THE ROLE OF NETWORKING IN THE EU

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Abstract. *What is Europeanness? The economic crisis brought along xenophobia and reduced the feeling of Europeanness to almost nothing. Will EU continue to exist without a European citizen? Is the European citizen emerging? NECE is one of the initiatives of European networking indicating also the emergence of the European citizen. The organization is interested in citizenship education in Europe through various activities through the organization of contacts, co-operation and synergies in the field of citizenship education. Nevertheless, NECE is not an institutionalized network, and works as a forum that allows the spectrum of stakeholders involved in citizenship education to interact with one another. The initiative's chief goal is to promote the Europeanization of citizenship education, and to contribute to the creation of a European general public. This example is interpreted against a second one centered specifically on the creation of an European public sphere, with a context where numerous forms of European networks compete and cooperate in shaping a more coherent European future. Is networking going to create a European feeling of belonging? The study identifies several arguments for a positive answer to this question.*

Keywords: *EU, networking, co-operation, European citizenship education, European general public*.

The study[1] attempts to describe the idea of Europeanness and than discuses the theory of social relations or of *networking* in order to evaluate the extent in which the relation between the European public space, the feeling of Europeanness, the European social capital and the activity of networking influence each other in a positive manner. Is the European feeling of belonging enhanced by the emergence of the European citizen or of the European general public? Is networking going to create an European feeling of belonging? These are the direction of interest in this study.

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What is Europeanness? Dominique Venner in his article "Europe and Europeanness" says that "the consciousness of belonging to a Europe is much older than the modern concept of Europe. This is obvious in the successive names of Hellenism, Celticism, Romanism, Franc Empire or Christianity. Seen as immemorial tradition, the Europeanness is produced by a multi-millenary culture derived with clarity and in a unitary manner from the characteristics of the constitutive peoples and from a spiritual patrimony whose supreme expression is found in the Homeric poems". Venner searches for the distinctive European element: "What is distinctively European is a weak reflection of a certain spiritual morphology, mysteriously transmitted through blood, language and a diffuse memory of a community. These particularities make us what we are and not somebody else even when our consciousness has lost them". We can easily notice how diffused are these characteristics of cultural nature shaped during the long durations of traditions. Venner emphasizes: "Understood this way, tradition is what shapes and extends individuality and being based on identity, gives life's meaning. This is not transcendence exterior to the self. Tradition is a „self" which is maintained through time, lively expression of what is special within the universal. Unlike other less fortunate people, the Europeans rarely had to raise the problem of their identity. It was enough for them to exist: numerous, strong and most of the time victorious". He also shows that this is no longer the case and that "*the terrible century 1914* ended the rule of the Europeans were affected since by all the demons including self-doubt, although attenuated by a provisory material abundance. The artisans of the unification tremble before the matter of identity. Identity is as important for community as the vital matter of the ethnic and territorial borders".

We notice nowadays that the material abundance of the European was indeed provisory. The terrible end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century led to opening borders and the economic crisis unfortunately overlapped even if partially bringing along the undesired competition for the vanishing abundance. The old Europeans found from the Western politicians and from media that the sources of their problems are the new Europeans. As a consequence the European identity was affected by xenophobia although in different manners as well in Central and Eastern Europe as in the West and before a real chance to form a feeling of Europeanness it was reduced to almost a nothing. Which could be the current sources of Europeanness? Citizenship? Will the European Union continue to last without a European citizen? How could be the European citizen a reality without the European public space?

Alain de Benoist signed a study titled "On Indistinction"[2] where he examines the following thesis: The history of the last millennia bear witness on the slow increase of indistinction – a phenomenon that started with monotheism. Indeed, stating the existence of only one God presupposes the unity of human family not only at the level of the biological species, but also from the spiritual point of view. To argue that there is only one God one needs to affirm at the same time

