studies and Reports: “Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme, Report of the Expert Group”, available for download at [http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index\\_en.cfm?pg=fp7](http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index_en.cfm?pg=fp7)

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2010): “Third FP7 Monitoring Report. Monitoring Report 2009”, available for download at [http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index\\_en.cfm?pg=fp7-monitoring](http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/index_en.cfm?pg=fp7-monitoring). SSH success rate refers to the first two calls (2007-2009).

In this survey, those online survey respondents who have not yet participated in FP7 were questioned about their personal reasons for not applying to the programme. Additionally, all interview partners – the majority with FP7 or FP6 experience – were asked what in their view might be barriers to participation (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 **Barriers for FP7 participation stated by survey respondents**



The most frequently named barrier to participation in FP7 identified by online survey participants is the complexity of proposal preparation – more than one in three respondents identify this as a barrier that led to non-participation in their individual cases. About one third of the online survey respondents point to the low success rates as the main reason for not participating. Another barrier, mentioned by

24% of online survey respondents refers to difficulties in consortium building and finding the right partners to undertake the proposal. These results are mirrored by the answers of the interview partners, with the difference that an even higher percentage of interviewees (69%) rate the complexity of proposal preparation as the most important barrier to participation. Apparently, the actual experiences with the complexity of the application process made by interview partners even exceed the apprehensions of those online survey respondents without participation experience. Simplification – not only of the application process but also of the administrative requirements of project management – is a frequent recommendation of interview partners.

On the other hand, only about 4% of online survey respondents declare they have not participated in FP7 because their expectations regarding research quality are not met by FP7 projects.

Obviously, the combination of complexity and great effort required for proposal preparation on the one hand and very low success rates on the other is a particular problem. An interviewed FP7 project coordinator stresses this point: *“Half a year of proposal preparation for – in our case – a chance of one in 27 to be funded – that is a barrier to participation.”* Many comments from interview partners suggest that this becomes even more relevant if the applicant does not have access to financial proposal preparation support e.g. from the institution or government and / or if national funding can be more easily accessed with the perspective of higher success rates.

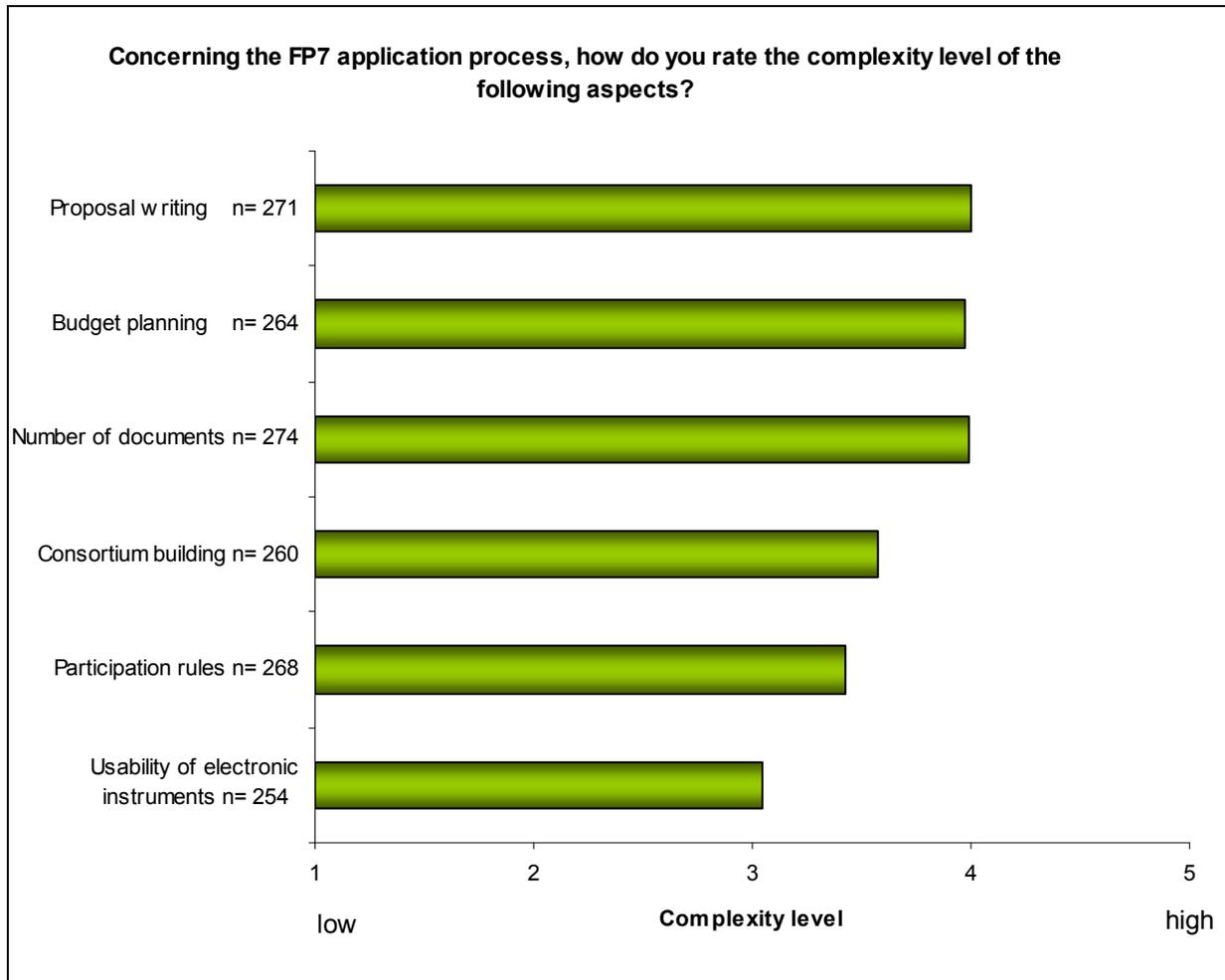
In this context it also needs to be stressed that the average total evaluation score of funded projects in Theme 8 “SSH” (13.75 points out of 15) is the highest of all thematic areas in the specific programme *Cooperation* and in several cases proposals scoring as high as 14.5 points did not receive funding due to inadequate budgets.<sup>7</sup> Due to budgetary restraints, a substantial number of excellent proposals have been denied funding in past calls. This might explain why only one in four participants of the online survey agree that the success rate of Theme 8 “SSH” suffices to safeguard the participation of excellent researchers in the long term.

As the complexity of proposal preparation is perceived as a major barrier to participation in the programme, it is vital to understand which elements of preparing proposals are assessed as particularly complex. For this reason, online survey respondents were asked to rate the complexity level of different aspects of the application process (Fig. 6).

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<sup>7</sup> Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme, p. 27.

Fig. 6 Complexity of application process (average total survey responses)



Results show that the actual writing of the proposal, the budget planning and the high number of documents that need to be taken into account are all perceived as the most complex aspects. In comparison, the usability of the electronic instruments for the submission of proposals is rated as being the least complex.

In the interviews, simplification – not only of the application process but of the administrative requirements of project management – is a frequent recommendation.

### **Conclusions on Incentives and barriers to participation**

- The main reason for SSH researchers to participate in FP7 is the strong desire for international cooperation and the conviction that an international approach increases the quality of research results. The general need for research funding is also an important incentive.
- The main barrier to participation is the complexity and the strain of the application procedure particularly in combination with the very low success rate in Theme 8 “SSH”, which is the second major barrier. The difficulty of international consortium building is a third important barrier. Additionally, the administrative burden of project management is stressed as a barrier by FP-experienced researchers.



“Socio-economic  
Sciences and  
Humanities” –  
Assessment of  
the programme and  
its funding schemes

### III • Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities” – Assessment of the programme and its funding schemes

While funding of socio-economic sciences and humanities in FP7 is not exclusively restricted to Theme 8 “Socio-economic sciences and Humanities” (SSH) in the specific programme *Cooperation*, this programme nonetheless represents the core of SSH research funding in FP7. Therefore, this survey places emphasis on Theme 8 “SSH” and how the programme is perceived in terms of relevance, structure, content and other characteristics such as success rates.

A majority of interviewees believe that the SSH research community is generally aware of the relevance of FP7 as the largest SSH programme worldwide, although awareness might differ between disciplines and is coupled with the widespread perception of FP7 as very complicated in terms of application and project implementation procedures.

The collected data show that Theme 8 “SSH” is assessed as effective in supporting international and cross-disciplinary research by a majority of those online survey respondents with explicit opinions (Fig. 7). 44% of them agree that Theme 8 “SSH” is attractive for the best-qualified researchers.

On the other hand, respondents both from the online survey and the interviews express strong discontent with the low success rate in Theme 8 “SSH”. Another point of criticism concerns the content of research topics addressed in the Work Programme – particularly with regard to the relevance of humanities: less than a third of the online survey respondents consider the inclusion of humanities in the call topics as adequate.

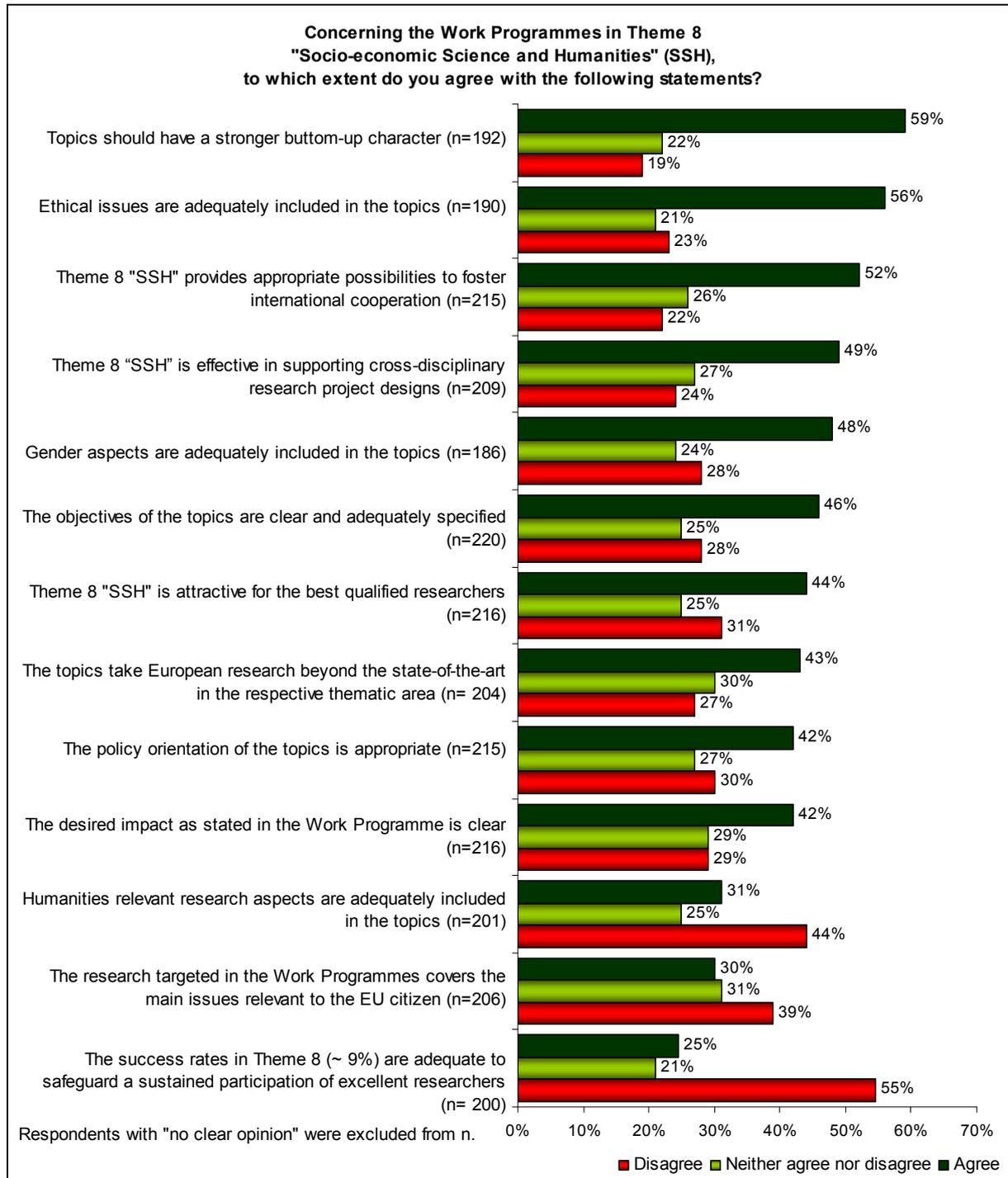
#### General assessment of content of the research topics

More than seven out of ten interviewed researchers agree that the topics of the annually published Work Programmes in Theme 8 “SSH”, which form the basis for the calls for proposals, reflect fully or partly the most relevant issues that the SSH community currently focuses on. However, some interviewees worry that the Work Programmes’ focus is too “*short-term*” and political while not taking the scientific perspectives adequately into account. One interview comment reflects this view: “*A good range of issues is covered but the emphasis seems to be on what is important on the policy agenda as opposed to what is important in terms of social trends.*”

While about one third of online survey respondents disagree that the research targeted in the Work Programmes covers the main issues relevant to the EU citizen, only 27% agree. In the interviews a number of respondents call for an increased involvement of the research community into the process

of identifying and phrasing the research topics – a sentiment that is also reflected in the “Interim Evaluation Report”.

Fig. 7 Assessment of Theme 8 “SSH” by survey respondents



Regarding scientific advancement, 43% of online survey participants believe that FP7 research topics take European research beyond the state of the art in the respective thematic areas, while 27% disagree.

Concerning the policy orientation of the topics, online survey respondents are divided in their opinions. Whereas 42% rate the policy orientation as appropriate, 30% disagree, while the remaining respondents neither agree nor disagree. Answers from the interviewees mirror this divide: while numerous researchers consider the policy orientation an incentive to participate others regards it as a deterrent. The assessment of this issue might be related to the disciplinary background of researchers: among online survey respondents with backgrounds in humanities only 35% agree that the policy orientation of topics is appropriate.

A majority of respondents both from the online survey and the interviews emphasize the importance of topics that are more openly phrased and offer greater flexibility – a bottom-up approach in the topic design (at least for a limited number of topics) is considered preferable. Although some comments from the interviews also anticipate possible problems linked to a “bottom-up” approach such as over-subscription and organising the evaluation process, the overall majority of survey respondents support a new balance between top-down and bottom-up research topics. This is in line with the recommendation of the Interim Evaluation of FP7 to place *“greater emphasis in the specific programme Cooperation during 2011-2014 on more open calls”*.<sup>8</sup>

## Assessment of specific aspects of the programme and the research topics

Many aspects of the SSH Work Programmes are evaluated positively by the majority of survey participants. Most online survey respondents (52%) agree that Theme 8 “SSH” provides appropriate possibilities to bring forward international research cooperation. About half the online survey respondents agree that the programme is effective in supporting cross-disciplinary research, while a quarter disagree (Fig. 7).

While less than half the online survey respondents agree that the objectives stated in the topics are clear and adequately specified (46%), and that the impact as phrased in the topic definition is clearly defined (42%), there is clear disagreement with this assessment from 27% of respondents (regarding the objectives) and from 29% of respondents (regarding the impact). This indicates that clarity in the topic description could still be improved further. Overall, respondents consider ethical issues and gender aspects to be adequately included – however many respondents offer no explicit opinion on this issue. A majority of interview partners welcome the integration of gender aspects in the research topics in general, but also express doubts whether they are always adequately implemented in funded

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<sup>8</sup> Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme, p. 11, 27.

projects. In this context it is important to note that women find the SSH programme, in comparison with other themes and areas of FP7, attractive – with a participation rate of 32% in funded projects. While gender balance remains an overriding problem in FP7, the SSH programme currently comes closest to achieving the European Commission’s goal of increasing the overall participation of female researchers to 40%.<sup>9</sup>

However, other issues connected to the SSH programme give rise to criticism. The low success rate of about 9% in Theme 8 “SSH” is the most important grievance. Only 25% of online survey respondents agree that the success rate of Theme 8 “SSH” is sufficient to safeguard the participation of excellent researchers in the long run, while 55% disagree. As already demonstrated in Chapter II “Incentives and barriers of participation”, this low success rate poses a major barrier to participation.

