



What Futures for the Social Sciences and Humanities?



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What Futures: Goal and Objectives

The goal - to shed light on future trends in Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) fields.

The objectives:

- To identify future research trends of SSH
- To assess the future impact of SSH on policy, economy and society
- To develop scenarios regarding the futures of SSH and its impact on society
- To derive recommendations for research policy priorities in SSH

Delphi Survey

Web-based Delphi survey (2 rounds) was conducted :

The objective of the survey was to garner experts' opinions about both the structure of the social sciences and humanities (SSH) in 2025 (Part II of the survey), as well as the main social issues they expect society to be facing then (Part III of the survey).



Focus on

The Delphi questionnaire was comprised of four parts:

- **Part I: Demographic questions**

- **Part II: Future general statements about SSH**

This part included 12 general statements about potential futures in SSH research. For each statement the following questions were asked: Likelihood, importance and desirability

Delphi Questionnaire

Part III: Future social issues in six main clusters:

- ❑ Economics and Employment
- ❑ Social change
- ❑ Environment and Sustainability
- ❑ Europe as a knowledge-based society
- ❑ Governance and citizenship
- ❑ Culture and Values

Questions that were asked: Likelihood, importance, the three most important research areas, likely impact of research, and level of collaboration.

Part IV: Respondents' own input

SSH-Delphi Survey Results

Participation:

- **845 participants**
(5200 email invitations sent,
16.3% response)
(first round: 666 respondents)
- **25 countries**
- **93.4% from Europe**



SSH-Delphi Survey Results

Gender				
Male		Female		
66.3% (n=487)		33.7% (n=248)		
Age				
20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	>60
4% (n=32)	26% (n=195)	29% (n=215)	24% (n=180)	16% (n=116)
Organisation				
University		Non-University		
80% (n=583)		20% (n=145)		
Research area				
Natural or other sciences		Humanities	Social sciences	
12% (n=77)		33% (n=210)	55% (n=350)	
Country				
UK & Israel	Nordic countries & Netherlands	Central Europe and Belgium	France	Other
6% (n=41)	40% (n=273)	35% (n=238)	14% (n=97)	6% (n=38)

General Statements

Three main assumptions:

- Interdisciplinary research will become the norm in SSH
- Universities in general and SSH in particular will increasingly rely on non-governmental sources of funding
- SSH academics and private sector will be drawn much closer together and develop new models of cooperation

General Statements

Five most importance and likelihood

	<i>Likelihood</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Desirability</i>
	(1=very low, 5=very high)		
Most SSH research is conducted within the universities	3.63	3.53	3.35
Researchers are required to have a wide range of interdisciplinary skills	3.55	3.95	4.00
A significant proportion of SSH research is carried out in collaboration with other disciplines	3.52	3.87	3.93
Most SSH research is publicly funded	3.35	3.70	3.50
SSH research is heavily dependent on methodologies that have been enabled by technological developments in other scientific disciplines	3.05	3.18	2.82

General Statements

	<i>Likelihood</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Desirability</i>
	(1=very low, 5=very high)		
Post-modernism has greatly modified the value system on which much Humanities research is based	2.82	2.95	2.37
SSH research has become an integral part in the development of new technologies and products	2.67	3.72	3.82
Research in various areas of the humanities has ceased to exist	2.62	3.41	1.70
Most SSH research is carried out in the framework of public/private partnerships	2.50	3.04	2.68
Most SSH research is conducted by the academy and industry in collaboration	2.31	3.02	2.56
Disciplinary boundaries have entirely collapsed	2.15	3.16	2.74
Funding of research for societal needs is equal to technological R&D funding	1.91	3.89	3.82