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[2] http://eurocontinentalism.wordpress.com//?s=de+Benoist+On+indistinction&search=Go

that all people are part of only one family and that all other gods should be eliminated. Alain de Benoist continues: This reduces to the rule of a new regime of truth where alterity becomes a source of falsity or error. „The Unique character was in the beginning the specificity of the Judeo-Christian culture", and only later of the modern culture as Michel Maffesoli wrote. The Uniqueness excludes another nature threatening its exclusivity. What is different must be, therefore, annihilated. During Western history, after de Benoist, the obsession of Unity never ceased to function as a guiding principle. From a historical point of view, the unifying tendency was the engine for intolerance, exclusion and separation and only later for fragmentation, triggering all sorts of inquisitions justified by the efforts to eliminate alterity. The philosopher states: "Indistinction means also the negation of all frontiers and of all limitations. The bottom line is how to get rid of a measure. The One goes hand in hand with excess (*hybris*), just as the logic of over-accumulation of capital is itself a form of limitlessness which has turned into its own "raison d'être." At all times cosmopolitanism has strived toward the erasure of borders. Today it has taken on the form of nomadic behaviour. The leftist ideology of no-borders converges with the rightwing ideology of free trade, with both interpreting globalization as across-the-board social hybridization. The ideology of "no borders" is jointly espoused by the financiers, the smugglers and the mob. "No borders" and "the undocumented" – that is to say, no adherence and no identity. Yet, borders are not barriers, but only locks in a waterway. In the era of globalization, they are primarily intended to regulate trade and protect the most threatened ones. (Régis Debray: "The poor has only his own pasture left to himself").This is the reason why the Capital International – the only one that thrives – requires the removal of all borders."[3]

On the one hand, uniformization brings along a functional European Union and a potential clearer European identity. On the other hand, if the defining mark of Europeanness seemed to be not long ago historical and cultural, linguistically too, precisely this European diversity, but we assist to current attempts infusing or enforcing uniformity on Europeanization: the Maastricht Treaty, complemented by Lisbon Treaty and the Fiscal Treaty. Are these achievements for the future of a more coherent Europe? We interpret and sustain in this study the perspective where these treaties are not only clear expressions of the long lasting European engagement in a liberal and democratic philosophy, but they also enhance values and norms that are very important in creating a social and political culture of democracy adequate to the challenges and changes registered in contemporary world and based on a lively social capital.

Xenophobia can be interpreted as a consequence of the current phenomenon of "indistinction" and also of the ideology of progress, but it is definitely not a consequence of the uniformity induced by the shared liberal and democratic values and norms sustaining the European norms, laws and treaties. The ideology of progress is built along the idea that reason leads to unity. Simplifying this intricate argument, we notice that among the positive aspects of this

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[3] *Ibidem.*

"indistinction" are nevertheless the numerous elements and proofs of social capital, generated in the effort, not as much to exclude, or attenuate alterity, but more to "translate" and integrate it within the norms, laws and also within the social networks, testing and allowing the existence of alterity in the social praxis, despite the tendencies to create a type of indistinct Europeanness.

Europeanness has future in correlation with the European *polis*, which in turn needs an *agora*. Zachary Neal[4] from Michigan University evaluates the correlation between the public space and *polis* seen as urbanism, identifying three main perspectives on the public space. The legal and economic perspective answers concrete questions concerning public space such as: "What is public space and who pays for it ?" The social and spatial perspective takes the existence of the public space as granted and it's concerned with its design and application: "How does public space look like and how is it used?" The political perspective analyzes the role of the public space in democracy as well as abstractly as an area of the discursive activities and in concrete terms a space of either exclusion or empowerment for the individuals. Although these three perspectives can overlap, one can distinguish specific origins, presuppositions and areas of interest.

Social network theory[5] views social relationships in terms of specific relating elements, "nodes" and "ties". In this perspective, networking is central to social theory. The "nodes" are the individual actors within the networks, and the "ties" are the relationships between the actors. There can be many kinds of ties between the nodes. Although, there are different types of connections in society, a social network can be conceived as a map of all of the relevant ties between the nodes. The network can also be used to determine the social capital of individual actors, often displayed in a "social network diagram".

