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Didier Georgakakis

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Does society matter? A reflexive testimony on the defense of social sciences and humanities in Horizon Europe

Didier Georgakakis (with Marylou Ham)

College of Europe - Université Paris 1.

This paper is a rough translation of an interview whose publication in French is forthcoming. I would like to thank Marylou Ham, who works with me on this project and who elaborated the questionnaire. The purpose of this interview was to bring my experience as a representative of the Social Science and Humanity (SSH) association at the EU level back to the surface and try to gain some reflexivity from it. The aim was to produce a perspective on the making of European research policy in SHS within Horizon Europe from a situated position. I also wanted to reveal the conditions for mobilising scientific knowledge for action and the effects of this ordeal on the theoretical and practical construction of the field of eurocracy (Georgakakis, Rowell 2013) as a political battleground for worldviews that include visions of societies.

I believe this exercise of anthropological reflexivity, as Bourdieu would have said, is relevant to the panel addressing the question of the construction of European society. In summary, I have spent almost 10 years working inside our representative organisations to defend the budget of SSH inside Horizon Europe. I am pleased to say that this has been successful. Instead of disappearing as many had predicted, we (and I must say that the week before the trilogue we were not so many in this “we”) managed to triple the budget of the Cluster 2 created a year before on topics such as democracy, social transformations and culture. Although successful, this process showed that there are still many shortcomings in the vision of SSH, the policy related to it and the people and organisations defending their cause. This experience provides a clear example of the relationship between the process of building a European policy and European societies, or the making of a European society. It shows how this latter is constructed, supported (or not), in what condition, with what bias, and how policies, even when they are generous on their principle, are taken by a process that weighs their capacity to tackle social issues and to contribute to build a European society.

In chronological terms, the experiment began at the end of 2011, during the Horizon 2020 negotiations (for the period 2014-2020), which finally provided a collaborative research programme for the humanities and social sciences with a budget of €1 billion. It continues with the contested implementation of the programme from 2014 onwards (around a third of the budget going to other programmes, including a large part to digital) and then the mid-term review - the mid-programme evaluation that also helps to shape the next programme. The experience we are reporting on here culminates in the negotiations that will lead to the Horizon Europe programme and the eventual adoption of a tripled budget, i.e. just over €2 billion compared with the previous €650 million for the social sciences and humanities on the night of 10-11 December 2020.

The interview is designed to provide a successive understanding of the conditions of this ten-year commitment to the cause of European social sciences and humanities, the socio-political topography of the Framework Programme for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences and the mobilisations involved, their modus operandi and the conditions that, from this point of view, have shifted the lines and included democracy in the programme. Finally, the interview looks back at the links between theory and action and a more general intellectual assessment.

The oral presentation is reserved for a summary of the conclusions on the theme.

As a first question, I'd like you to go back over the origins of your involvement? How did you come to get involved in what was to become the Horizon Europe programme?

As your question relates to the genesis of my commitment, you will allow me to go back a little way to say that I had already been a major institutional activist. To cut a long story short, a career in higher education was socially unlikely: my father only had his school-leaving certificate, I wasn't awarded a research grant (largely due to my own fault and the unnaturalness of a university career) and I did and finished my thesis at a time when there was (already!) a shortage of political science students. In the mid-90s, there were around a hundred applications for each MCF post, and this was the time of the first mobilisations of PhD students, which led to the creation of the ANCMSP and then the AECSP¹. If I hadn't been lucky enough to be offered a paper in *Politix* and then in *Actes de la recherche*, I don't know whether I would have continued. Just after my thesis, however, I was recruited by the Strasbourg law faculty with a proposal for a project on Europe. There were very few of us political scientists and we were a bit 'on mission'. I had read Karady's work on the Durkheimians for my thesis and realised that the institutionalisation of a discipline was far from self-evident. Once R. Dorandeu left the management of the IEP and Yves Deloye joined the IUF, the 'oblate effect' came into full play and I became involved with the team in the construction of the master's degree in European politics, the integration of the European Political Sociology Group into the CNRS and the founding, of a major field of political and social science, which was simply unthinkable in the local configuration at the time of the delirious LMD process², or the coordination of the university's relationship with ENA in a European pole and the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Alsace. I had also been active in the AECSP and then elected as the only MCF to the AFSP. This was an important condition for the future, both from the point of view of institutional activism and in terms of the experience and contacts I acquired.