A considerable proportion of 44% of online survey respondents express discontent with the integration of humanities within Theme 8 “SSH”. On the other hand, less than one third believe that research aspects relevant to humanities are adequately integrated into the research topics. This is mirrored by a number of comments from the interviews that suggest economic sciences dominate the Work Programme, while humanities research aspects are rather neglected. However, both interviewees and online survey respondents with a background in humanities are even more sceptical about the integration of humanities into the topics of the programme. This is supported by the fact that in the online survey, an above-average percentage of this group states that a major barrier to participation in FP7 is that the FP7 priorities are not sufficiently in line with their own research priorities. While the EU Commission is dedicated to integrating humanities in the Work Programmes of Theme 8 “SSH”, there is apparently still room for improving the implementation of this goal.

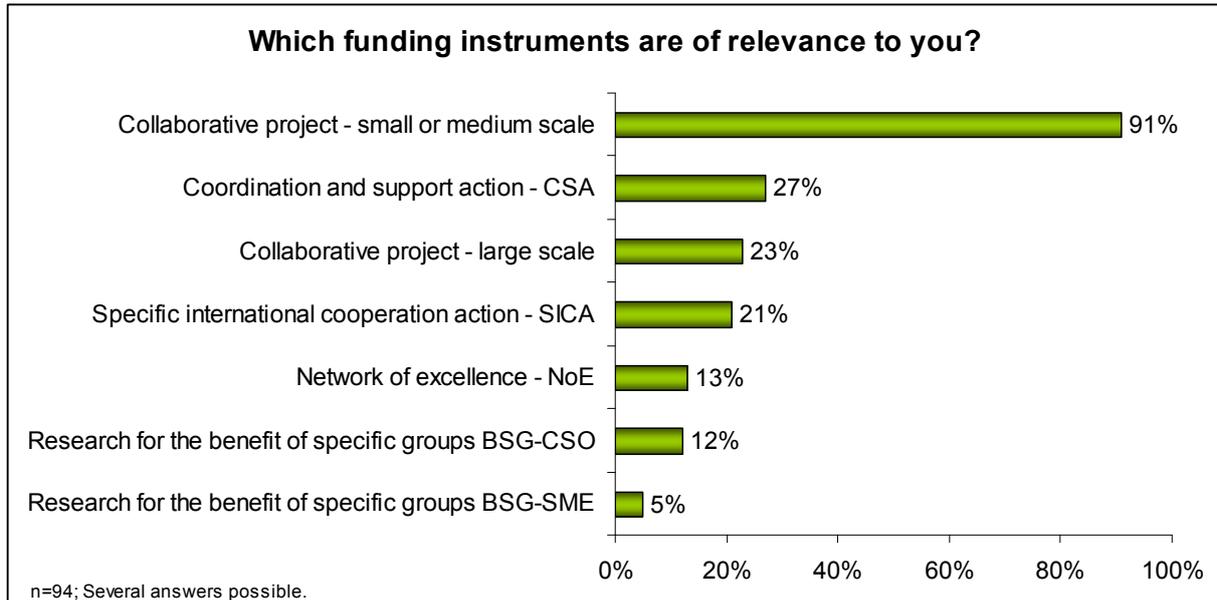
## Assessment of funding schemes

To establish which funding schemes meet the requirements of the SSH community, interviewed researchers were asked which of the FP7 funding schemes were of relevance to them. A vast majority of interview partners (more than 90%) prefer small and medium-scale focused research projects over large-scale integrated projects – the latter are assessed as difficult to manage and ineffective due to the larger number of partners usually involved. Less than one in four interviewees rate large-scale projects as relevant for themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme, p. 28.

Fig. 8 Assessment of funding instruments by interview partners



The preference for smaller research projects is also connected to a second aspect. In the interviews, a frequent recommendation for improvement was to fund several smaller projects per topic rather than one large-scale project – in order to gain a variety of different perspectives on the given issue.

The funding schemes “Research for the benefit of specific groups” (for small and medium-sized companies – BSG-SMEs – and for Civil Society Organisations – CSOs) and “Networks of Excellence” are appreciated only by a small number of interview partners. Still, the majority of interview partners believe that the integration of stakeholders such as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) brings significant benefit to projects, even though a number of researchers admit that integrating stakeholders into research projects is a very demanding task. FP7 complexity is rated as an even higher barrier for CSOs than for researchers. The findings show that CSO participation is regarded as beneficial to the project by most interviewed researchers, especially when it comes to dissemination of the project’s results and generating great impact, but also by generally improving the quality of the research. All in all, the interview results indicate that although most researchers welcome the integration of stakeholders, the specific implementation of this goal by the funding scheme “Research for the benefit of specific groups – CSO”, which puts CSOs in the position of determining the direction of the research, is assessed as problematic. This is underlined by a German coordinator: *“It is problematic that the funding scheme was just adapted from an instrument for the integration of SMEs, instead of being genuinely designed for the needs of CSOs.”* The foreseen funding rates might serve SMEs but non-profit CSOs often find it hard to manage with a 50% funding rate for R&D activities.

## Societal challenges – a “New Approach”

In 2009, the Commission introduced a “New Approach” aiming to reduce the perceived fragmentation in SSH research while facilitating the creation of a solid knowledge base “on which Europe-wide, comparative, interdisciplinary research” could flourish. This new approach was to give SSH research a clear programme orientation – a policy-driven orientation. This “New Approach” was translated into “Societal Challenges”. Prior to the implementation there was much discussion in different relevant fora as to whether this “New Approach” was compatible with the realities and capabilities of the SSH research community. On June 5, 2009, the Commission organised a workshop for NCPs and the SSH research community at large, introducing and elaborating on the objectives, design and structure of the “Societal Challenges” topics.

With the 2010 call for proposals (published in 2009) onwards, “Societal Challenges” were phased into the SSH programme as the focus of the large-scale integrating research project funding scheme. “Societal challenges”, in comparison to traditional large-scale projects, command a much larger budget with a minimum of € 6.5 million and a minimum of seven partners from seven countries – both being eligibility criteria. “Societal Challenges” not only have newly-defined objectives, more funding and more partners, they also have a pre-described structure which includes:

- A coordinated interdisciplinary approach and plurality of perspectives to examine the different dimensions of the “Societal Challenge” considered;
- Building on previous research; stock-taking;
- Forward-looking / Foresight analysis regarding the evolution of the Societal Challenge, where relevant;
- Deployment of a significant international cooperation dimension in addition to the European dimension;
- Dissemination and exploitation of research results in a variety of contexts (scientific, policy, media, civil society);
- Development of an effective critical mass of actors, involving a wide range of key stakeholders;
- A rigorous professional approach on managing research and day-to-day administrative work;
- Ethical and gender dimensions will continue to be relevant in both the conduct of the research and its content.

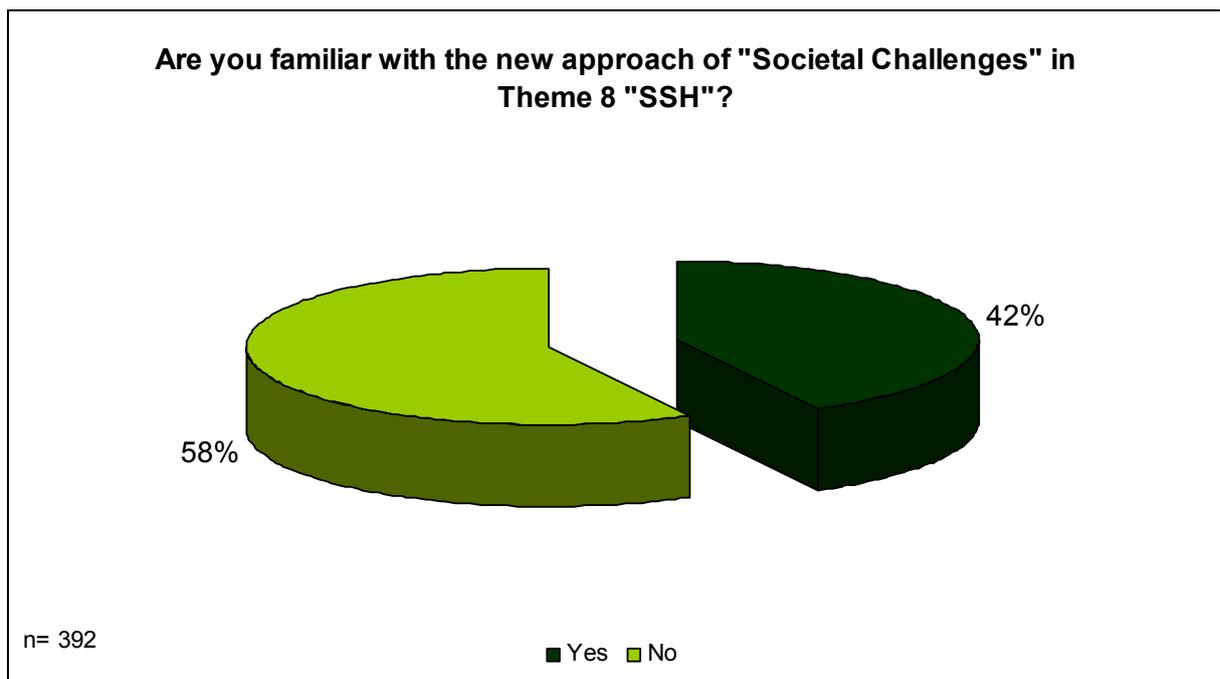
In addition, proposal-makers are also encouraged to define additional research aspects that go beyond the research subjects identified inside the given “Societal Challenges” in the Work Programme, with a more comprehensive approach in view.

The online survey and the interviews were launched at a time when the first researchers had completed the initial application process and evaluation summary reports had just been circulated. At this time *none* of the online survey respondents or interview partners had gathered actual experience in working or managing a “Societal Challenge” – therefore, the responses only pertain to experiences and impressions gained during the proposal preparation phase.

Contrary to the expectations of numerous critics of the “New Approach” 50 proposals were submitted to the five challenges of the call. While 33 proposals were deemed eligible for funding, only one proposal per Challenge is being funded, leaving the success rate at a mere 10% – only slightly higher than the success rate of the other instruments in the programme.

The Commission’s promotional efforts with regard to the “Societal Challenges” can be considered a success. While the majority of online survey participants are not familiar with the “New Approach” (58%) – 42% are aware of the “New Approach” (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9 Familiarity with the “New Approach” stated by survey respondents



Given the timeframe (one year after the Commission’s announcement) of the online questionnaire, this response can be considered an accomplishment. It is, however, not surprising that those respondents who have not yet participated in FP7 (71%) and those with a humanities background (71%) were the least familiar with the “New Approach”. Over half those in the interviewees’ group (57%) are aware of the new scheme.

Overall, researchers remain divided on the assessment of the “Societal Challenges”. In the online survey, only respondents familiar with the “New Approach” (n= 161) were asked to assess it (Fig. 10 and Fig. 11). While nearly 40% of them agree that the approach is “adequate”, 31% disagree. Comparatively high agreement could be achieved on the issue of dissemination and scope: 49% of online survey respondents considered the dissemination objectives set out not to be a problem and 40% judged the scope of the societal challenge as being appropriate. At the other end of the scale, only 24% of the online survey participants considered building the larger consortia required not to be a problem and only 27% believe that the increased management requirements mean business as usual. The results from the online survey are mirrored by similar findings from the interviews.

While news has travelled more quickly than expected, the responses as they pertain to societal challenge must, as already stated, be seen as a snapshot – given that no researcher to date has actual experience in managing or working in the context of a societal challenge. Nonetheless, the overall embedding of the “Societal Challenge” in the context of the Work Programme can be commented on already. While a wait-and-see attitude is not atypical, numerous researchers do voice their scepticism. The current practice of funding one project per Challenge is an issue taken up by several interview partners. Putting “*all your eggs in one basket*” is even considered a dangerous trend by one researcher – saying that it is detrimental to the plurality vital for SSH research. Another interviewee went so far as to state that this approach paves the way for monopolies.

Interviewees also stressed the importance of keeping the approach and scope of the “Societal Challenges” description open (“bottom-up” approach): “*There is a need for flexibility in a project – even after the grant agreement is signed, the plan should be changeable.*”

The role of the humanities in the context of “Societal Challenges” is a point taken up by numerous interview partners – stating their concern, on the one hand, that it is even more difficult for humanities researchers to be involved in this scheme than in other SSH instruments – especially as a coordinator – while also pointing out the importance of defining clear points of entry for the humanities in the definition of “Societal Challenges”. On the other hand, “Societal Challenges” are perceived as bringing interdisciplinarity another step forward.

Researchers also used the opportunity to comment on what they consider a useful tool that the Commission could provide. Special training “*for coordinators of large projects as soon as the projects are approved*” is considered a very effective measure for improving and facilitating the organisational and administrative burdens of the project.

Another recommendation from the interviews was to adapt the template for proposal application. As “Societal Challenges” are large and complex they require a different structure than smaller collaborative projects. Instead of just dividing them into work packages and tasks it would be necessary to have a third level to cluster work packages into several columns. A template for proposal application should thus allow for such a third level and a more detailed description of how the different work packages will come together in the project.