SSH- Futures Scenarios

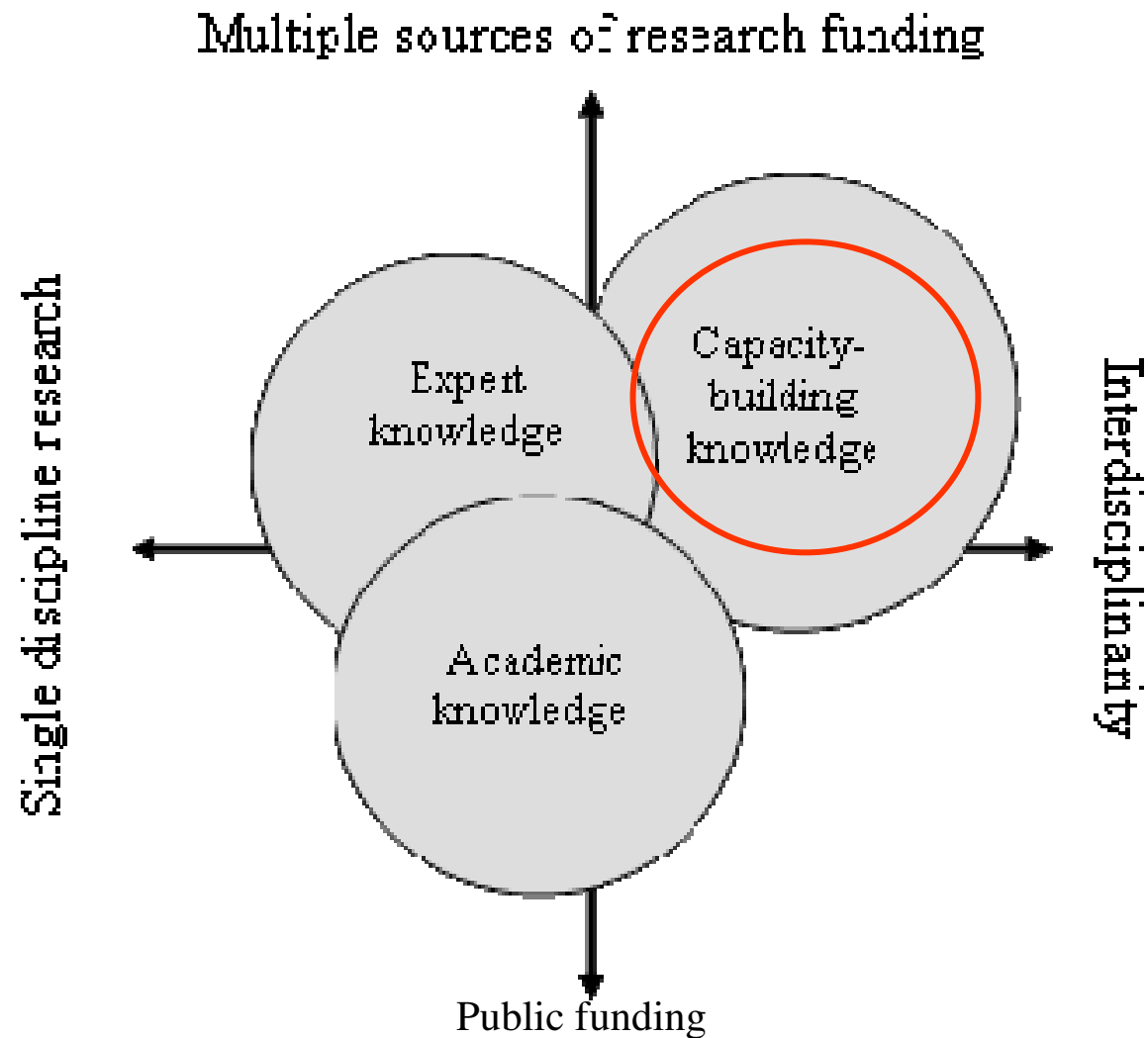
- **The goal:** to highlight the large scale forces that might push the future in different directions in which SSH might develop.
- The scenarios are based on the **theoretical background** of the project, as well as on the **survey results**.
- The scenarios are constructed on the basis of the dimensions of “supply” and “demand”:

The “**supply**” side is represented by researchers and research organisations, which offer knowledge that runs along a continuum from single- to interdisciplinary research.

The “**demand**” side, runs from “solely public funding”, standing for mediocre demand for SSH knowledge, to “multiple sources of research funding”, which indicates heightened demand for SSH knowledge”.

This enables us to create a matrix with two axes: sources of funding and level of interdisciplinarity