It was at the AFSP, moreover, that the commitment to defending European SHS began. The AFSP was a member of the European Confederation of Political Science Associations (ECPSA), which was a kind of informal coordination of national political science associations led by Suzanne Schutemeyer, then President of the German Political Science Association, and in which Pascale Laborier participated when she was Director of the Marc Bloch Centre in Berlin. On his return to France, Yves Deloye, who had by then become Secretary General of the AFSP, suggested that I should represent the AFSP. In the meantime, I had become a professor and had been awarded a Jean Monnet Chair. This 'European thing' didn't interest many people and Yves knew my sense of commitment to the discipline. For my part, I was curious to experiment with transnational relations that I claimed to theorise and teach elsewhere...

The AECSP's meetings were used to discuss the implementation of the Bologna process, how teaching and research were evaluated in the various countries, and the possibility of a European political science *bachelor's degree curriculum* (which never came to fruition), but a change in circumstances reawakened my activism and transformed my role at the end of 2011. The first drafts of the EU's eighth research framework programme, which was to become Horizon 2020, no longer included an autonomous budget for SHS, as had been the case for several framework programmes. This was all the more of a shock given that the 'Citizenship and Governance' challenge of the Sixth Framework Programme (2002) had been (whatever one thinks of its substance) a high point in the recognition of European SHS, both in terms of disseminating the programme to the scientific community and at institutional level (with a substantial budget, a directorate within DG Research,

¹ List of acronyms in Annexes.

² The Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate system introduced by the Bologna Process.

etc.)³. Less than ten years later, the Commission's Director-General for Research was promoting an innovation shock and a doctrine of *mainstreaming*, which consisted of ensuring that the social sciences and humanities no longer existed solely as a support for specific themes (digital, transport, health, energy, etc.). Coordination was established around a group of European research organisations⁴, led by Rudiger Klein, former director of the European Science Foundation, whom I had met in Strasbourg when I was working at the Maison Interuniversitaire des Sciences de l'Homme-Alsace (MISHA). A former member of the Royal Academy of Amsterdam, he had contacted a group of representatives of SHS associations, including the ECPSA, to mobilise a wider audience. At the time, there were few EU specialists on the ECPSA board and I was geographically the closest to Amsterdam, so the president asked me to represent the confederation there.

This coordination met several times afterwards, in Brussels, then Berlin, then of course Paris for its constituent (I'll come back to this), but the meeting in Amsterdam in December 2011 was for me the starting point. There were only three of us from France, the ECPR was there too, I think, and around thirty representatives from a wide range of disciplines, from medievalists to musicologists. Rudiger was on the podium with representatives who had signed an open letter to the Commissioner and who seemed to be familiar with relations with the Commission. The others were new to us. In the debates, the fact that I was a political scientist and that I had a discourse on the European institutions made a difference compared with other organisations that had troops but were more outsiders in the European political game; some time later Rudiger contacted me again so that ECPSA could mobilise its networks to approach members of parliament. Unlike many European scholarly associations, the (at least potential) strength of ECPSA lay in the fact that we represented not only the most Europeanised section of political scientists, but also national associations with access both to national governments and to national and European networks in Brussels. This proved important right up to the end. In any case, I discovered that Rudiger had links with Philippe Keraudren, who was the deputy head of the Commission's SHS unit, and who I came to understand played an important role for SHS and its resistance. He was a French political scientist who had written a very critical thesis with V. Wright on public management under Thatcher and had been admitted to the Agreg in political science before joining the Commission. I had read him and also met him 10 years earlier at a conference on the Commission's administrative reforms and then on trade unionism in the European civil service, which was one of my subjects. Both quickly convinced me that the SHS were under threat and that there was an urgent need to mobilise.

How do you see your role at the time? Who were the stakeholders more generally?