Fig. 10 Assessment of the “New Approach” by survey respondents

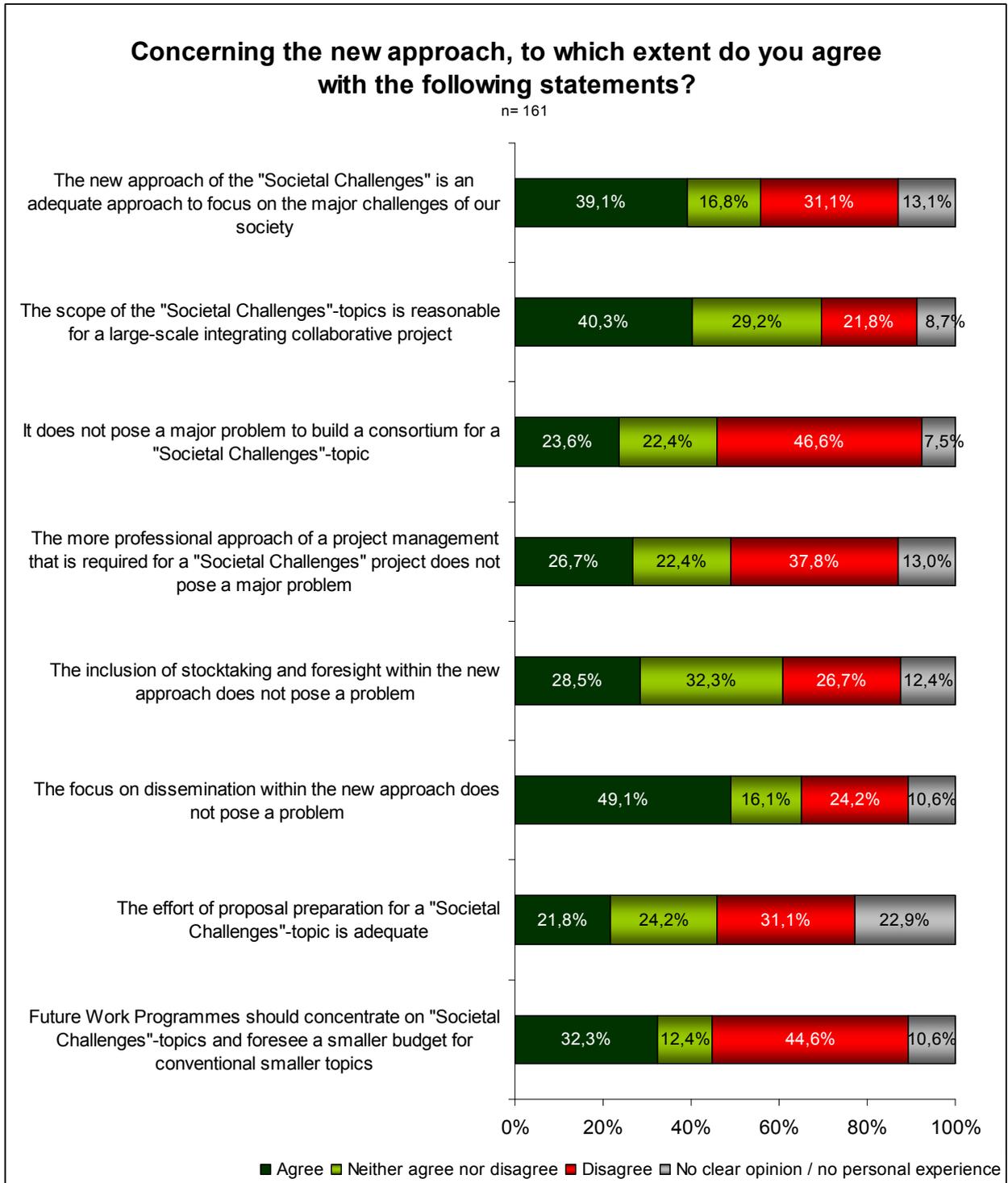
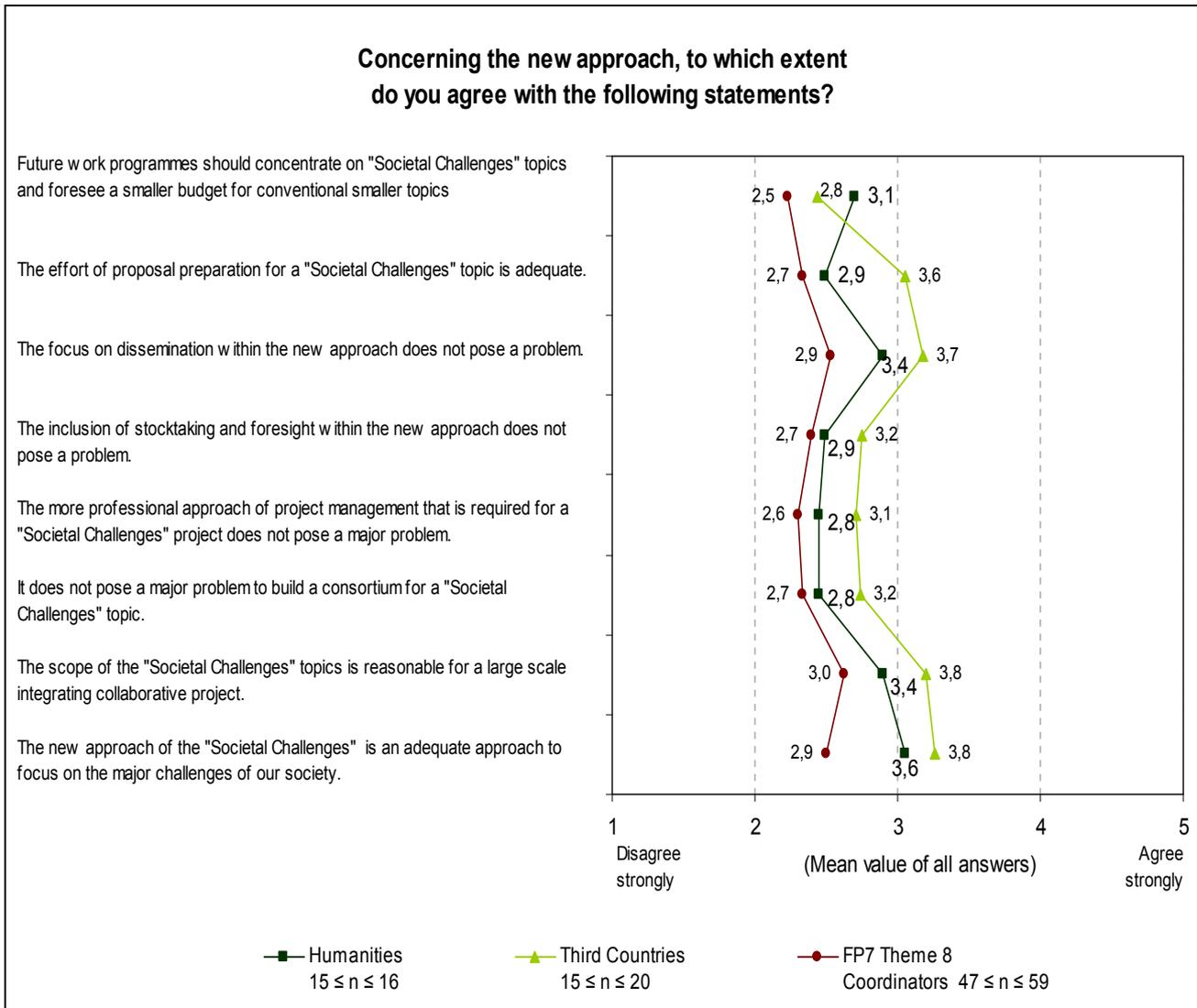


Fig. 11 Assessment of the “New Approach” grouped by background of survey respondents



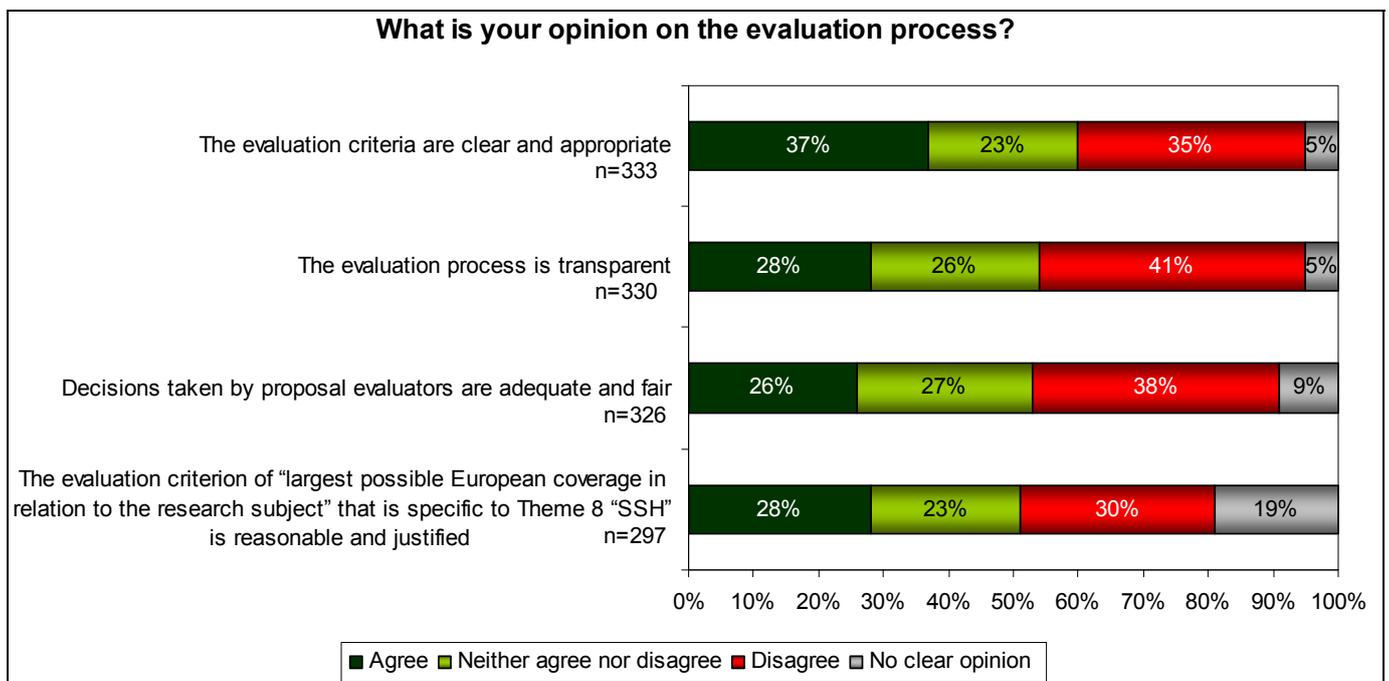
It is noteworthy that FP7 coordinators are slightly more critical of the “New Approach” than other participants while being more optimistic with regard to the question of consortium building. One researcher comments *“The new approach seems appealing and relevant [...] the definition of challenges, however, seems too policy-driven, ignoring some of the real challenges that we have to face.”*

## Assessment of the evaluation process

Surveys among FP7 evaluators and National Contact Points on the quality of the FP7 evaluation process have resulted in very positive assessments.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore especially noteworthy that the respondents of this survey reveal rather polarised opinions about the evaluation process.

A substantial number of answers from the online survey participants express critical views on different aspects of the evaluation process (Fig. 12). While 37% agree that the evaluation criteria are clear and appropriate, 35% of respondents disagree. Even fewer respondents agree that the evaluation process is transparent (28%) or that the decisions taken by evaluators are adequate and fair (26%). The SSH-specific evaluation criterion on the “largest possible European coverage” is rated as reasonable and justified only by 28% of online survey respondents.

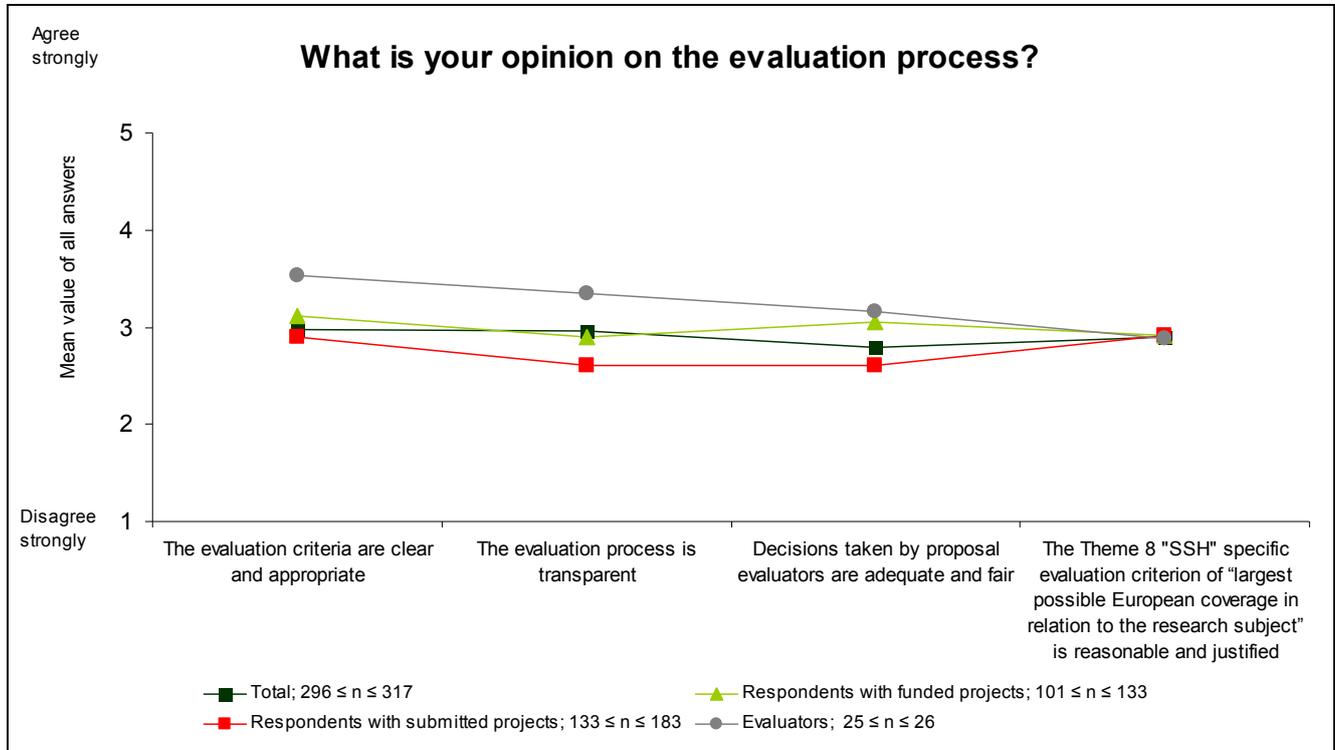
Fig. 12 **Assessment of evaluation process by survey respondents**



Roughly speaking, slightly over one third of all online survey respondents are dissatisfied with the evaluation process, slightly less than one third are satisfied and around one third offered no specific opinion. One possible explanation for the differentiated picture painted by these results might be that a considerable number of proposals in Theme “SSH” do not receive funding despite achieving the highest scores. At the same time, the process of ranking proposals with identical scores remains non-transparent to applicants.

<sup>10</sup> Third FP7 Monitoring Report, p. 33.

Fig. 13 Assessment of evaluation process grouped by participation / evaluation experience



Respondents who have acted as FP evaluators themselves and those who are or have been involved in funded projects have a more positive opinion of the evaluation process than those who submitted projects that did not receive funding (Fig. 13). Individual experience might play a role here. However, a considerable number of critical views could be found in all groups of respondents.

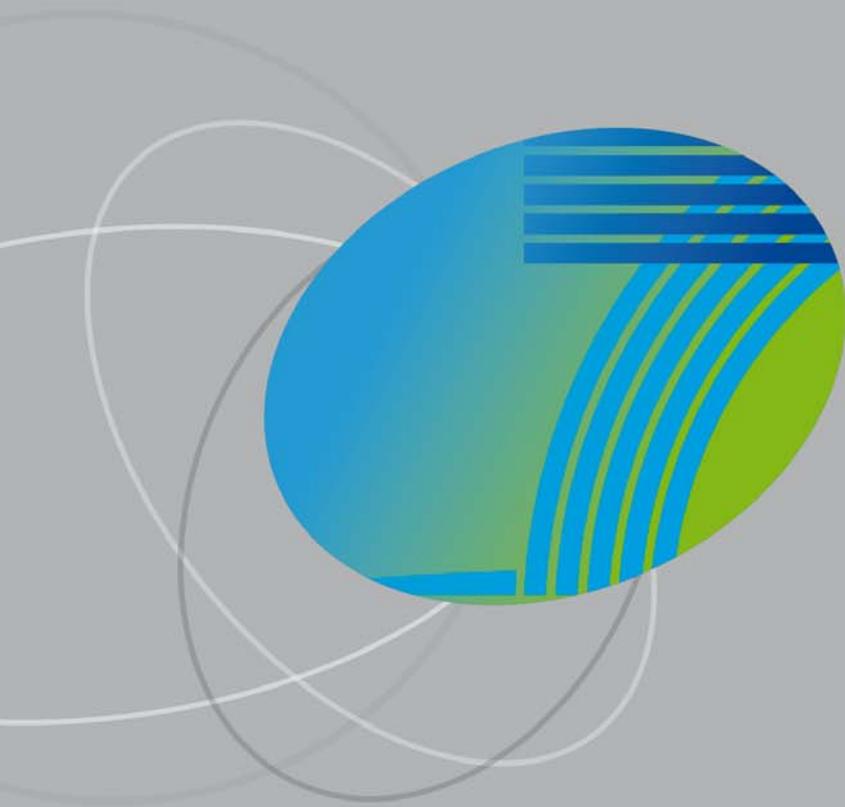
Findings from the interviews differed from those mentioned above: around two thirds of interview partners viewed the evaluation process positively. Again, one needs to consider that the percentage of respondents with involvement in funded FP projects is considerably higher in the interviews. However, a number of specific comments with regard to the evaluation process are given by interview partners. One common criticism of the Evaluation Summary Reports is that the feedback they provide is not sufficiently detailed and clear-cut – and is sometimes inconsistent with the actual evaluation score given – *“it feels like a telegram”* (interview quote). The majority of interview partners find that the process of ranking proposals with identical evaluation scores in all three evaluation criteria is not transparent. Other comments stress the difficulty of evaluating proposals with a very high degree of interdisciplinarity and express doubts as to whether evaluators chosen on the basis of the topic, not the proposal’s content, were up to this job. A description of the evaluation criteria in more detail was a further recommendation.

### Conclusions on Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities”

- In general, SSH researchers are aware of the relevance of FP7 as the largest programme for SSH research worldwide.

SSH researchers believe that Theme 8 “SSH” is effective in supporting international cooperation and cross-disciplinary research, that the programme is attractive for the best-qualified researchers and that all in all it focuses on the most relevant issues for the SSH community.