The future of humanity is more and more connected with the activity of networking and society itself is more and more structured deeply as a network of the future, with the impact of the internet and new technologies. Beyond social theory, internet offers possibilities to bring social theories closer to life as European researchers employ the technological possibilities to increase the impact of their results. The networks move beyond the stage of webs of information and knowledge toward a stage of action and involvement. In this perspective, European researchers identify the need to make their expertise part of the knowledge society and, to a certain extent, to contribute to the social constructions which reflect and include the big projects and "big thinking" for sustainable development and, implicitly, for democratization.[6]

Society is changing nowadays at a fast pace. Scientists discuss and project self-organized networks, called "edge networks" sustaining mobile phone technology and the interface of software for phones, PC, internet etc. This technological surge renders obsolete the type of fixed networking environments and the relations which are still defining for the current infrastructures of nowadays

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[4] https://www.msu.edu/~zpneal/publications/neal-seekingcommon.pdf
[5] http://www.istheory.yorku.ca/socialnetworktheory.htm
[6] http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/network-future-beyond-theory

societies already termed "transparent" (G. Vattimo[7]), but still in the process of regaining a new shape. This process leaves room for re-imagining societies with a more democratic content and the role of researchers should become more important. The speed of these transformations recalls the phrase of Paul Virilio[8] who identified the transformations of democracy, society and cities under speed into an ambiguous reality, or the phrase of Anthony Giddens[9] *a runaway world*. "Risk always needs to be disciplined, but active risk-taking is a core element of dynamic economy and innovative society. Living in a global age means coping with a diversity of new situations of risk. We may need quite often to be bold rather than cautious in supporting scientific innovation and other forms of change. After all, one root of the term 'risk' in the original Portuguese means 'to dare'."[10] Therefore, the functionality of the fast-evolving societies is in question as the architectures of the future should be informed with contents, dimensions, values and principles that call for a specialized input and to an integrated approach that manages the movements from theory to design.

The present study undertakes a different sociological approach where the characteristics of the social interaction of the individuals take second place to the networking action. This is more useful in explaining the reality of society and preserves some room for individual agency involved in the choices and manners of networking. The individuals are still able to influence their achievements in society, while they remain relatively dependant on their place in the structure of the network.

In our view, networking stimulates social capital, considering that, in general, social relations have mutual benefits for the individuals involved in various networks. Although, social capital doesn't have nowadays an undisputed definition there are several that made a relevant contribution in contemporary sociology. We have selected only three definitions illustrating our point. Thus, for Baker, social capital is "a resource that actors derive from specific social structures and then use to pursue their interests; it is created by changes in the relationship among actors"[11]. Bourdieu[12] considers social capital "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition (…)'made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility"[13]. In Knoke's view social capital is "the process by

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[7] G. Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, London, Polity Press, 1992.

[8] Jason Michael Adams, "The Speeds of Ambiguity. An Interview with Paul Virilio" available at http://www.academia.edu/456671/The_Speeds_of_Ambiguity_An_Interview_With Paul Virilio_boundary_2_

[9] A. Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization Is Reshaping our Lives*, New York, Routledge, 2000.

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 53.

[11] W. Baker, "Market networks and corporate behaviors", *American Journal of Sociology*, nr. 96, 1990, pp. 589-625 (see especially p. 619).

[12] P. Bourdieu, "The forms of capital" pp. 241-258, in Richardson J. G. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 248.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 243.

which social actors create and mobilize their network connections within and between organizations to gain access to other social actors' resources"[14].

With this methodological perspective in place, could we sustain that the activity of networking is going to create a European feeling of belonging? The investigation suggests a positive answer with the accent placed on the positive impact of a European liberal and democratic social capital informed by the specific activities of networking. These activities accomplish an optimum and intricate combination of diversities that are reduced in their entropic character through the common reference to liberal and democratic values and norms, which do not impose a totalitarian type of uniformity, or in-distinction.

These definitions of social capital that we have selected and presented above emphasize that network connections are both resources and benefits, translated in social capital. This crucial characteristic could be followed in general in the effervescence of network organizations in Europe, nowadays, as well as in the case of each network. As following we are going to study a few examples of networks established on this presupposition of the relation between social capital, democratization and individual fulfilment. In this respect, NECE[15] is an organization for networking citizenship education in Europe. It develops a framework to encourage contacts, cooperation and dynamics of citizenship and civic education. One of the main aims is to promote the Europeanisation of citizenship education, enhancing the creation of a European general public sphere. The activities gather academics, practitioners, and policymakers at the European level, stimulating not only the knowledge transfer and information exchange, but also the emergence of a higher level of involvement through good practices and raising awareness of the impact of citizenship education.