My role? I think that initially I was more involved with others than with myself. Incidentally, I wasn't a fan of clusters. Marine de Lassalle and I had studied them in our book on the uses of the white paper on governance, and it seemed to me that they created a mainstream effect to the benefit of studies that weren't always very rich. When Philippe became an evaluator, however, he convinced me that it was one of the rare instruments of European integration in the SHS, inviting teams to cross the borders of methodological nationalism, to join transnational networks, and potentially (I stress the word potential, because the mechanism is far from always being the same) to propose alternatives to the dominant international (and often American) models. At a time when the value of a cluster for the SHS was being questioned, several national agencies were anticipating the disappearance of the European budget and, in the wake of the 2008 crisis, were slashing their own

³. Find out more about :

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/608697/EPRS_IDA\(2017\)608697_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/608697/EPRS_IDA(2017)608697_EN.pdf)

⁴ ESF - European Science Foundation: Standing Committees for the Humanities and Social Sciences; ECHIC - European Consortium of Humanities Institutes and Centres; Net4Society - Network of SSH National Contact Points.

SHS budgets. Informed by the debate on the categories of public action in the mid-90s⁵, it seemed to me that without a European budget category, the humanities and social sciences would suffer in all the Member States. There were warnings to this effect in several countries. In France, the context of autonomy and the subsequent mergers of universities that I had experienced meant that there was a strong risk that the humanities and social sciences would be perceived as 'orchid sciences', as the Germans put it, compared with the hard sciences, which were behemoths. So we had to avoid the domino effect and fight for the budget category.

In this context, strengthening the coordination of representative associations at European level seemed to be a priority. When I was deputy director of the MSH d'Alsace, I went to the office of Potocnik, who was Research Commissioner in 2007, to ask him to come to Strasbourg. I knew a civil servant there who was involved in my research on the European civil service and she had alerted me to the lack of political representation of the SHS and the absence of a contact person: "We don't know how to deal with you", she told me. The system outlined by what was to become *the European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH)*, in the form of an association representing the broadest spectrum of European disciplinary or scholarly associations, seemed to me to be more than desirable. This is to say that in a somewhat diffuse transnational reality, we are carried along by resonances, by the experiences of institutions and their players... With Olivier Bouin, we decided to get involved in the institutionalisation of EASSH and joined a sort of provisional board. For my part, I contributed to a constituent assembly in the Richelieu amphitheatre at the Sorbonne. It was just after the 2015 attacks, and Najat Vallaud Belcaceem, whose office I had approached to open our meeting, had to cancel at the last minute, but sent us a letter that made a strong impression on the representatives present. Olivier had worked on the statutes and brought in resources for the MSH so that there would be a permanent job. He was later elected president. EASSH was an important platform, even if there were limits (much of what I ended up doing was with ECPSA and the resistant fraction of the commission, and the information from my former students in the system). But EASSH made it possible for meetings with the Commission's SHS unit to be set up and routinised, and for positions argued in the European Parliament to be put forward in more consistent and official forms (which did not rule out more individual interventions or interventions in the name of political science). She subsequently invited the Directors-General and the EP rapporteur to attend her general meeting. In short, it embodied the SHS in a landscape where it was not.

Seen from the Research Directorate-General (DG), and in particular the unit in charge of SHS, the topography is indeed as follows. First of all, there is the Commission's hierarchy, the competing units within the Research DG, and one suspects that the SHS unit was far from being the most powerful. The unit had to exist in the face of the others, and depending on who was leading it and how much they were investing, there were opportunistic strategies, avoidance or caution. The other Directorates-General are formally present when there is an interservice procedure, but informally, with tension here between DG Connect and the more social DGs, such as Social Affairs or Education and Culture. Then there are the Member States and the Parliament, whose arenas vary according to the stage of the negotiations.

In concrete terms, the Member States (MS) are represented on the programme committee, whose members (civil servants) participate in defining the themes at the initiative of the Commission and vote on the budget proposal each year in the comitology process⁶. Initially, the representatives of the United Kingdom and Ireland, from which the Commissioner came, were pro-active in favour of the SHS. If the Horizon 2020 budget had been saved, it was because the Commissioner was due to give a speech to the British Academy defending the SHS, and a civil servant who had long served the

⁵. See the work of Dubois and Buton, for example, published at the turn of the 90s and 2000s.

