



## *EERA's response to EASSH Document FP9 must invest in Research for a Democratic Union and the European Social Dimension*

*The central message of the response of the European Educational Research Association (EERA) to the Framework Programme 9 consultations is that EERA is happy with the inclusion of a recommendation about education and the emerging consensus of the necessity to use the Programme to enhance the social aspect of Europe in the coming years. EERA further welcomes the initiative by EASSH to develop a common platform to bring the insights and concerns of the broad community of social science and humanities (SSH) researchers to the Commission. While we welcome the increased profile of education and other SSH disciplines in the current round of discussions we consider that the background of this recommendation is too limited and that, unfortunately, the vital role of educational and other SSH research for enhancing democratic structures and facilitating positive social transformation has been ignored. We believe an opportunity is being missed to incorporate within the 9th Framework the role of education and educational research as a critical source of solutions for the great societal challenges of our times; democratic participation, social transformation, (youth) unemployment, migration, terrorism, (social) inequalities, and political extremism.*

As an active member of the broad family of European humanities and social science research organisations EERA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the EASSH paper *FP9 must invest in Research for a Democratic Union and the European Social Dimension*. We are in broad agreement with the central thesis of the paper that argues for the protection and reshaping of Europe's global role as a union of democracy, citizenship, innovation and social progress. We would further agree with the contention that the *Horizon 2020 programme* suffered from an undue emphasis on the importance of economic growth and development to the detriment of an investment in research on the social dimension of the European project. We see the FP 9 programme providing the SSH community with an opportunity to broaden the focus of European research for an extended period. Within this wide remit we would argue that education and educational research has an important role to play in the transformation of Europe to one that prioritises democracy and social transformation.

### **Democratic Participation and Social Transformation**

The problems that afflict humankind today are complex, pervasive, and affect all of us. We have legitimate ambitions for a happier, fairer and more humane life. Addressing these issues represents a major challenge that calls upon the active and collaborative effort of all sectors of society, and a clear awareness of the central role of education. Education is crucial in helping people at all age levels to participate fully and responsibly in a democratic society, in its discourse and its institutions. Education for such European citizenship, or even better for world citizenship, needs to include the competence to participate and deliberate. Schools as locations for and subjects of educational research



are increasingly becoming places which seek to model democratic participation and the valuing of a wide range of opinions, traditions and attitudes. Parents, students and the wider community are actively encouraged to take part in discussions around the purposes and processes of education and as such are provided with a voice in a context where, arguably, they have been traditionally voiceless. It is arguable, therefore, that schools, are becoming a microcosms of a democratic society and are transforming themselves in practical ways on a daily basis. For this reason EERA would suggest that an EASSH platform that seeks to emphasise the importance of participation and transformation needs to examine how educational organisations have managed and are managing similar processes. Explorations of these transformations often suggest that students must be empowered to use critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems and policies. They need to develop a concern for the welfare of others, the common good, and for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities. More research is needed on the development of education that will help students to become active and critical citizens in a challenging and changing world.

The current conceptualisation of education in the emerging discussions of the FP9 Programme also misses the crucial link between educational reform and effects envisaged: educational research. Only educational reforms – and indeed broader social reforms – that are based on sound research can lead to the societal changes we all strive for. An example is the area of education for key competencies in Europe. Educational research has shown clear evidence of the essential role of well being and social and emotional competencies in pupils' school success and success in later life (e.g. employment, active citizenship and personal fulfilment). The development of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is another example that wouldn't have been possible without educational research. This framework encourages educational practices towards the development of tolerance, respect towards otherness and the value of cultural diversity, and thus to diminish phenomena of human conflict, racism or xenophobia.

The capacity of educational research moves beyond a narrow focus on empirical research and statistical results. It also has the capacity to look behind the statistics and to answer through qualitative and mixed methods research questions on key processes in education. Why and under what conditions do some interventions work and others not? Which approaches work best with which students and why? The fact that education in so many different countries has been at the forefront of policy experimentation means that there has been ample opportunity for educational research to learn about system change, and the differences that national contexts make. Thus educational research results can be of great help in realising the introduction of an educational agenda for world citizenship.

Problems in education often can be recognised as complex, multidimensional and contextualized and to solve such problems interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches are needed. Educational research by its very nature is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary bringing together insights from among others politics, economy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology and applying them to the educational sciences.



Thus educational research makes an essential contribution to solving the problems in educational reform and society.

In summary, EERA would suggest that any EASSH platform for a better Europe should include an explicit commitment to expanding the conceptualisation of education currently included in consultation documents. We argue that it should view education as a tool not only for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, but also for the important societal challenges European citizens are facing.

Areas of research focus should prioritise these societal challenges and include, for example,:

- (youth) unemployment,
- democratic values
- identity and citizenship
- wellbeing
- social and emotional competence
- migration,
- addressing (social) inequalities, and
- combatting political extremism.

It is our view that a concentration on these and other areas of social priority will lead to greater democratic participation with all of its associated social benefits.

EERA will be happy to work with the EASSH to ensure that the next Framework Programme will include educational research in such a way that it will help ensure high quality education for the future of European democracies and societies.

*The European Educational Research Association is an association of national and regional general educational research associations in Europe. It unites over 15,000 educational researchers in over 30 countries.*

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