The concrete means of networking are the sustained conferences and workshops that empower the scientific discourse in citizenship education which becomes a presence in promoting the European public sphere. Dedicated to issues of contemporary interest such as "citizenship education in immigration societies" the conferences emphasize the relevant analyses and investigations of a great variety of specialist from different fields and countries in an effort to involve theory into practice through interactive modules structuring the workshops. The insistence on the impact of citizenship education at the European level enforces the emergence of the European public sphere. In our view, NECE functions as a "node" which multiplies and propagates both the "ties" of the specific measures that value the social capital involved by networking citizenship in Europe and the individuals' awareness of the importance of a European public sphere. As Baker pointed out we can identify in this initiative a source of a democratic and liberal social capital since the network becomes a true resource that actors derive from these specific social structures offered by NECE which then are used to pursue their informed and educated interests.

In this respect we interpret the series of conferences organized by NECE as "nodes" opened toward the concepts of democracy and participation, in face of

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[14] David Knoke and Laurence E. Lynn, "Groups, Interests, and U.S. Public Policy", *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 1999, vol. 18, issue 3, pages 524-525 (see especially p. 18).
[15] http://www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/netzwerke/nece/

the current challenges and changes taking place in politics, society and economy. This specific transparency and responsibility A brief incursion into the meanings of the conferences organized by NECE of their concepts, purposes and theoretical and practical dimensions illustrate the richness of the social capital they inform and their relevance for the creation of a European public space. This type of network creates the tools and the circumstances for empowerment. For instance, the title of the 2012 NECE conference, which took place at Córdoba, "Participation Now! Citizenship Education and Democracy in Times of Change", underlines the imperative of participation, seen as a mobilization of the European "nodes" and "ties" of the public sphere. The previous NECE conference prepared the stage. "Democracy and participation in the face of global changes", took place in Madrid, as well in 2012, and addressed the crisis of confidence in the European capacity to face the democratic changes of our times, investigating the new forms of participation as a source of development in a democratization based on the social capital triggered by involved citizenship. The conference entitled "Closing the empowerment gap through citizenship education: How to address educationally disadvantaged groups" (Warsaw, 2011) has opened this discussion concerning the resources that remain excluded from the civil society and political processes in the absence of participation. The frames of interaction and dialogue opened by networks such as NECE create a favourable public space for the manifestation of the new forms of political involvement, where citizenship education meets citizenship competencies.

The cultural dimension of the citizenship education has an impact in the European effort to enhance a social capital mobilized against the erosion of the European social fabric. Since 2004, the series of NECE conferences have fulfilled this role of creating a viable and dynamic architecture of "nodes" and "ties", beyond the various national, ethnic or religious backgrounds, active and relevant in the actualization of a public sphere at the European level, shaping a contemporary European "tradition" of dialogue, inclusion and citizenship education, a specific European culture of diversity and a sustaining social capital of involvement.

Let us further explain the coordinates and perspectives concerning this relation between social capital and networking through a second example provided by the European reality. We have chosen these examples because, while we see social capital as the result of networking, we appreciate that this result, and its quality, depend on the structure and purpose of networking, and on the democratic and liberal political culture of the network participants. In this light, the networks of researchers initiate in the best hypostases the reality of a functional European Public Sphere.

EUROSPHERE[16] is a network with the declared aim to strengthen a European public sphere, through the sustained effort to identify the specific factors involved in its functioning. There are facilitating and obstructing factors which either favour or challenge the formation of a functional European Public Sphere. European researchers identify a set of possible solutions to the problems accompanying the lack of communication between citizens, different social/political actors, various

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[16] http://eurosphere.uib.no/research/theory/

sub-European spheres, and several European institutions. EUROSPHERE is presented as a network determined to identify possible new approaches to the European public sphere, termed through the phrase "*diversity perspective*".