⁶ Comitology refers to the procedures that regulate the executive power of the European Commission. See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:comitology>

cause of the SHS advised her, in the car, to include a passage aiming for a minimum budget for the SHS. But, as in many committees, the director representing the Commission carries enormous weight, and most of the Member State representatives follow suit. There is obviously some leeway, depending on who is around the table, what is being said unofficially and how well the players know each other. Co-ordination is more complicated in the MS: representatives have to co-ordinate with others while keeping in line with their own administrative or political hierarchy, and this often results in a dynamic where everyone waits for the other. For example, at the start of the implementation process, we could see that things weren't adding up and we wanted the Member States to vote against. We alerted the cabinets of the French and German ministries, which were following our lead on the substance, but this ended in a blank vote, because neither of the parties involved was certain of the other's position and because, even in the case of large States, there is a reluctance to go against 'the' Commission, whose internal divisions are not necessarily known. In this case, the German director had also gone to Berlin to plead against the community associations and not find himself outvoted by his own country. Here we see "national capital" in action⁷. Another concrete embodiment of the Member States, the Council working group plays a major role in the design of the framework programmes. But as research is part of the working group on competitiveness, the SHS are de *facto* in a delicate position with regard to innovation and everything that implies rapid economic profit.

This brings me to the Parliament, where there were scattered relays throughout the ten years and which was decisive at the end. The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy was the Commission's natural interlocutor, but not necessarily the best channel for us at the outset. It was the committee most composed of scientists from the hard sciences⁸. In general political terms, the arguments in favour of innovation carried much more weight than the SHS. And this was true even on the left, which was intuitively closer: for it, the horizon budget was a lever for creating jobs. Although messages were put across at the hearing of Commissioner Moedas, the only MEP to plead the case was an AFD MEP... If you like, there is no obvious difference between funding innovation based on the belief that we are going to create a European Google and SHS. But things have evolved with time and the personal knowledge of the rapporteurs. The Budget Committee was also very important, at several points, as were the contacts maintained with various national delegations, in particular by ECPSA. Sometimes with mistakes: it is not impossible that Parliament's support for the 'science for society' programme in Horizon 2020 is the product of a confusion in the translation of 'social science' brought by a colleague to a former President of Parliament. Of course, it's not just the MEPs who have played a role here, but also the Parliament's political staff and administrators, both consistently and at decisive moments, such as the last dialogue to decide on the budget.

The final group for the Commission are the stake-holders. Before the arrival of EASSH, these were mainly large universities that had formed associations to represent their interests. The Director General relied on the LERU⁹, which brings together the leading universities in terms of research (Oxford, KUL, Leiden, Strasbourg for France, etc.) and whose representatives' attitude towards the SHS is sometimes a little condescending, even a little paternalistic, especially when the SHS community manifests autonomist tendencies. The Dutch Director General was from Leiden and there was a direct axis. The mainstreaming doctrine suited them very well, and in fact their SHS representative (himself Dutch) had advocated it at meetings in Brussels. As a result of competition, the Guild¹⁰ was more receptive, but I think it was created a little later. Others such as Coimbra were

⁷. Georgakakis & Vauchez, "Le concept de champ à l'épreuve de l'Europe", in Johanna Siméant and Bertrand Réau (eds.), *Enquêtes globales en sciences sociales*, ed. CNRS, 2015, pp. 197-220.

⁸ The European Parliament is divided into twenty specialised standing committees, whose centrality in the parliamentary arena varies.

⁹. <https://www.leru.org/members>

¹⁰. <https://www.the-guild.eu/>

more neutral, but also useful for getting messages across. Here again, the role of EASSH, and the direct links it maintains with colleagues from its associations (I saw a lot of them when I sat on the Europaeum committee¹¹), got things moving. In very concrete terms, beyond the apparatus and organisations, the people mobilised are always more or less the same, and there are major network effects. Observational participation here confirms the perspective on the major players which is the political science grid, but at the same time it makes them more concrete by showing how much the men and women who represent them matter, as well as their current and past relationships, which are very difficult to reconstruct in their entirety in any other way.

We understand the importance of national dynamics and networking, but you say little about France. Does this mean that it counted for little? If so, does this more generally reflect a particular relationship to European involvement?