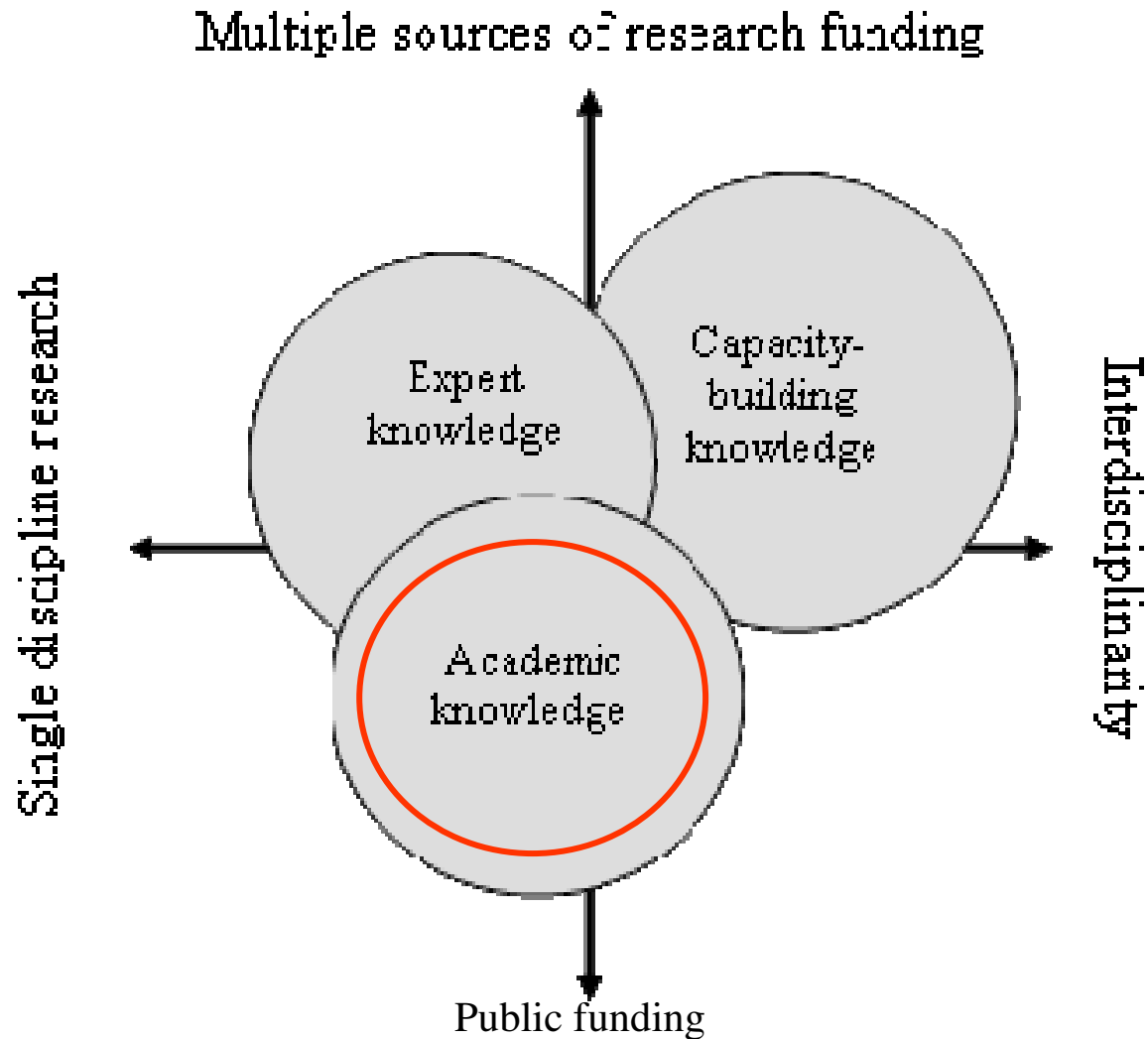
Three scenarios for the future of SSH:



Capacity-building knowledge:

- Much SSH research **no longer takes place within the university**, and **no longer abides by traditional disciplinary divisions**.
- SSH research is **fully integrated into industry and technological development**, and contributes to the development of new products. Researchers enjoy **private funding** in addition to their public sources of finance.
- Most of the research is **interdisciplinary**. SSH researchers are able to impact on decision making in whole new spheres, and have unprecedented access to funds.
- There is **increased demand for research knowledge** and knowledge based on intensely interdisciplinary research for problem-oriented research.
- There is a direct relation between the generation and the use of knowledge. **Knowledge production of this type is by definition goal- and task-oriented** and not organised according to specific disciplines.