- The success rate of Theme 8 “SSH” is perceived as too low to guarantee the participation of excellent researchers in the long run.
- In the perception of the SSH research community, aspects of humanities research are not adequately included in the Work Programmes.
- The majority of researchers would welcome the inclusion of more openly-phrased research topics (bottom-up) within the FP7 *Cooperation* specific programme and Theme 8 “SSH”.
- A large majority of SSH researchers prefer small and medium-scale research projects over large-scale projects.
- Researchers advocate the funding of more than one project per topic to ensure a variety of perspectives on a given topic.
- In general, most SSH researchers stress the benefits of integrating stakeholders and Civil Society Organisations into research projects. However, the funding instrument “Research for the benefit of specific groups – CSO” is seen as problematic.
- All in all, the EU Commission’s efforts to promote the Societal Challenges approach can be considered a success.
- Researchers remain divided in their assessment of the Societal Challenges.
- The practice of funding only one project per Societal Challenge is criticised.
- Consortium building and project management are assessed as problematic due to the size of the “Societal Challenge” projects.
- Survey respondents reveal polarised opinions on the quality of the evaluation process. The ranking of proposals with identical evaluation scores is perceived as not transparent. The feedback from the Evaluation Summary Reports is assessed as not detailed enough.



SSH research  
in FP7 outside of  
Theme 8 “SSH”

## IV • SSH research in FP7 outside of Theme 8 “SSH”

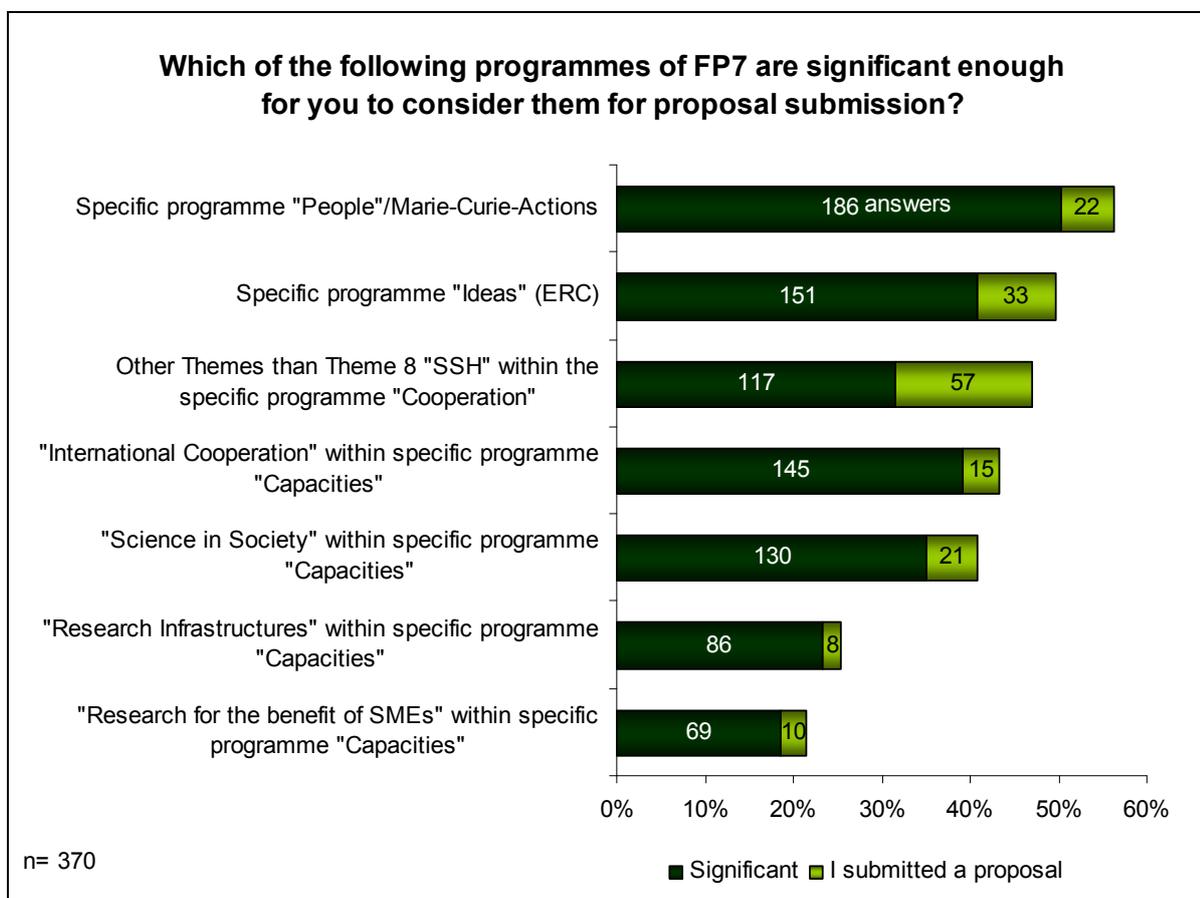
FP7 funding opportunities for research in socio-economic sciences and humanities are not restricted to Theme 8 “SSH”. While SSH researchers can apply in the thematically open, specific programmes *People* (Marie Curie Actions) and *Ideas* (European Research Council) as well as in the areas of the specific programme *Capacities* (e.g. “Science in Society”), there are also many possibilities for funding in the nine other Themes of the specific programme *Cooperation*. In Theme 6 “Environment”, for example, up to 50% of topics in the Work Programmes explicitly include socio-economic research aspects albeit to differing degrees. One of the research pillars of the Security Programme “Society and Security” also has an SSH-relevant focus. One objective of this survey is to learn more about the visibility of alternative funding opportunities to Theme 8 “SSH” in FP7. To what extent are SSH researchers aware of other programmes, and which programmes do they perceive as relevant for their research issues? What are their experiences with the integration of socio-economic and humanities aspects in other Themes of the *Cooperation* programme? How do they assess the concept of SSH as a cross-cutting issue in these themes?

As the FP7 specific programme “Ideas / European Research Council (ERC)” is a programme of particular interest to SSH research – both owing to its large budget and the “bottom-up” approach of identifying research topics – this chapter also highlights the “Ideas / ERC” programme.

### Assessment of the significance of FP7 programmes other than Theme 8 “SSH” for SSH researchers

All online survey respondents were asked to indicate which FP7 programmes other than Theme 8 “SSH” are significant enough for them to consider proposal submission. They were also asked whether they had already submitted proposals in the other Themes or programmes. Overall, the results of this survey illustrate that researchers seem to be well aware of most alternative funding opportunities outside of Theme 8 “SSH”.

Fig. 14 Assessment of the significance of different FP7 programmes according to survey respondents



Programmes	Online survey respondents who rate the programme as relevant (in %)	Online survey respondents who submitted proposals (in %)	Total (submitted and rated as relevant, in %)
People / Marie Curie	50.3	5.9	56.2
Ideas / ERC	40.8	8.9	49.7
Cooperation – Other Themes	31.6	15.4	47
International Cooperation	39.2	4.1	43.3
Science in Society	35.1	5.7	40.8
Infrastructures	23.2	2.2	25.4
Research for SMEs	18.6	2.7	21.3

The collected data show that SSH researchers mainly perceive those specific programmes offering funding to individuals such as *People* (Marie Curie Actions) and *Ideas* (ERC) as alternative funding opportunities (Fig. 14). Other Themes of the *Cooperation* programme – targeting collaborative research – come third in attracting SSH researchers. In detail, 56% of the online survey respondents rate the *People* programme as significant enough to consider proposal submission or have already submitted proposals in the programme, and almost one in two (50%) assesses the *Ideas* programme as an attractive funding opportunity. Again, almost half the respondents (47%) consider other Themes in *Cooperation* as a significant possibility for obtaining funding. These numbers include online survey respondents who either declare that the mentioned programmes are relevant for them in principle or who have actually submitted proposals in these programmes in the past.

It should be noted, however, that the picture takes on a somewhat different slant when the data of actual proposal submissions in the different programmes is regarded exclusively. The three programmes *People*, *Ideas* and *Cooperation* still rank as the most attractive funding opportunities, but in reverse order: 15% of online survey participants have already submitted proposals in other Themes outside Theme “SSH” in the *Cooperation* programme. 9% submitted in the *Ideas* programme and 6% have applied to the *People* programme. This illustrates the de facto significance of the *Cooperation* programme and cooperative funding instruments for SSH researchers.

The specific programme *Capacities* contains a multitude of diverse funding activities. While a considerable number of respondents assess the funding possibilities in the *Capacities* areas “International Cooperation” (43%) and “Science in Society” (41%) as significant for themselves or have already submitted proposals in these programmes, only a minority of online survey participants look for funding in the areas “Research Infrastructures” and “Research for SMEs”. A negligible percentage of 2% and 3% respectively have submitted proposals in these programmes. However, 23% (Research Infrastructures) and 19% (Research for SME) of respondents would consider submitting future proposals in these programmes.

Online survey respondents with a background in humanities differ slightly in their assessment of the relevance of the *Cooperation* programme. This group rates other Themes within the *Cooperation* programme as less important (19% declare it “significant” and another 10% submitted proposals). But again, if one looks at the actual percentages of submitted proposals of the online survey respondents with a background in humanities, the *Cooperation* programme ranks first, followed by the programmes *Ideas* and then *People*.

## Integration of socio-economic and humanities research in the specific programme Cooperation outside Theme 8 “SSH”

Socio-economic and humanities research aspects can be found in the topics of a number of other Themes in the specific programme *Cooperation* (e.g. Theme 1 “Health”, Theme 3 “ICT”, Theme 6

“Environment” or Theme 10 “Security”). An important question is therefore how SSH researchers assess the integration of SSH aspects in these other Themes.

In this context, all online survey respondents were asked about their overall opinion on the level of inclusion of SSH aspects in other Themes and their specific integration into topic designs, as well as about their perception of the possible difficulties SSH researchers might face when they submit proposals in other Themes (e.g. consortium building, evaluation). About half the survey respondents have not formed an opinion on questions of integration of SSH research into other Themes (Fig. 15). The following numbers therefore refer only to those respondents with express opinions (Fig. 16).

Fig. 15 **Assessment of SSH in other Themes of the Cooperation programme by survey respondents**

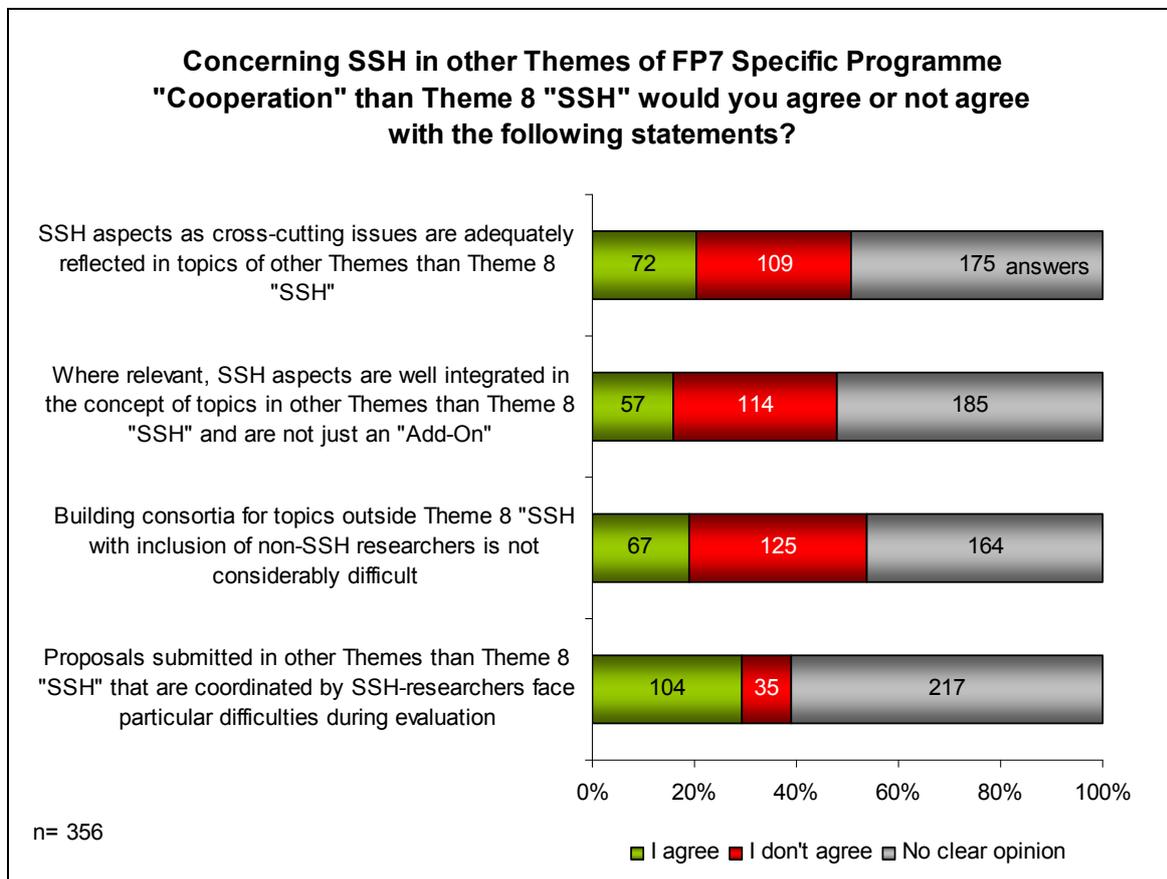
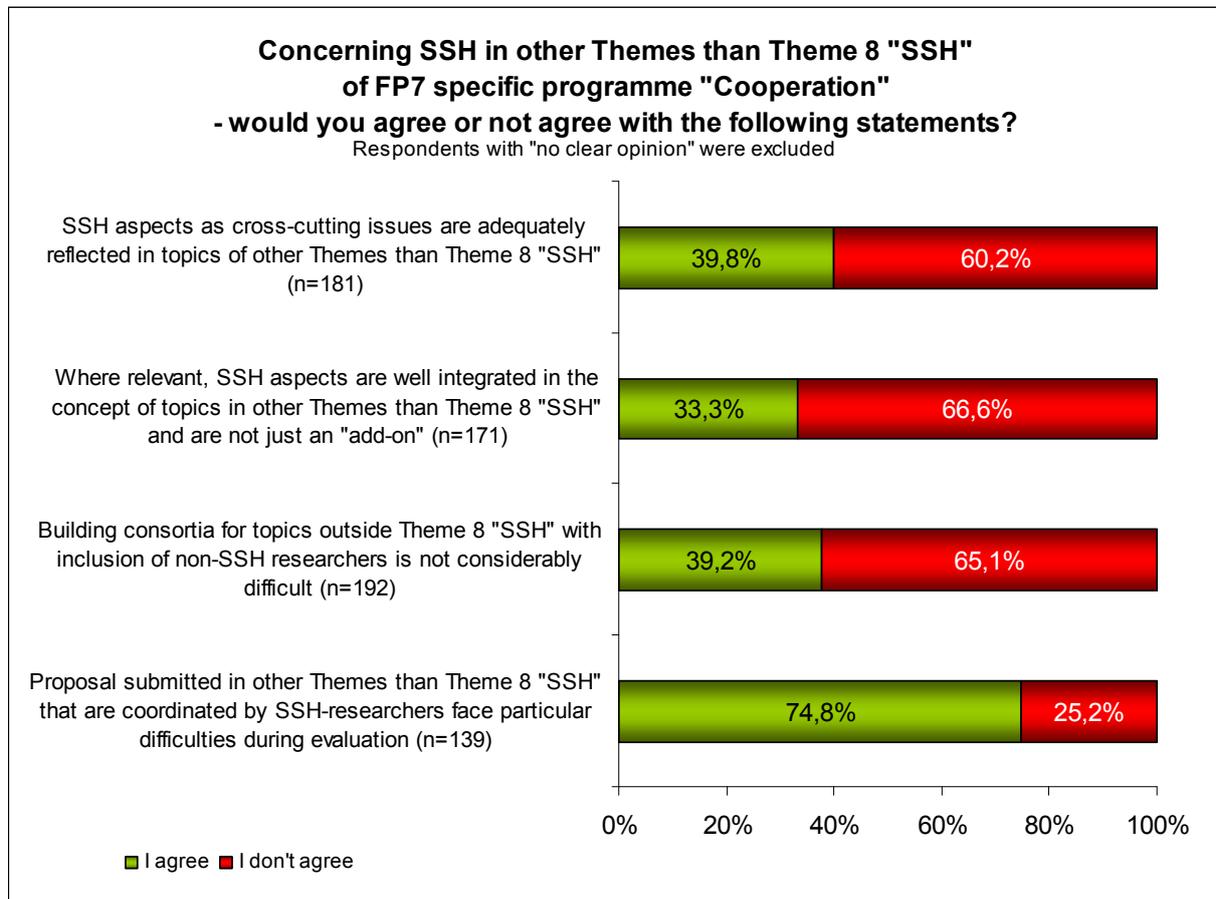


Fig. 16 Assessment of SSH in other Themes of the *Cooperation* programme – survey respondents with “no clear opinion” excluded



Apparently, SSH researchers are not yet satisfied with the inclusion of socio-economic and humanities aspects in the research areas of the *Cooperation* programme, as 60% of the online survey respondents do not believe that SSH aspects are adequately reflected in other Themes outside Theme 8 “SSH”. Two thirds of respondents state that where SSH aspects are included, they are not well integrated into the concepts of the topics. 65% are of the opinion that consortium building with researchers from fields other than socio-economics or humanities for topics outside Theme 8 “SSH” is considerably difficult. And an even higher number of respondents (almost three out of four) agree that proposals with SSH-coordinators which are submitted in other Themes of *Cooperation* face particular difficulties during evaluation. Of the researchers with a background in humanities, 19 out of 21 (40 offered no clear opinion) believed there are particular difficulties connected to evaluation. Several comments resulting from the interviews shed more light on this issue: researchers are doubtful that evaluators selected outside of Theme 8 have the necessary SSH background to adequately assess proposals that are part of a non-SSH specific evaluation process. Evaluators in natural science or technology-based research programmes tend to marginalize SSH relevance.