At the time I discovered it, but also afterwards, the French had very little involvement in the process. At the Amsterdam meeting, there were three of us: François Heran, Olivier Bouin (whom I was to meet again later within the Athena Alliance and then in all the EASSH stories), and myself. To get involved at this level, you already have to understand the problem, be committed to the cause and to an organisation, accept having to defend it in English (which, by the way, was not my strong point), but also have a minimum knowledge of Europe and not see it as a necessarily fatal labyrinth. There were also other difficulties at the time. The first was that the French representatives were in complete agreement with the change in direction. The senior official representing France on the programme committee seemed convinced by the *mainstreaming of SHS*. It was as if, as the privileged interlocutor on both sides, he was in a position of quasi-capture with little opposition, either through lack of interest or fear of confrontation (his longevity shows that he had power). As a member of the IUF jury in 2011, I took advantage of the occasion to see Wauquiez's SHS adviser at the time, who was Minister for Research and, incidentally, a former colleague from Strasbourg, and to alert him. He was not aware of this and I understood that the French position had changed as a result. Later, with Fioraso under the left, we had the feeling that the Ministry was completely committed to the cause of innovation (hence the idea of asking the Minister for Education to attend the constituent assembly in Paris), and then interest returned with Thierry Mandon, for whom Pascale Laborier was the SHS adviser (among other things).

To illustrate the disconnect that exists between Paris and Brussels, I remember a visit to the cabinet, where in the corridor advisers to whom I told that I had come for a European dossier told me "oula l'Europe, ça on ne touche pas, quand on fait quelque chose ça ne va jamais, faut aller au SGAE¹²". At the SGAE, however, decisions are made in favour of the major projects and technologies that France is defending, which is understandable, but does not serve the SHS. More generally, the status of what happens in Brussels appeared to me throughout this experience to be very ambivalent in France. There is a kind of superficial interest, especially when you are convinced that Europe is an extension of France. But as soon as you get into the detail, no one is interested. At the AFSP, at the outset, there was a sincere interest. I remember strong encouragement from Jean-Luc Parodi¹³ when he was still on the board, and then from successive management tandems. But very soon Horizon 2020 and then Europe were systematically relegated to the miscellaneous items at the very end of meetings, in favour of more internal issues. After that, I'm not complaining, successive boards have

¹¹. Europaeum is a network of cooperation between "leading European universities" led by Oxford and which includes Paris 1 and many of the universities that are members of the organisations mentioned above. <https://europaeum.org>

¹². The General Secretariat for European Affairs, which is responsible for coordinating European policies in France.

¹³. Jean Luc Parodi (1937-2022) was a highly influential General Secretary of the AFSP between 1979 and 1999 and continued to serve thereafter. <https://www.afsp.info/hommage-a-jean-luc-parodi-1937-2022/>

always trusted me. Where things moved a little more was at the Athena Alliance. Jean Emile Gombert, after having chaired the MSH in Rennes (on whose scientific council I was a member), had been elected by CPU to head the Alliance, and the alliance was fighting a battle with a remarkable secretary general and very clear manifestos for the social sciences, such as sciences within science with Jacques Commaille¹⁴. I asked him about it and he immediately understood, and got me involved in the discussions on internationalisation, where Olivier Bouin was also involved.

So we are really dealing with two fairly watertight levels. In Brussels, in the immediate vicinity of the SHS unit, it was a question of survival. Then beyond that circle, a sort of great desert. From this point of view, the costs of entry, but also of maintaining a presence and especially an active presence, are high. This says something about the "integration" process, as has been shown by all those who deal with the unequal access of interest groups or civil society.

Were external relays envisaged?

The open letter to the Commissioner in 2011 had made an impact, but it was difficult to reproduce. In 2014 we launched a petition that I didn't believe in. We had less than ten thousand signatories, which wasn't too bad, but compared to the tens of thousands of colleagues involved in the humanities and social sciences, that's not much. So the disconnection I was talking about is not just with France. For most colleagues, these issues are distant and bureaucratic. The press was also considered. We wrote an open letter in *Libération* in November 2013¹⁵, which about ten of us signed. Open letters, as I subsequently came to understand, are useful when you already have support and someone on the inside (perhaps within the Commission hierarchy or the Parliament in particular) uses them to advance your cause. This is what I did at the time of the 2019 dialogue with a note in the mainland: it was in fact a message addressed to the members of the dialogue, many of whom were already aware of it but who could make use of it or not¹⁶.