Networks such as EUROSPHERE are expressions of European democratic social capital which inform and trigger the activities of the European public sphere. EUROSPHERE insists to define and disseminate a novel, "context-sensitive" public sphere, interested in the environments of communication and actions, the purposes of communication and actions. This "context-sensitive" public sphere promotes a good democratic climate, a participative climate, a catalyst for the creation of trans-national networks, groups and communities. "The outcomes of EUROSPHERE thus constitute a novel perspective and a reliable knowledge base for political action and interaction towards creating a common European public sphere. EUROSPHERE first puts diversity as an alternative to the perspectives of difference at the very foundation of a major comparative research effort. One advantage of the diversity perspective is that it provides a multi-theoretical richness and conceptual diversity, thus enabling this project to capture the particularities of different European contexts that cannot be captured with a singular theoretical approach. This requires an integrated and comparative research design that takes into account the relationships between sub-European public spaces, different social and political actors, citizens' involvement and the emerging European public sphere."[17] Theory meets good political, communicational and participative practices. Thus, "research design is based on responses to policy issues of theoretical relevance, which take account of (1) the relationship between European integration and social cohesion across different identities, across different types of citizenship, and the European public sphere and (2) the boundaries of Europe. Earlier research on the European Public Sphere (EPS) has shown us that, under current conditions, it is difficult to realize a common EPS in the foreseeable future, but that there are traces of a EPS in the making on some policy issues. Most importantly, it has drawn our attention to the integrative, democratizing, legitimizing, and meaning-creating roles of the public sphere."[18] The construction of a unified European Research Area becomes a catalyst for the further democratization of Europe, for good governance in Europe, identifying the directions of European development. "The focus on EPS as a means of achieving democratic legitimacy at the European level can easily be justified normatively, but, has not been substantiated empirically. Further, earlier research teaches us little about how the public sphere can be included in the European context of deep and complex diversities. Existence of a near-perfect procedural or deliberative democracy, including a public sphere where citizens freely exercise their rights of free speech, assembly, critique, deliberation, opposition, etc in order to form the public will is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. If we accept that any notion of state legitimacy produces a corresponding notion of

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[17] *Ibidem*
[18] *Ibidem.*

legitimacy of individuals, it is important to inquire into what forms of public sphere include/exclude which groups, to what degree, and on which matters."[19]

Project EUROSPHERE provides answers to the demanding current European crisis of political space. "There has been a growing awareness that fundamental political concepts are essentially territorial concepts that make sense in relation to concrete and well-delimited territories. The State, and a number of collateral notions – democracy, community, polity, nation, etc. – have also been understood in relation to this grounding in a concrete space. But the displacements operated by globalisation, the weakening of physical and symbolic boundaries, the lesser role of the State as a force that organises and bounds territories (and more generally the global weakening of the State or its increasing inadequacy as a template for effective governance – cf. 'failed states') as well as the emergence of stateless forms of governance, have destabilised the modern representations of politics. In political theory, philosophy, or political science, efforts are made to understand the political once it is detached from a concrete, bounded space: what is at stake in notions of 'empire', of 'post-national' formations, and other similar terms is the capacity to think such de-territorialised forms of politics. How are we to conceive of democracy, of the possibility for exercising collective capacities, of rights and entitlements, beyond the bounded horizon of the territorial state? What is politics when it is disconnected from the relation to concrete spaces? Can we re-imagine politics beyond the dimension of bounded space?"[20]

A potentially dangerous attempt is the normative ambition of EUROSPHERE project with attention to the question of inclusion/exclusion in and the boundaries of public spheres. "It is urgent to investigate whether the existing focus on democratic legitimacy in EPS studies has inadvertently led to emergence of new criteria for defining who the legitimate participants of the public sphere are or should be. Indeed, it has been empirically shown in numerous sociological and social anthropological studies of national public spaces that, in contexts of diversity, such standards can be discriminatory, marginalizing, and excluding. As a supplement to the contributions made by the democratic legitimacy debate in empirical EPS studies, EUROSPHERE conceptualizes the European Public Sphere as a means of inclusion for democracy. Thereby, the project both contests and complements the existing academic work on the EPS with the following overall research question: *Are inclusive European public spheres (EPS) possible under conditions of complex diversity; national path dependencies of polity forms, institutions and policies; multilevel governance; and shifting boundaries within and of the EU?*"[21] This type of approach is dangerous, as excessive attention to normative rules shadows the threat hidden in this very interest for the idea of legitimate participants in the public sphere. An inclusive public sphere should welcome all human voices in the public sphere, citizens and residents all should contribute to the common European public life. In the name of the eradication, or alleviation, of discriminatory, marginalizing, and excluding practices in the

