

Valuing the work of SSH today: the expected contribution of ESWRA

How can we "value" the work of Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH) in Europe today? On the one hand, there are obvious examples in front of our eyes and in our newspapers: terrorism of course, but also migration, unemployment, tax evasion, wars and crises at the door of Europe, growth models, the future of Europe, and so on. On the other hand, there are less "fashionable" items that SSH can address because SSH alone can analyse all the various forms of organised and non-so organised violence, exploitation and indifference.

Isn't "social work" in this latter category? As ESWRA defines itself, "*ESWRA's vision is to take forward the development, practice and utilization of social work research to enhance knowledge about individual and social problems, and to promote just and equitable societies*". Is that an objective that we should abandon? Certainly not if we continue to live in democratic societies whose foundation is still, at least until it may become democratically contested, to be as just and as equitable as possible. If we want to live by democratic standards, it is thus obvious that the work of ESWRA is necessary and, given the current difficulties of our social policies, even more and more necessary.

I have been struck by the fact that ESWRA was founded in 2014 only and that it already has over 250 members from 21 countries. The existence of ESWRA is important because it says to the public, to the policy makers that there are serious people thinking serious things and that these people represent the SSH communities. The voice of specialists like you must be heard, your analyses must reach the public domain at large. There is actually now an excellent opportunity for ESWRA to respond to the current public consultation on the social

pillar of the EU which will form the basis for the social policy of the EU for the next few years. By contributing, ESWRA will signal to EU policy makers that SSH scientists are involved in the world they live in and not only neutral observers.

Some may rightly ask: are you trying to push SSH academics you on the slippery road of engagement which sometimes had obscured the vigilance and the objectivity of SSH and of other sciences? The argument is rather to say that science should not be separate from public discourses, or else that democratic debates should not develop without organised exchanges and take up of SSH, even if we know that, eventually, the necessary political arrangements of our democracies may discard the conclusions of science. Organising the exchanges between science and policy is therefore essential and this is a new and delicate task for most of the SSH scholars.

Of course, the critical dimension of SSH and its active stance towards complexity and nuances may have difficulties to be accepted by all in our changing democracies. Nevertheless, rather than leave the battlefield of public ideas, the SSH, which by far are still publicly funded, have to enter this field with courage and the intelligence of what a democratic debate means, and make their claims for rationality and evidence based debates in democracies.

This is what ESWRA was set up for and this is the task that will grow for ESWRA in the near and distant future.

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