As Tarrow, de la Porta, Fillieul and others demonstrated a long time ago, European social mobilisations have costs (material, cultural, etc.) that make them difficult, which is not to say that they don't exist or that they are impossible, but in order to succeed, the collective mobilised must be recognised as the bearer of an issue in and by the struggles in the field. So beyond access, the practice of space is crucial. You have to invest in the domesticity of the field. In the case of the SHS, the collective was very weakly federated, and it was not in a position to mobilise a bunch of "Nobel Prize winners" to embody science by an effect of immediacy or obviousness, to remain concrete. From this point of view, playing from the outside seemed both complicated and unprofitable, unlike entering the domesticity of the field and, above all, multiplying the points of contact. But that doesn't mean you have to be tied hand and foot: it is possible to use a close external presence to send out messages and take up the cause or fight (particularly when it comes to defeating an opponent) through different points of entry, for example journalists or politicians from the commissioner's entourage, permanent representatives who want to open up new areas of play, external associations or institutions, but adjacent to the sector's official borders, which share converging causes - in this case contacts with the European Trade Union Confederation, European student associations, the Council of Europe, and at the decisive moment Civil Society Europe, the hub of European civil society platforms represented at¹⁷. The field (of forces and struggles) is not the

¹⁴. Commaille, J., & Thibault, F. 2014. *Des sciences dans la Science*. Paris: Éditions A. Athéna. doi :10.4000/books.allianceathena.192

¹⁵. https://www.liberation.fr/culture/2013/11/28/quel-futur-pour-la-recherche-en-sciences-humaines-et-sociales-en-europe_962718/

¹⁶. <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/12/07/democratie-horizon-europe/>

¹⁷. Europe civil society, includes groups of NGOs such as the social platform, the green 10, concorde, etc: see <https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/our-network/>

official sector, so the margins of play fluctuate with the redefinition of its boundaries within the limits that can be mobilised. Positions within the institutional machine also include many nuances, again hardly detectable by observing official scenes alone, and even less by conventional interviews. Without the discreet internal resistance of certain civil servants, things would have been very different.

The fact remains that while it is important to pose a problem or make it a reality, it is not a question of posturing, which can be done from afar (and in reality without much effect), but not much in the domestic arena. Here, participation "obliges", and either you join in (that's the submissive posture), or you work to propose alternatives in the general interest.

Specifically, how was the decision taken to move to a budget that contributes to democracy and social transformation?

I was returning from a big rave in Bratislava on the future of the European humanities and social sciences, organised by DG Research. I was tired and said to myself "we won't win, nobody cares, not even us". In Bratislava, I had been invited by the Commission to summarise a panel on 'Fair, secure and democratic societies'. It was typical: the apparatchiks had flocked to the migration panel, where there was plenty of money at the time. In our panel, there were fewer people, intellectuals... and most of the Commission's intermediary agents, including several people with a long history in the sector who were probably launching a trial balloon. I'd found it useful to summarise what I'd said, and a civil servant came to see me to tell me that she'd liked what I'd said, and above all to give me some subtle advice on how to express it better. When I got home, I said to myself, why not? What if, rather than fighting for a budget and a community, we sent out a message about the contribution of research to democracy and social justice?

Initially, my partners weren't completely convinced, it sounded too much like political science. Internally, we had to argue a lot about the fact that this was potentially of interest to all SHS, from art to economics, that it was a priori more mobilising than having budgets, about the objective need for the EU to embody something other than a policeman for the economy or the market, and also that if the Director-General continued to have the intention of taking SHS out of the budget, he would have to say publicly that he was sitting on democracy. Some time later came the Brexit, and at the bi-annual meeting with the Commission's SHS unit, where we were presented with the major themes for the end of Horizon 2020 on 'governance', the technological turnaround, etc., we took the floor with our Austrian colleague, we spoke with our Austrian colleague who chairs the European Association of Sociologists, with which we have a strong link, to say that it was becoming urgent to move away from 'techno' routines on governance and innovation, and to take the problems of the times more seriously, and in this case democracy and the risks of inequality posed by the technological, social and ecological transformations underway.