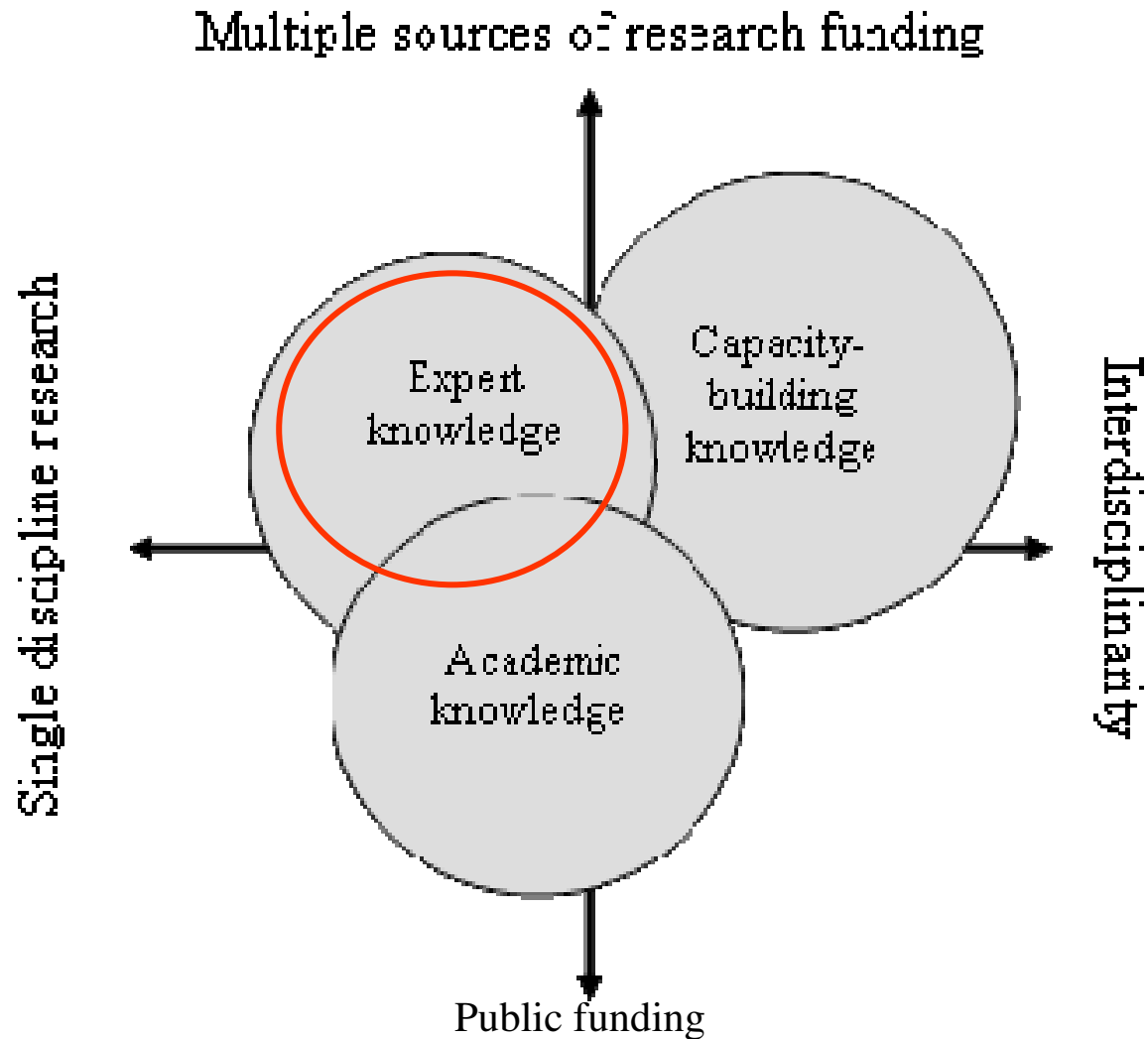
SSH- Futures Scenarios



Academic knowledge: “traditional academic research”

- Most SSH research is **university-based** and **publicly funded**.
- Research is **less interdisciplinary** than the previous scenario. When it is interdisciplinary, it tends to remain within the SSH.
- Research follows the **traditional academic mode of production** and is submitted to the traditional academic logic of verification

SSH- Futures Scenarios



Expert knowledge:

- **Single-disciplinary research** funded by **multiple sources**.
- Two research approaches are mixed: research following the **traditional academic logic funded** by the public, and a specific **instrumental kind of “applied” research**.
- **Private funding** may sometimes come from industry, where the contribution of SSH research is recognised as crucial to new product development. **SSH researchers are thus integrated into product development processes**, but each according to their own field of expertise.
- **Knowledge is produced for the direct benefit of clients**, and is verified or falsified by the practices that are based on it

The future structure of SSH - Conclusions

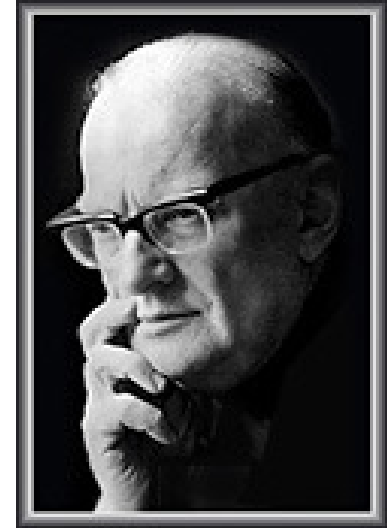
- Two main driving forces were identified as impacting most powerfully on the structure of SSH:
 - **level of interdisciplinarity**
 - **source and amount of funding**
- It is likely that a high level of interdisciplinarity will be required, be that in terms of research methodologies, researchers' skills, collaboration with other academic disciplines, as well as with industry.
- It is important that SSH research will become an integral part in the development of new technologies and products.

The future structure of SSH - Recommendations

- To emphasize the acquisition of interdisciplinary skills during academics' graduate training, as well as at regular intervals in their academic careers
- To encourage researchers to conduct interdisciplinary research by means of special programs and funding
- To devote special attention to the humanities and invest efforts in sustaining its various disciplines
- To pay special attention to dedicated activities that would heighten the impact of the SSH research in political decision-making and that would enhance cooperation between industry and the academy

“For every expert there is an equal and opposite expert.”

Sir Arthur C. Clarke



Thank you for your attention!

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