Online survey respondents who have actually submitted proposals in other *Cooperation* Themes (n=54) do not differ in their assessments from the results stated above.

To complete the picture of the online survey, interview partners were also asked if all topics with a major focus on socio-economic sciences or humanities that can currently be found in other Themes should rather be located in Theme 8 “SSH” instead (provided that this is reflected in a budgetary increase). Interviewees are split into those who prefer to keep the current structure of SSH as a cross-cutting issue in addition to a distinct SSH programme in Theme 8 (overall a slight majority) and those who believe all topics with major SSH focus should be located in Theme 8. The main argument conveyed by the interviewed experts for keeping the current structure is that it is important to anchor SSH research in all areas and that the policy context of the other Themes might otherwise be lost. The difficulty of happily merging the theory and practice of this goal – e.g. the integration of SSH in other *Cooperation* Themes – continues to be seen as a worrisome issue by researchers. Some interviewees are sceptical about the extent to which the inclusion of SSH research requested in topic descriptions is actually realised in funded projects, as the following comment underlines: “[...] *You run the risk of SSH being included as a tick box as part of a multidisciplinary research approach, where the social scientific framework may not be the core of those projects [...]*”. It was also suggested in the interviews that integration of SSH researchers be made mandatory wherever relevant and a part of the budget of other *Cooperation* Themes be allocated to SSH research.

A further finding from the interviews is that the visibility of SSH – both in the Work Programmes and in the projects with SSH involvement in other Themes – needs to be improved. Interviewees also emphasised the importance of a distinct SSH programme within the EU Research Framework Programmes to provide opportunities for genuine SSH research and to address the current and future societal challenges that Europe and the world are facing.

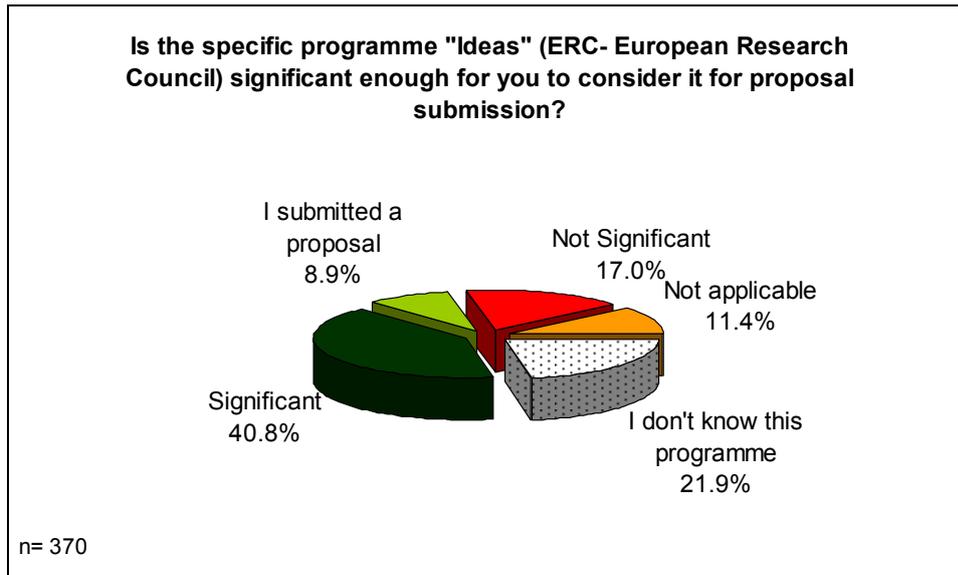
## Assessment of the specific programme Ideas (ERC)

The specific programme *Ideas* (ERC – European Research Council) was first introduced with the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> EU Research Framework Programme. The objective of the programme is to fund “frontier research” (basic research at the frontiers of knowledge) by individual teams with excellent track records. The ERC allows researchers to identify the directions and topics of their research themselves (bottom-up approach), unlike the *Cooperation* programme, where priorities are set at the political level (top-down approach). For the duration of FP7 (2007– 2013) a budget of € 7.5 billion is provided for the ERC. Around 15% of the overall ERC budget – over € 1 billion – is reserved for the funding of socio-economic sciences and humanities. This number exceeds the budget of Theme 8 “SSH” (€ 623 million) and underlines the importance of the ERC in FP7 for SSH researchers. The amount of available funding as well as the possible appeal of the bottom-up approach and the funding of individual principle investigators justifies a specific spotlight on the ERC within this survey.

One survey objective was to shed light on how the ERC is assessed by the SSH research community and which features of the *Ideas* programme are rated as attractive or unattractive in comparison to Theme 8 “SSH” in the FP7 *Cooperation* programme.

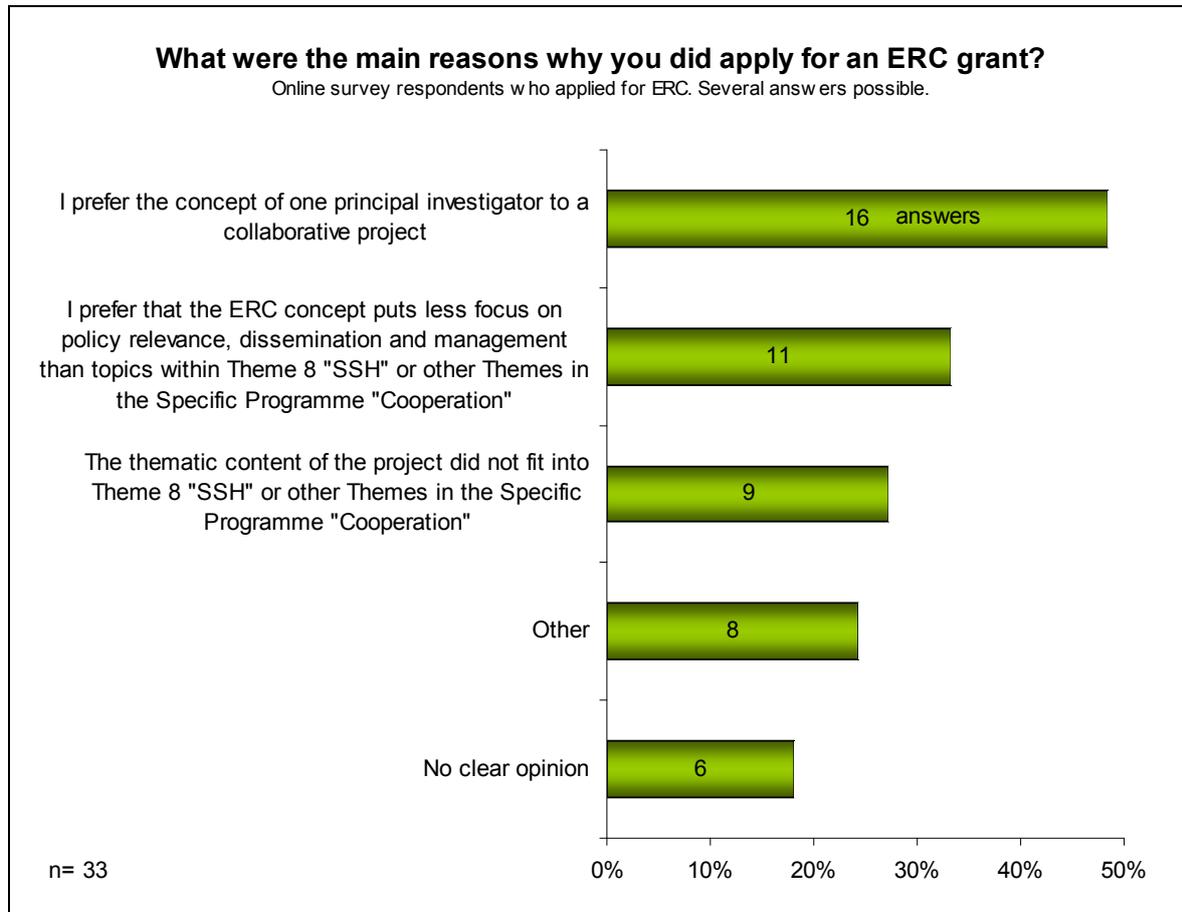
All online survey respondents were asked whether the ERC is significant enough for them to consider proposal submission (Fig. 17). Around 40% of respondents consider the ERC as important and nearly 9% have already submitted an ERC proposal. Approximately one in five respondents are not yet aware of the programme.

Fig. 17 **Assessment of ERC importance by survey respondents**



Those online survey respondents who have actually submitted proposals for ERC grants were asked about their main motives for application (Fig. 18). Almost half the respondents state that they prefer the concept of one principal investigator to collaborative projects. One third prefer it when the ERC concept places less focus on policy relevance and dissemination. 27% (9 out of 33) state that the thematic focus of their research project did not fit into the specific programme *Cooperation* as a main motive. Although the sample is rather small (n=33), it is a primary indication that the concept of an individual principle investigator and of a bottom-up choice of research topics account for the appeal of the ERC.

Fig. 18 Main motives for applying for ERC grants stated by survey respondents



The results from the online survey are complemented by answers from the interviews. All interview partners were asked whether the ERC concept seems more attractive to them than application to Theme 8 "SSH". Many interview partners (around 40%) offer no opinion on whether they prefer the ERC or Theme 8 "SSH". A majority of approximately two thirds of those stating an opinion assess the ERC concept as more attractive – mostly because of its bottom-up approach. Few interviewees (less than 10% of those who offer an opinion) mention the bigger ERC budget and the concept of one principal investigator as advantages. ERC application procedures and management rules are perceived as less regulated which also adds to the appeal of the programme. The highly competitive nature of the ERC on the other hand is a barrier to participation for some, and a number of interview partners stress that they prefer the working environments of collaborative projects.

To summarise, the ERC is assessed as attractive by a majority of researchers, mainly due to the freedom in choice of research topics but to some extent also because of the concept of funding of individual teams. However, comments from the interviews suggest that a considerable proportion of SSH researchers prefer working in collaborative projects and participate in FP7 mainly due to the opportunities for international collaboration. A considerable number of interviewees stress that ERC and collaborative research in Theme 8 "SSH" are complementary.

### Conclusions on SSH research in FP7 outside of Theme 8 “SSH”

- Researchers seem to be well aware of most alternative funding opportunities outside of Theme 8 “SSH”.
- In the assessment of survey respondents, the best-known and most important programmes outside “Theme 8 SSH” are the specific programmes *People*, *Ideas* and other Themes within the specific programme *Cooperation*.
- Around two thirds of online survey respondents with explicit opinions are not satisfied with the integration of SSH in other *Cooperation* Themes and see particular difficulties for SSH researchers applying there (consortium building, evaluation).
- Researchers are divided on whether topics with a major SSH focus in other Themes should rather be addressed under Theme 8 “SSH” or whether the current practice of including SSH as a cross-cutting aspect in all *Cooperation* Themes (in addition to Theme 8 “SSH”) should be maintained.
- Researchers stress the importance of a distinct SSH programme within FP7.
- The specific programme *Ideas* (ERC) is assessed as attractive by a majority of researchers, mainly due to the freedom of choice of research topics but to some extent also because of the concept of funding of individual teams. However, all in all, ERC and collaborative research in Theme 8 “SSH” are perceived as complementary.



# Impact of SSH research in FP7

## V • Impact of SSH research in FP7

The expert group on the interim evaluation of FP7 has stressed that in general FP7 has a clearly positive impact on European science and the development of the European Research Area (ERA). The principle of excellence in project selection is largely achieved.<sup>11</sup> This is also true for the SSH programme: it is highly competitive and funded proposals score an average 13.76 out of 15 points total, and 4.6 out of 5 points in the scientific excellence criterion. In comparison with all *Cooperation* Themes, projects in SSH gain the highest scores, which underlines the excellence of funded SSH projects.

The Interim Evaluation covers all of FP7 and does not analyse in detail the impact of the individual themes within the specific programme *Cooperation*. To complement the picture from an SSH point of view, this chapter focuses on specific impact that FP7 SSH research has on the research landscape of socio-economic sciences and humanities in Europe. The analysis concentrates on two aspects:

- 1) What were the major outcomes (e.g. development of new methodologies, wider European coverage) of FP7 SSH projects? (Self-assessment of project participants)
- 2) To what extent does SSH research in FP7 contribute to the process of internationalisation of the SSH research community and the development of the ERA? (Self-assessment of project participants on the durability of their partnerships)

Due to limited resources, it was not analysed to what extent the “expected impact” as stated in the Work Programmes is achieved by funded projects.

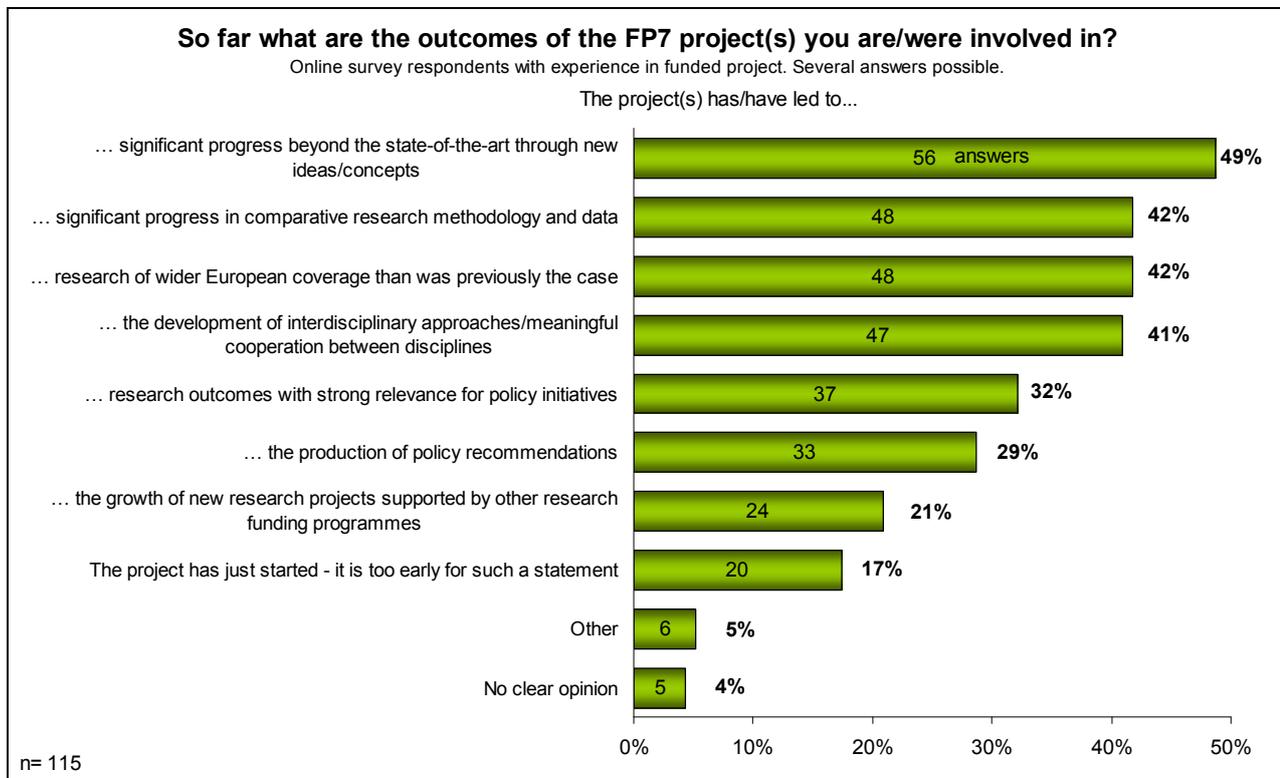
### Outcomes of SSH FP7 projects

Online survey respondents with experience in funded FP7 projects were asked to assess the outcomes of their projects – in terms of advancing the state of the art (new concepts, methodologies, and data) but also in terms of policy-relevant outcomes (Fig. 19).