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[19] *Ibidem.*

[20] The European Commission, *Emerging Trends in Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities in Europe*, p. 116 available at http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/metris-report_en.pdf

[21] http://eurosphere.uib.no/research/theory/

public sphere when researchers turn to the identification of "new criteria for defining who the legitimate participants of the public sphere are or should be", they open the way for discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion, simply because it allows discussions, thoughts, arguments and, eventually, criteria, for conceiving, describing, suggesting or arguing which could be the illegitimate participants in the public sphere. The accommodation of the diversity of numerous European public spheres of liberal democracies, calls for the accommodation of the diversity of numerous types of European citizens, whose main characteristic as citizens is precisely their participative, that is, active citizenship. As the European Commission notices that "A number of societal transformations have recently led researchers to explore new types of citizenship beyond economic and political citizenship – e.g. ethnic, religious, sexual, scientific, biological, and bodily citizenship – and to question traditional political citizenship from a gendered, subaltern, or migrant perspective. Sociological research on the relation between secularised conceptions of the polity and religious citizenship is crucial for informing policies, while the role of European institutions in mediating or constituting these new citizenship claims also needs to be analysed. The crisis of traditional political representation has stimulated research focusing on new forms of interest representation and participation. One clear trend centres on the forms, theories, and technologies of 'participation' at various levels of social life. How does the shift from technocratic to participatory models of policy and decision-making affect the practice of citizenship? What does 'participation' mean in practice? How can it be effective in a context of privatisation or outsourcing of social or public services?"[22]

Whenever this European diversity of gender, minority, race, sexuality, disability brings along discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion the reaction of the learned and cosmopolitan European society should not be a normative effort to identify "new criteria for defining who the legitimate participants of the public sphere are or should be," but new methods to increase participation and access to the public sphere, and to legitimate the diversity of public inputs within the democratic "space" described by citizenships' freedoms, rights and obligations.

The project EUROSPHERE is beneficial in networking researchers to shape the inclusive European public sphere, both feasible and sustainable in various European contexts. "EUROSPHERE opts for a research design capable to achieve these two objectives. We set up context-sensitive theoretical and analytical approaches and methodology to assure that our results have sufficient grounding, considering contemporary realities and the research on the European public sphere. EUROSPHERE comparatively assesses the features of *social/political actors* and of sub-European communicative public spaces that promote or hinder development of various types of European belongings and citizens' involvement in European policy making. Think tanks, political parties, social movements/ citizens' initiatives are, in this respect, treated as both sub-spaces and actors."[23]

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[22] The European Commission, *Emerging Trends in Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities in Europe*, p. 123 available at http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/metris-report_en.pdf
[23] http://eurosphere.uib.no/research/theory/

The very identification of a European Research Area represents an important indicator of the relevance of the networking of various researchers, practitioners and activists in the evolution towards a redefinition of Europeanness and European citizenship. "The social sciences and humanities (SSH) are a cornerstone of the European Research Area, and European society benefits from their vast and diverse contributions to knowledge. Research develops according to long term agendas that reflect the needs of changing social, cultural, and economic environments. This report on monitoring emerging trends in social sciences and humanities was written at a time of great insecurity about global economic and financial stability, but also, more broadly, of uncertainty about the future of the social sciences and the humanities. Paradoxically, this conjuncture may provide the opportunity for reasserting the social purpose of SSH research and strengthening their contribution to European governance. The unique educative, ethical, and culture-shaping roles of the social sciences and humanities are of fundamental importance for understanding current developments and for informing future policies."[24]

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[24] The European Commission, *Emerging Trends in Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities in Europe*, p. 123 available at http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/metris-report_en.pdf