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<sup>11</sup> Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme, p. 7.

Fig. 19 **FP7 project outcomes according to survey respondents with experience in funded projects**



The most frequently mentioned project outcome refers to “significant progress beyond the state of the art through new ideas/concepts”. Nearly half the respondents declare this as an achievement of their FP7 projects. The second most common project outcomes named by the respondents are “significant progress in comparative research methodology and data” (42%) and “research of wider European coverage than was previously the case” (42% too). A similar proportion of online survey respondents (41%) say their projects led to the “development of interdisciplinary approaches / meaningful cooperation between disciplines”.

Almost one third of respondents declare that the outcomes of their FP7 projects have a high relevance for policy initiatives (32%) or that their projects have produced policy recommendations (29%). About two out of ten respondents (21%) claim that their cooperation in FP7 projects has generated new research projects supported by other funding programmes.

The results of the online questionnaire suggest that researchers define their work in terms of scientific progress rather than political impact. This does not necessarily mean that SSH researchers in general neglect the objectives and expected impact as phrased in the Work Programmes. On the contrary, a clear majority of interviewed experts state that they indeed took the objectives and impact of the topic descriptions very seriously in the actual implementation of their FP7 projects.

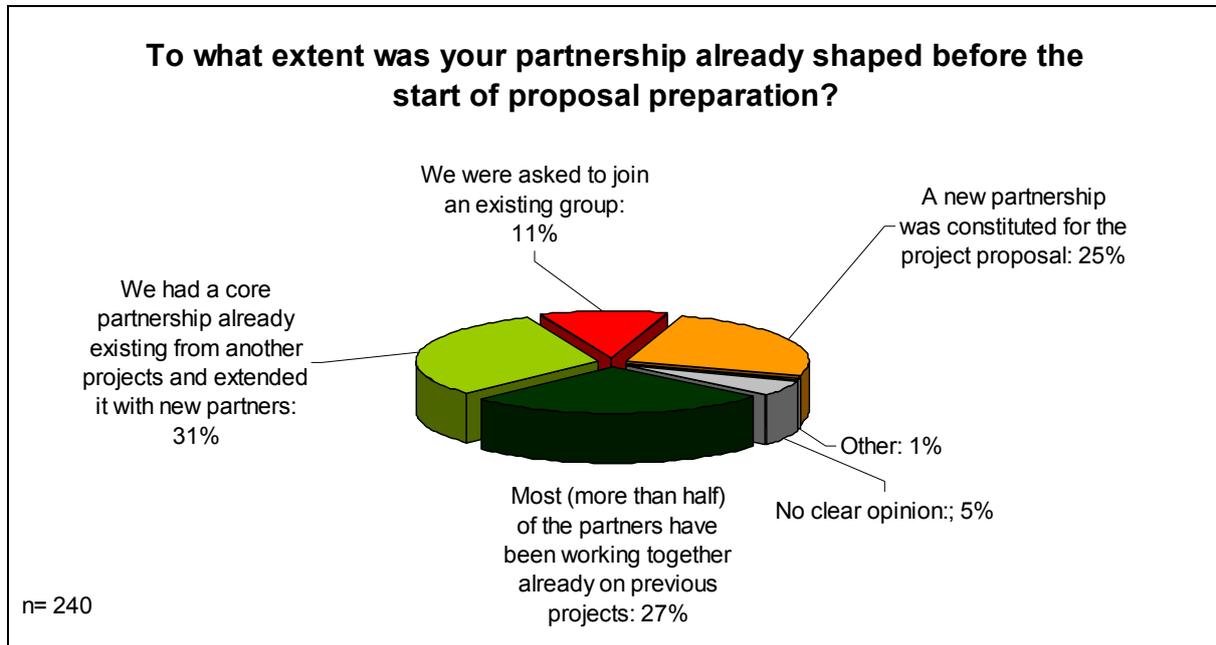
The difficulties in predicting the impact of SSH projects might be connected to questions of research design and methodology in social sciences, as one coordinator of an FP7 project delineates in an interview: *“Social Science and Humanities research is more an inductive rather than deductive process. You cannot determine your target regardless of responses to research, nor the desired impact, and then work in linear steps towards it! Iteration loops are inevitable and necessary”*. Also, even if researchers strive to integrate the expected impact into their research, some perceive the policy orientation of topics in Theme 8 “SSH” as inappropriate (30% of survey respondents), while 42% rate it as appropriate (Fig. 7). As previously mentioned in Chapter III, evidence from the interviews also supports the impression that the policy relevance of the topics invites some participants and deters others. A suggestion for improvement of the political impact might be to define more clearly the “expected impact” in the Work Programmes (while 46% of online survey respondents agree that objectives are clearly phrased and 42% agree that the impact is clearly defined, around 28% disagree that this is the case, and a large proportion of respondents offered no explicit opinion). Comments from interviewees stress that the description of the “expected impact” in the Work Programme remains too general – it is therefore very difficult to measure the degree to which the outcomes of a project comply with it.

## Contribution of SSH FP7 research on internationalisation

The second focus of this survey with regard to “impact” is on the contribution of SSH FP7 research to the process of internationalisation and building of the European Research Area (ERA). An indication of the scope of international cooperation in SSH are the 67 countries currently participating in FP7 projects funded in Theme 8 “SSH”. Typically, European SSH research teams include six to nine international partner institutions.

As already mentioned in Chapter III on Theme 8 “SSH”, a majority of online survey respondents agree that Theme 8 “SSH” has a positive impact on internationalisation of SSH research and on supporting cross-disciplinary research. To learn more about the effects of FP7 funding with regard to promoting research partnerships, online survey respondents with experience in FP7 proposals were asked to what extent their project partnerships were already shaped before they started proposal preparation (Fig. 20). Most consortia do not start from scratch but include partners who have previously worked together on other projects. However, only slightly more than a quarter of respondents answer that the majority of partners in their consortium have already been working together in previous projects. A considerable proportion of 25% of respondents declares that a new partnership was formed for their project proposal. These data prove that FP7 has a profound effect on connecting the SSH research community in Europe and beyond.

Fig. 20 **FP7 effects on forming research partnerships according to survey respondents who submitted proposals in FP7**



Online survey respondents with experience in funded FP7 projects were also asked whether they expected project partnerships to last beyond the duration of the project (Fig. 21). As it turns out, three out of four respondents are convinced their project partnerships will indeed continue or have already done so – either through seeking further sources of funding by EU programmes or through other means. Only 13% believe their project partnerships will not continue after the completion of the project.

Fig. 21 **Expected sustainability of consortia according to respondents with experience in funded FP7 projects**



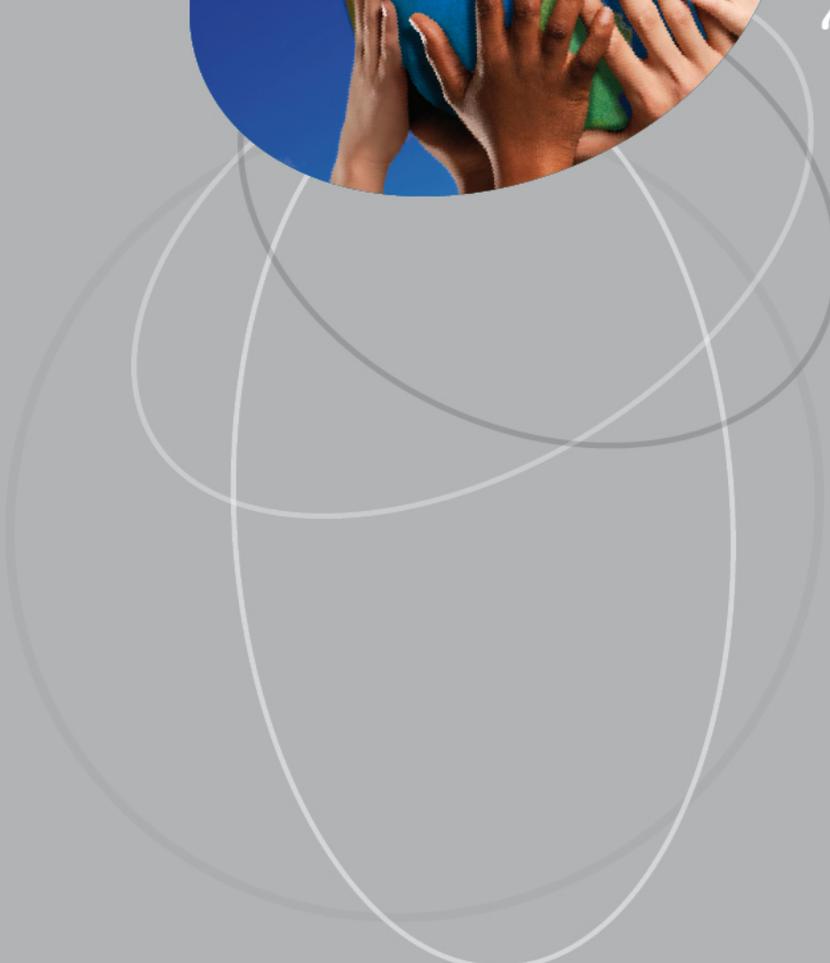
All in all, it can be concluded that FP7 projects substantially contribute to the forming of new European and international partnerships within the SSH community as well as to the extension and duration of existing networks. SSH research in FP7 significantly contributes to the European Commission's goal of establishing a European Research Area.

### Conclusions on Impact of SSH research in FP7

- The principle of excellence in project selection is achieved in projects funded under Theme 8 "SSH" (see "Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme").
- In the assessment of SSH researchers, FP7 project outcomes lead first and foremost to significant progress beyond the state of the art with regard to new concepts, methodology, data, European coverage and interdisciplinarity. The relevance of outcomes for policy initiatives is assessed as less significant.
- While researchers take objectives and the expected impact as stated in the Work Programmes seriously, the project's actual contribution to the impact is perceived as difficult to measure.
- SSH research in FP7 is effective in further connecting SSH researchers in Europe and in contributing to building a European Research Area (ERA).



International  
cooperation with  
“Third Countries”



## VI • International cooperation with “Third Countries”

International cooperation with so-called “Third Countries” (i.e. countries which are neither EU member states nor associated to FP7) is a cross-cutting issue integrated in all thematic areas of the 7<sup>th</sup> EU Research Framework Programme.<sup>12</sup> By March 2010, “Third Countries” provided for 5% of all participations in FP7.<sup>13</sup> In the first two calls in Theme 8 “SSH” (2007-2009) more than 70 participants in funded projects came from “Third Countries”.

This chapter focuses on the survey respondents’ assessment of international collaboration in SSH in FP7 as well as on the specific FP7 experiences of SSH researchers from “Third Countries”. All interviewees (among them nine experts from “Third Countries”) were asked to share their experiences on international cooperation beyond Europe. In addition, the online survey contained specific questions on international cooperation for respondents from “Third Countries” only.

Most interview partners from EU member states or from states associated to FP7 report positive and successful cooperation experiences with partners from “Third Countries” in FP7. Around 43% of online survey respondents state that they would consider proposal submission or already have submitted proposals in the area “International Cooperation” within the FP7 specific programme *Capacities* (see Chapter IV). However, some interviewed experts also comment on difficulties connected to FP7 rules and procedures when it comes to international cooperation. A significant number of interviewees point out that the administrative effort of participating in FP7 is especially difficult for partners from “Third Countries” due to a lack of comparable administrative support and different administrative rules. Additionally, differences in the science culture and difficulties in finding suitable international partners are perceived as problems.

It needs to be stressed that even though interview partners identify the aforementioned difficulties, the majority of their reports on international cooperation are positive, as for example is this statement by a researcher from the UK: *“I think it's crucial to integrate third countries in FP7 projects, but it can be difficult initially. Once all the kinks have been ironed out though it can provide new levels of understanding, particularly of how different societies deal with the same issues”*.

To gain insights into the perceived relevance of FP7 among researchers from “Third Countries”, online survey respondents from Third Countries were asked about their assessments of the relevance of the scope and objectives of Theme 8 “SSH”. While Work Programmes in Theme 8 “SSH” do contain a number of topics dedicated to specific “Third Countries” regions, the majority of the topics have a definite European slant. More than half (17 out of 32) the “Third Country” respondents answer that in

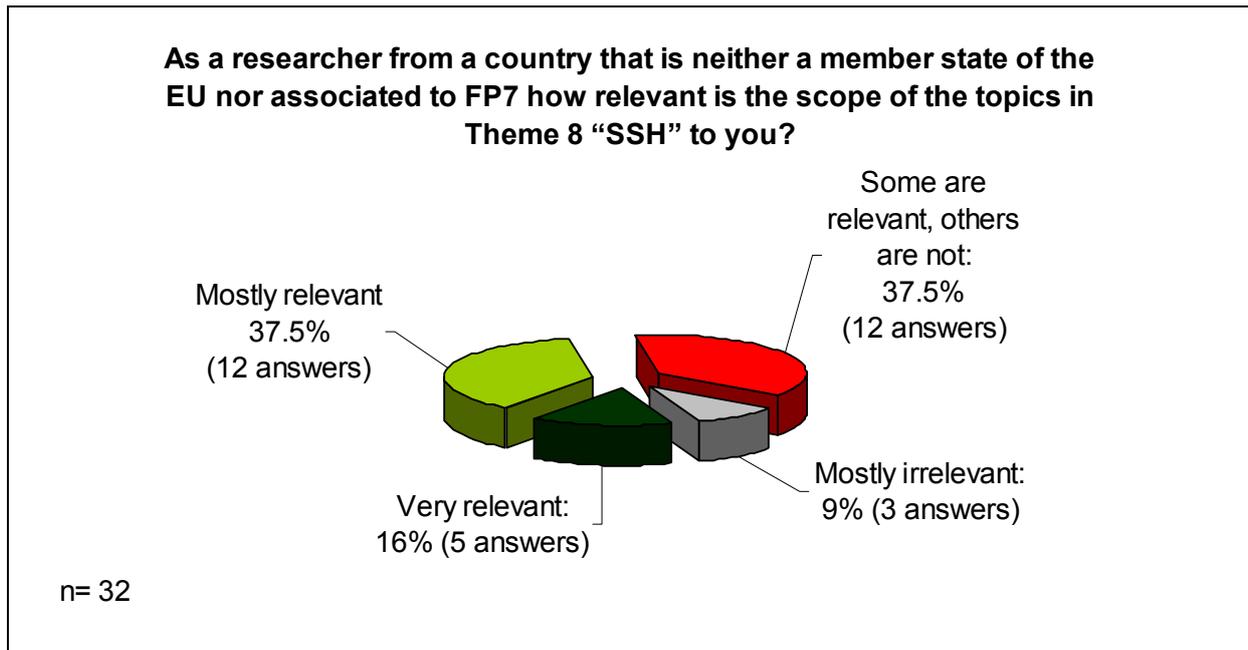
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<sup>12</sup> Low- and middle-income states, so-called ICPCs (International Cooperation Partner Countries) can receive funding, while high income states can participate but not receive funding.

<sup>13</sup> Interim Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme, p.54.

terms of scope, topics are “very relevant” or “mostly relevant” to them. 12 out of 32 respondents (37%) answer that some topics are relevant, while others are not. Only 3 out of 32 respondents (9%) state that the scope of the topics is mostly irrelevant (Fig. 22).

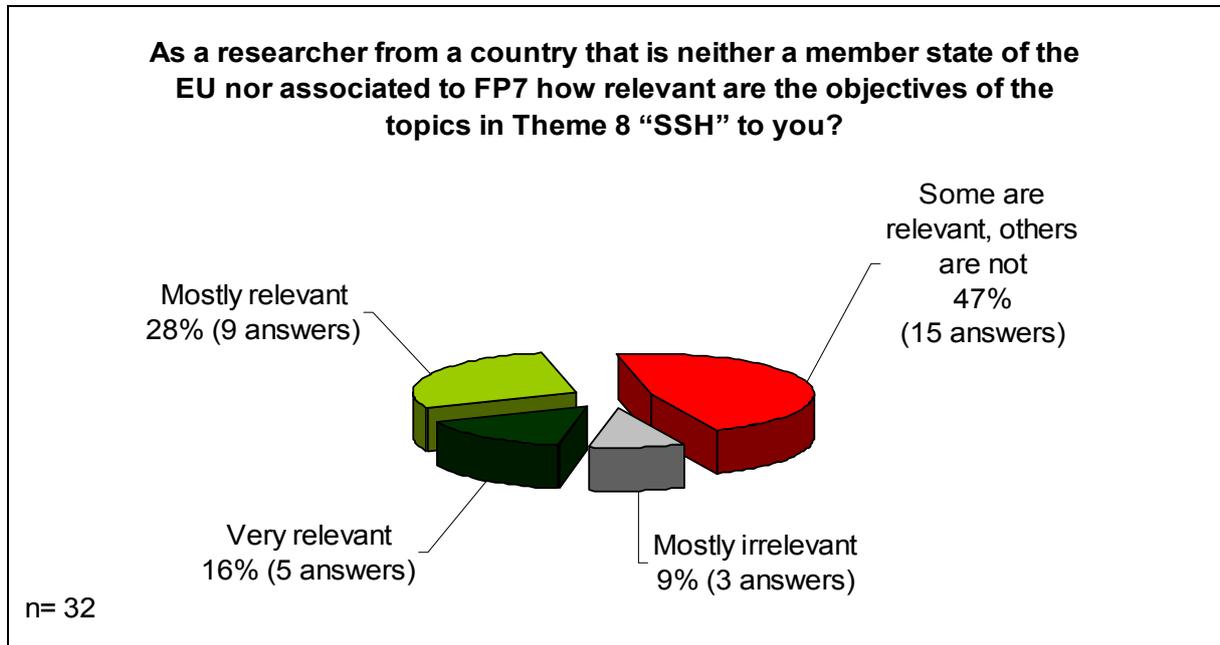
Fig. 22 **Relevance of the scope of Theme 8 “SSH” topics according to survey respondents from “Third Countries”**



The relevance of the objectives of the topics in Theme 8 “SSH” is perceived differently: 44% (14 out of 32) say they are “very relevant” or “mostly relevant” while 47% (15 out of 32) feel that some of the objectives are relevant to them, while others are not (Fig. 23).

At this point it can be summarised that a majority of online survey respondents from “Third Countries” evaluate the scope of the topics as mostly relevant to themselves, while the objectives of the topics are perceived as slightly less relevant. Concerning the scope of topics, it is also interesting to note – though not surprising – that about two thirds of the online survey participants from “Third Countries” prefer topics that thematically focus on their own region.

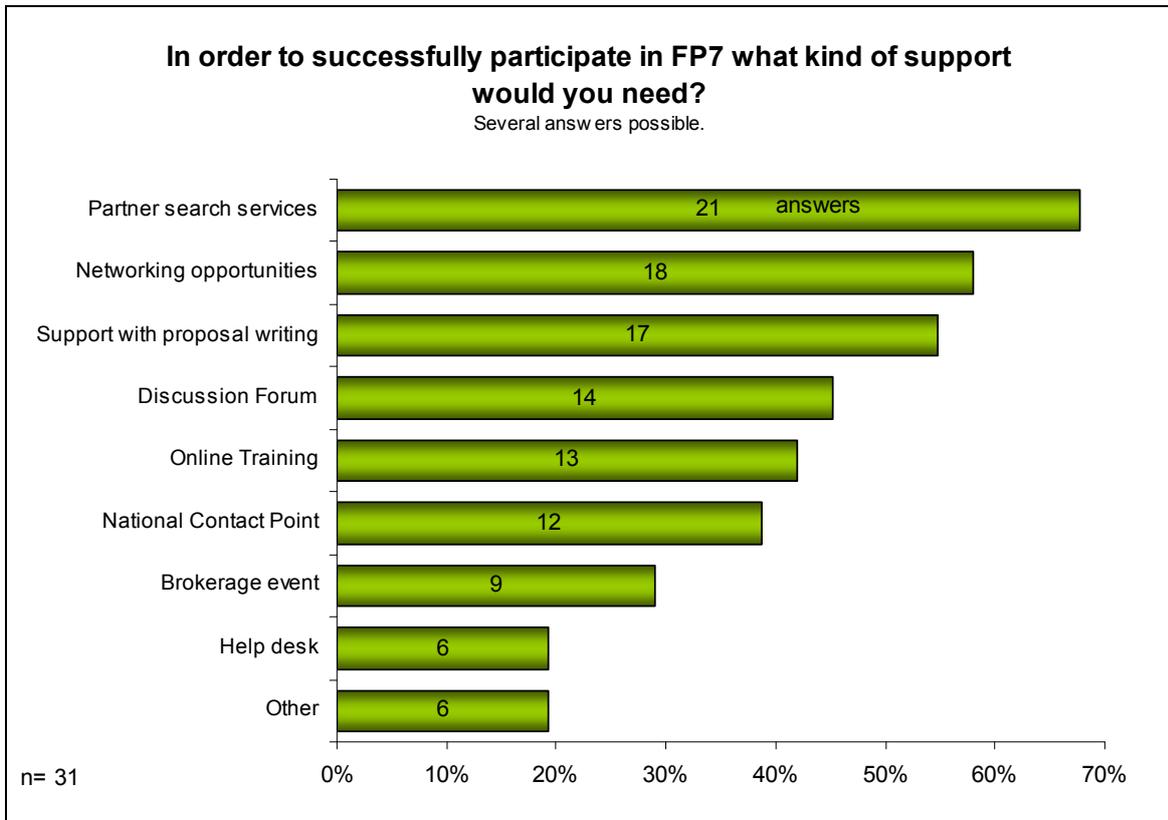
Fig. 23 **Relevance of the objectives of Theme 8 “SSH” topics according to survey respondents from “Third Countries”**



A second focus of this survey addresses the specific needs in terms of support services for FP7 participants from “Third Countries”. Three support services are particularly requested by online survey respondents from “Third Countries” (Fig. 24):

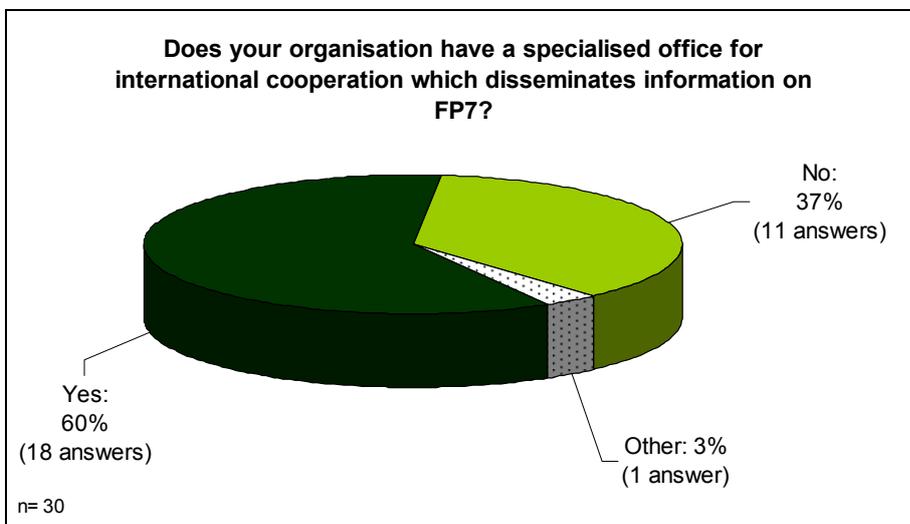
1. Partner search services (68%)
2. Networking opportunities (58%)
3. Support with proposal writing (55%)

Fig. 24 Support needs stated by survey respondents from “Third Countries”



The expressed need for partner search services and networking opportunities is also underlined by the fact that “Third Country” survey respondents, both from the online survey and from the interviews, identify “difficulties with consortium building” as the main barrier to FP7 participation.

Fig. 25 Percentage of “Third Country” survey respondents from organisations with international offices



In terms of receiving information on FP7, a clear majority of online survey respondents from “Third Countries” are supported by their own organisation: 60% come from an organisation with a specialised office for international cooperation that disseminates information on FP7 (Fig. 25).

### **Conclusions on International cooperation with “Third Countries”**

- Overall, the experiences of survey respondents with international cooperation beyond EU member states and FP7 associated countries are positive. Difficulties are perceived in the areas of FP7 administrative burden, consortium building and differences in scientific culture.
- Researchers from “Third Countries” rate the scope of topics in Theme 8 “SSH” as mostly relevant to them. As regards the objectives of the topics in the Work Programme, these are rated relevant in some cases and less relevant in others.
- The most important area where survey participants from “Third Countries” are in need of support is establishing contacts with European researchers.



## Recommendations



## VII • Recommendations

Researchers from socio-economic sciences and humanities (SSH) consider funding from the 7<sup>th</sup> EU Research Framework Programme as the key to international research cooperation. The strong desire to work in an international context is the main motive for participation in the programme. FP7-funded SSH research is effective in further connecting scholars in Europe and in contributing to the formation of the European Research Area (ERA). However, over-subscription to calls, low success rates and complex application and project management procedures pose major barriers to participation.

This section of the report puts forward a number of recommendations for improving the implementation of FP7 and future Framework Programmes. The following recommendations are derived from the overview of all findings and conclusions from this survey. Interview partners were asked to give recommendations on possible improvements in the future of EU Research Framework Programmes.

- The budget foreseen for SSH research in the next Framework Programme FP8 should be substantially increased to reduce the current over-subscription of Theme 8 “SSH” and allow for more excellent proposals to be funded.
- The complexity of proposal preparation and the administrative burden of project management both need to be substantially reduced. Since this is a major barrier for SSH researchers – and others – to participate in FP7, efforts should be made to implement further simplification measures.
- A new balance between top-down research topics and more openly phrased topics (bottom-up in nature) within Theme 8 “SSH” should be considered. This approach could encourage innovative project ideas within the context of collaborative research and offer greater flexibility in the project implementation.
- The funding of more than one project per topic to gain a variety of different and complementary perspectives should be a general objective of all SSH calls. This might be achieved by focusing on the funding of small and medium-scale research projects (instead of large-scale projects) and by limiting the number of research topics per call.
- The integration of humanities research aspects into call topics should be improved. Emphasis should be placed on the particular contributions of humanities researchers to FP7 objectives in Theme 8 “SSH” as well as in other Themes of the specific programme *Cooperation*. The communication of opportunities for humanities research within Theme 8 “SSH” and other *Cooperation* Themes should be improved.
- Enhancement of the Evaluation Summary Reports (ESRs): The degree of detail included in the ESRs varies considerably. ESRs need to be more concise, more precise and more detailed.

- Transparent ranking rules: While the evaluation criteria are transparent to a certain degree they become opaque once proposals achieve the same high scores. Ranking procedures for proposals scoring 14 points and above must be transparent and conclusive.
- There is a need for greater transparency in the selection procedure for evaluators. A closer match between the expertise of the evaluators and the content of the research proposals is necessary. Mandatory registration of proposals prior to the deadline could facilitate the evaluator selection process.
- The process of developing the Work Programmes should become more transparent and provide possibilities for the research community to interact.
- Clear phrasing of the “expected impact” in the Work Programme is required. The relevance of dissemination and the visibility of SSH research results should be better communicated by different channels – including the Commission.
- The specific policy relevance should be made accessible to the research community via early stage information events and counselling by the Commission and the NCPs.
- A distinct SSH programme in the Framework Programmes is essential and indispensable for providing opportunities for genuine SSH research and for addressing the current and future societal challenges that Europe and the world are facing.
- Complementary to a genuine SSH programme within FPs, integration of SSH in other Themes of *Cooperation* should be improved e.g. by providing appropriate instruments to facilitate the implementation of truly cross-disciplinary research. Interdisciplinary evaluation processes in other Themes outside Theme 8 “SSH” should be improved. The role of SSH should not be restricted to accompanying research.

## Specific recommendations

### New approach:

- More than one project per Societal Challenge should be funded to guarantee plurality and allow complementarities.
- Societal Challenges should be less rigid and prescriptive in their approach – making way for innovative research designs.
- Providing professional project management seminars for coordinators is essential. These seminars could be provided by the Commission or NCPs at the start of the project.
- The proposal application template is not in line with the complexity of the Societal Challenges and should be adapted to the complexity of the project designs.

**International Cooperation:**

- To facilitate the participation of “Third Country” participants, efforts to support partner searches and consortium building need to be intensified. The administrative burden for participation should be further reduced for “Third Countries”. Additional efforts should be channelled into disseminating information on FP7 in “Third Countries”.



# Appendices

## **Appendix 1**

Background of Interviewees,  
Selection Criteria and  
Interview Questions

## **Appendix 2**

Online Questionnaire

## Appendix 1

### Background of Interviewees, Selection Criteria and Interview Questions

#### Experience background of interviewees (n=100)

Area	Level of experience			
	Experience in funded projects		Experience in submitted proposals	
	As a coordinator	As a partner	As a coordinator	As a partner
FP7 – Theme 8 “SSH”	30	43	49	63
FP7 – Other Themes in Cooperation	14	13	19	18
FP7 – Ideas	2	1	4	4
FP6	31	38	33	44
FP5	19	26	21	28

#### Selection criteria for interviewees

Interviewees were selected by the interviewing NCPs of the NET4SOCIETY project according to the following criteria (declining priority):

- Experience in FP7 Theme 8 “SSH” as a coordinator in funded projects
- Experience in FP7 Theme 8 “SSH” as a partner in funded projects
- Experience in FP7 Theme 8 “SSH” as a coordinator of submitted proposals
- Experience in FP7 Theme 8 “SSH” as a partner of submitted proposals
- Experience with proposal submission in a “Societal Challenge” topic
- Experience in FP7 as a coordinator (or partner) in funded projects (or submitted proposals) in other Themes within the specific programme *Cooperation*
- Experience with participation (funded projects or submitted proposals) in the specific programme *Ideas (ERC)*
  
- General knowledge of FP7 / Participation experience in earlier Framework Programmes and active decision not to participate in FP7

## Interview questions

1. Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research in the context of FP7 is the largest research programme worldwide for SSH – Do you believe that the SSH research community in general is aware of the relevance of this programme?
2. What are in your personal opinion the most important incentives to participate in FP7?
3. What on the other hand might in your view be barriers to participation in FP7?
4. In your view, does the content of the Work Programmes in Theme 8 “SSH” reflect the most relevant issues that the SSH community currently focuses on?
5. Concerning the topics in the Work Programmes of Theme 8 “SSH” – would you prefer a more bottom-up approach for the topics in which the topics would just present a challenge or research problem but the particular content and research approach are left open?
6. From your experience, which funding schemes in FP7 (types of projects) are relevant to you and in how far do they correspond to the needs of your research projects?
7. Are you familiar with the new approach of the “Societal Challenges” in Theme 8 SSH that was introduced in 2009?
8. Do you generally welcome this new approach as an adequate instrument to focus on the great challenges of our society?
9. How would you assess the practicability of the new approach of the “Societal Challenges” in terms of the following aspects:
  - Size / character of consortia
  - Budget
  - Inclusion of foresight /stock-taking
  - Scope of the topics
  - Dissemination
  - Project management
10. How important were the impact and the objectives of the area or topic described in the Work Programme for your project? Did/Does it correspond to the genuine objectives of your project?
11. What are your experiences (participation or other) with SSH in other Themes of FP7 than Theme 8 SSH?
12. Would you prefer to have all policy-oriented themes/topics with a major SSH focus in Theme 8 with the additional budget instead of having them in other priorities in FP7?
13. What is your opinion of the evaluation process in FP7?
14. How transparent is in your opinion the process of ranking proposals – esp. concerning those proposals that have an identical number of points in all evaluation criteria?

15. Do you think that an ERC grant is in general more attractive than a project funded within Theme 8 “SSH”?
16. What is your experience with the integration of Civil Society Organisations or other stakeholders in FP7 research projects?
17. What are in general your experiences with international cooperation in FP7?
18. What is your opinion on the relevance and the prestige of FP7 in Third Countries?
19. What is your opinion on the integration of gender-aspects as a cross-cutting issue in all FP7 SSH research?
20. What would you suggest to be improved in the next FP7 SSH calls?
21. Name and surname
22. What is your sex?
23. What is your age?
24. Name of institution
25. Country in which organisation is based
26. What is the type of your organisation?
27. Does your institution have administrative support for EU research?
28. Which field of academic disciplines forms your background?
29. How long have you been working in SSH field?
30. What is your highest academic degree?
31. What is your current position?
32. Do you have any international working experience? If yes, please indicate duration and your position.
33. Do you have personal experiences in the participation in European Framework Programmes (FP)?
34. What was your role in the preparation of FP7 proposals?
35. Do you have any personal experiences in participating in projects funded in other research funding programmes than the European Research Framework Programmes (FP)?

## **Appendix 2**

Online Questionnaire

SSH NCP FP7 Midterm  
Complementary Evaluation of  
the 7<sup>th</sup> European Framework Programme

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

## 1. In which country is your organisation based?

## 1. Research collaboration and funding experience

## 2. Have you personally participated in European Framework Programmes (FP)?

Please tick all that are applicable.

### As coordinator:

	I submitted a proposal.	My project was funded.
FP 5 (1998-2002)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 6 (2002-2006)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 7 (2007-2013) – Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities” (SSH)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 7 (2007-2013) – Specific Programme “Ideas” – European Research Council (ERC)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 7 (2007-2013) other – please specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> No personal experience – neither in drafting a proposal nor in participating in a funded project.		

### As partner:

	I submitted a proposal.	My project was funded.
FP 5 (1998-2002)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 6 (2002-2006)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 7 (2007-2013) – Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities” (SSH)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 7 (2007-2013) – Specific Programme “Ideas” – European Research Council (ERC)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 7 (2007-2013) other – please specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> No personal experience – neither in drafting a proposal nor in participating in a funded project.		

### As evaluator:

FP 5 (1998-2002)	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 6 (2002-2006)	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 7 (2007-2013) – Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities” (SSH)	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 7 (2007-2013) – Specific Programme “Ideas” – European Research Council (ERC)	<input type="checkbox"/>
FP 7 (2007-2013) other – please specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>

- No personal experience as an evaluator.
- Any other experience** (expert group member, member of project advisory board etc.)  
Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Do you have any personal experience in participating in projects funded in other research funding programmes besides the European Research Framework Programmes (FP)?

<i>Please tick all that are applicable.</i>	As a coordinator:	As a partner:
National	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> No personal experience		
European – other than FP (e.g. European Science Foundation, Structural Funds, Education/Training programmes, European Tenders) Please specify the programme(s):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> No personal experience		
International – beyond Europe: Please specify the programme(s):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> No personal experience		

## 2. FP7 application process

*Question 4 only addresses SSH researchers who have no personal experience in FP7.*

### 4. You did not apply for FP7 calls – what are the main reasons?

*Please tick up to 3 statements that best describe your situation.*

- I am not aware of FP7 funding possibilities.
- I am currently involved in other EU research projects (e.g. FP6) and have no capacities for further projects.
- The FP7 priorities are not enough in line with my own research priorities.
- I have already secured sufficient funding.
- Although I am in need of funding, I consider the chance of success too low to invest in an application.
- I consider the FP7 rules for application / project implementation as too complicated.
- I was unable to find the right partners / build a consortium.
- FP7 projects do not meet my expectations on research quality.
- I prefer projects on a national level.
- The budgets of FP7 projects are too limited.
- Other reasons – please specify:

→ *Please continue with Question 8.*

Questions 5-7 only address SSH researchers with personal experience in FP7- (funded projects or submitted proposal).

**5. What are the main reasons why you did apply for FP7 Calls?**

Please tick up to 3 statements that best describe your situation.

- FP7 projects provide prestige.
- FP7 projects are a good opportunity for international networking.
- An FP7 project might improve the access to further research funding.
- Collaborating with international partners might increase the quality of research results.
- FP7 funding was crucial to finance the project.
- The topic of the project required a European approach.
- I already participated in earlier EU Research Framework Programmes and made good experiences.
- I want to contribute to the development of a European Research Area.
- Other reasons – please specify:

**6. Concerning the FP7 application process, how do you rate the complexity level of the following aspects on a scale of 1 (low complexity level) to 5 (high complexity level)?**

	1 low complexity	2	3	4	5 high complexity	No clear opinion	No personal experience
Participation rules	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Number of documents (guide for applicants, call fiche, work programme etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Proposal writing	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Usability of electronic instruments (EPSS etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Consortium building	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Budget planning	<input type="checkbox"/>						

**7. Independent of potential funding possibilities – what is your opinion of the added value of the preparation of a FP7 proposal?**

Please tick all that are applicable.

- I still benefit from this experience.
- It helps in defining ambitious goals.
- It encourages me to find new partners and extend my network.
- Proposal preparation itself has no added value if the proposal is not funded.
- No clear opinion.
- Other – please specify:

## 8. What is your opinion on the evaluation process in FP7?

	1	2	3	4	5	No clear opinion	No personal experience
The evaluation criteria are clear and appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
The evaluation process is transparent.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Decisions taken by proposal evaluators are adequate and fair.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
The evaluation criterion "largest possible European coverage in relation to the research subject" that is specific to Theme 8 "SSH" is reasonable and justified.	<input type="checkbox"/>						

Specific remarks on the evaluation process:

\* 1= Agree strongly, 2= Agree, 3= Neither agree nor disagree, 4= Disagree, 5= Disagree strongly

## 3. Theme 8 "SSH" Work Programmes

### 9. Do you actively follow the developments concerning the Work Programmes in Theme 8 "Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH)"?

- Yes  
 No

*If "YES" → please continue with Question 10.*

*If "NO" → please go on to Question 11.*

### 10. Concerning the Work Programmes in Theme 8 "Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH)", to which extent do you agree with the following statements?

	1	2	3	4	5	No clear opinion
<b>Programme level</b>						
Theme 8 "SSH" is effective in supporting cross-disciplinary research project designs.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Theme 8 "SSH" is attractive for the best-qualified researchers.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
The success rates in Theme 8 "SSH" (about 9%) are adequate to safeguard a sustained participation of excellent researchers.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
The research targeted in the Work Programmes covers the main issues relevant to the EU citizen.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Theme 8 "SSH" provides appropriate possibilities to foster international cooperation.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<b>Topic level</b>						
The topics take European research beyond the state-of-the-art in the respective thematic areas.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
The objectives of the topics are clear and adequately specified.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
The desired impact of the topics as phrased in the work programme is clear.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
The policy orientation of the topics is appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Humanities relevant research aspects are adequately included in the topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Gender aspects are adequately included in the topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Ethical issues are adequately included in the topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Topics should have a stronger bottom-up character.

\* 1= Agree strongly, 2= Agree, 3= Neither agree nor disagree, 4= Disagree, 5= Disagree strongly

#### 4. FP7 – the new approach of “Societal Challenges” in Theme 8 “SSH”

The SSH Work Programme 2010 (published in 2009) introduced a new approach – some topics addressed major societal challenges and called for large-scale integrating collaborative research projects. The budget of these large-scale integrating projects ranges between € 6.5 million and € 8 million. The minimum number of participants in the consortium is 7 partners from different member states / associated states. The research design needs to include stocktaking as well as foresight activities. This new approach is in line with the upcoming EU 2020 strategy that is designed to identify and deal with major societal challenges.

#### 11. Are you familiar with the new approach of “Societal Challenges” in Theme 8 “SSH”?

- Yes
- No

*If “YES” → please continue with Question 12.*

*If “NO” → please go on to Question 13.*

#### 12. Concerning the new approach, to which extent do you agree with the following statements?

	1	2	3	4	5	No clear opinion	No personal experience
The new approach of the “Societal Challenges” is an adequate approach to focus on the major challenges of our society.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
The scope of the “Societal Challenge” topics is reasonable for a large-scale integrating collaborative project.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
It does not pose a major problem to build a consortium for a “Societal Challenge” topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
The more professional approach of project management that is required for a “Societal Challenge” project does not pose a major problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
The inclusion of stocktaking and foresight within the new approach does not pose a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
The focus on dissemination within the new approach does not pose a problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
The effort of proposal preparation for a “Societal Challenge” topic is adequate.	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Future work programmes should concentrate on “Societal Challenge” topics and foresee a smaller budget for conventional smaller topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>						

\* 1= Agree strongly, 2= Agree, 3= Neither agree nor disagree, 4= Disagree, 5= Disagree strongly

## 5. SSH in other Themes of the FP7 Specific Programme “Cooperation” than Theme 8 “SSH” and in other FP7 Specific Programmes

### 13. Which of the following programmes of FP7 are significant enough for you to consider them for proposal submission?

	Significant	Not significant	I submitted a proposal	I do not know this programme	n/a not applicable
Other Themes than Theme 8 “SSH” within the Specific Programme “Cooperation” (e.g. “1 – Health”, “2 – Food”, “6 – Environment”, “10 – Security”)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific Programme “Ideas” / European Research Council (ERC)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific Programme “People” / Marie Curie Actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
“Science in Society” within Specific Programme “Capacities”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
“International Cooperation” within Specific Programme “Capacities”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
“Research Infrastructures” within Specific Programme “Capacities”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
“Research for the benefit of SMEs” within Specific Programme “Capacities”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other – please specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)	(n/a)

### 14. Concerning SSH in other Themes of FP7 Specific Programme “Cooperation” than Theme 8 “SSH”, would you agree or not agree with the following statements?

	I agree	I don't agree	No clear opinion
SSH aspects as cross-cutting issues are adequately reflected in topics of other Themes than Theme 8 “SSH”.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where relevant, SSH aspects are well integrated in the concept of topics in other Themes than Theme 8 “SSH” and are not just an “add-on”.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Building consortia for topics outside Theme 8 “SSH” with inclusion of non-SSH researchers is not considerably difficult.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Proposals submitted in other Themes than Theme “SSH” that are coordinated by SSH-researchers face particular difficulties during evaluation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Question 15 only addresses SSH researchers with personal experience in the FP7 ERC programme (funded project(s) or submitted proposal).**

### 15. What were the main reasons why you did apply for an ERC grant?

Please tick all that are applicable.

- The thematic content of the project did not fit into Theme 8 “SSH” or other Themes in the Specific Programme “Cooperation”.
- I prefer the concept of one principal investigator to a consortium-oriented approach.
- I prefer that the ERC concept puts less focus on policy relevance, dissemination and management than topics within Theme 8 “SSH” or other Themes in the Specific Programme “Cooperation”.
- Other – please specify:
- No clear opinion

## 6. Impact of FP7 projects

*Question 16 only addresses SSH researchers with personal experience in FP7 (funded project(s) or submitted proposal).*

### 16. To what extent was your project partnership already shaped before the start of proposal preparation?

*Please tick what applies best to your situation.*

- Most (more than half) of the partners have been working together already on previous projects.
- We had a core partnership already existing from another project and extended it with new partners.
- We were asked to join an existing group.
- A new partnership was constituted for the project proposal.
- Other – please specify:
- No clear opinion

*Questions 17-18 only address SSH researchers with personal experience in FP7 funded project(s).*

### 17. Do you expect project partnerships to continue beyond the duration of the project (at least two researchers from different countries continuing their cooperation)?

*Please tick what applies best to your situation.*

- The partnership went on / will go on, independently of funding by the EU.
- The partnership sought and received / will seek new sources of funding by the EU.
- This partnership did not continue / will probably not continue after the completion of the project.
- Other – please specify:
- No clear opinion

### 18. So far what are the outcomes of the FP7 project(s) you are / were involved in?

*Please tick all that are applicable.*

The project(s) has / have led to...

- ...significant progress beyond the state-of-the art through new ideas / concepts.
  - ...significant progress in comparative research methodology and data.
  - ...research of wider European coverage than was previously the case.
  - ...the development of inter-disciplinary approaches / meaningful cooperation between disciplines.
  - ...the growth of new research projects supported by other research funding programmes.
  - ...the production of policy recommendations.
  - ...research outcomes with strong relevance for policy initiatives.
  - The project has just started – it is too early for such a statement.
  - Other – please specify:
  - No clear opinion
-

## 7. International Cooperation

*Section 7 (Questions 19-23) only addresses researchers whose organisation is based in a country that is NEITHER an EU member state NOR a state associated to FP7.*

**19. As a researcher from a country that is neither a member state of the EU nor associated to FP7 – how relevant are the objectives of the topics in Theme 8 “SSH” to you?**

- Very relevant.
- Mostly relevant.
- Some are relevant, others are not.
- Mostly irrelevant.
- Totally irrelevant.
- No clear opinion.

**20. As a researcher from a country that is neither a member state of the EU nor associated to FP7 – how relevant is the scope of the topics in Theme 8 “SSH” to you?**

- Very relevant.
- Mostly relevant.
- Some are relevant, others are not.
- Mostly irrelevant.
- Totally irrelevant.
- No clear opinion.

**21. In order to successfully participate in FP7 what kind of support would you need?**

*Please tick all that are applicable.*

- Partner search services
- Support with proposal writing
- Brokerage event
- Networking opportunities
- Help desk
- National Contact Point
- Online training
- Discussion forum
- Other – please specify:
- No clear opinion

**22. For participating in the Specific Programme “Cooperation” in FP7 – do you prefer topics that thematically focus on a specific region?**

- Yes, I prefer topics that thematically focus on my relevant region.
- No, I prefer topics that do not have a specific regional focus.
- I haven't seen any topics focusing on my region. If there were any I would prefer them.
- No clear opinion.

**23. Does your organisation have a specialised office for international cooperation which actively disseminates information on FP7?**

- Yes
- No
- No clear opinion
- Other – please specify:

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## 8. Personal information

**24. What is the type of your organisation?**

- University
- Research institution (public funding)
- Research institution (private, no public funding)
- Private commercial company – small or medium-sized (<250 employees and financially independent)
- Private commercial company – large
- Public sector organisation other than research
- Non-profit organisation (e.g. foundation)
- Other – please specify:

**25. Which field of academic discipline forms your personal background?**

- Humanities
- Social sciences
- Economics
- Law
- ICT
- Environmental sciences
- Other – please specify:

**26. What is your sex?**

- Female
- Male

### 27. What is your age?

- Under 30
- 30 to 40
- 40 to 50
- 50 to 60
- 60 plus

### 28. What is your highest academic degree / qualification?

- Habilitation
- Ph.D. / Dr.
- Master's
- Diploma
- Bachelor's
- Other – please specify:
- n/a – not applicable

### 29. What is your current position?

- Professor
- Associate professor
- Senior researcher
- Junior researcher
- Research assistant
- Other – please specify:
- n/a – not applicable

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## 9. Final remarks

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Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire!