Then a very important event happened. Philippe died in September. I knew he was ill, but he was confident in the care he was receiving. It was brutal and a terrible shock. We were the same age and had become friends over the ten years of our struggle, because it was a struggle. And then two things happened. The first is that there's a ceremony in the Van Merlan church, which is the church for European civil servants in the European quarter, next to the library and archives. There's a huge crowd there to pay their respects, not everyone has access to the hall, and there's a great deal of emotion. I have the feeling that his director general, who is present (the future is there too), understands something. Then there was a meeting where the whole community of SHS policy insiders was present. Later, Graspe - a Commission think-tank - of which Philippe was a leader, organised a tribute conference in which the new Director General took part¹⁸. It's terrible to think

¹⁸. <https://graspe.eu/document/grasp40.pdf>

that this type of event was needed, but the mobilisation of the SHS community had become visible in the field, and the theme was taken up in a different way, this time by Commission staff.

That's not to say that the theme came easily. We had an EASSH general meeting a few weeks later. A tribute was paid to Philippe the day before, but the day after, the president of the European alliance didn't want to hear about democracy and social change. As master of ceremonies, he used every trick in the book: no decisions, pauses when a majority was emerging, changing the subject. It's extremely violent, and just like during the LMD and other negotiations, I find myself the only one arguing. Philippe's betrayal infuriates me. It's very tense, and when you take the President to task over his political responsibility, you lose the vast majority of the soft players and all those who are there to bring in money, not to mention those who are magnetised by institutional positions. In short, things are off to a bad start. Miraculously, the two Commission officials invited, one a British retiree and the other a Greek, who had come to summarise (and no doubt replace Philippe, whom he knew well), came to my defence in a very flexible way. The British official said that if the Commission drew up its proposal within a month, it would be a "window of opportunity" that should not be missed. In short, he did a useful job of educating the representatives, who knew neither the EU nor the jargon of public policy, with the authority of an official who knew the process inside out. But above all, the second official summarised and ended up saying that democracy and social justice were important priorities for Juncker, and that we could probably get political support if we chose to defend the theme of democracy and social change. The President finally agreed and the majority of the participants were relieved. From an ethnographic point of view, it's incredible to see, even after theorising about it, the extent to which European institutional capital produces effects. I'm experiencing here what I've shown elsewhere, that in practice there's a big gap between those at the heart of the process and those on the periphery, and/or who, like the apparatchik pole, reproduce the official watchwords in a form of structural following. Fortunately, the representatives of the institutions present belonged to the critical faction!

With this new "democracy" framework, the balance of power has been completely reversed. What are the effects on relations with Commission staff? Have you had any conversations with them about this, in which they expressed surprise at the lack of innovation or alternative proposals from researchers?

First of all, it has to be said that while the adoption of this framework has moved things forward, there is no direct link between this and the tripling of the budget. It's not all magic. The compromise that held sway for a long time was the doubling of the budget with the triptych democracy/social transformation/culture but with the disappearance of the theme of democracy from the title of the cluster. It was at the last triologue that the tripling was imposed under pressure from the Parliament's rapporteurs. For me, however, it remains a black box. We had contacted all the key players personally, right up to the last minute as far as I was concerned, but I don't know how it all came about (that's for future research). All I got was a message from a former student the next morning and EASSH had other, less favourable information.

But your question raises more general questions about the relationship between researchers and the administration, and that's a good thing because there's nothing obvious about it. I do think that the principle of bureaucracy is that there should be no waves. Hence the surprise of the hierarchy in the face of the guerrilla warfare being waged (petitions, parliamentary questions, demands made to the cabinet or at meetings). In fact, it was because there were vague questions about how the budget was being used that regular meetings were set up with the SHS community (EASSH, ECPSA, ECHIC, ESA and two or three others). But this does not describe the ordinary situations and expectations. On a more routine level, civil servants develop forms of clientele, which they build up and use in return. I hadn't understood it at that point, but building policy communities is part of the job, which is probably why the concept has been so successful in the literature. After that, the civil

servants use them or not and translate them into their organisational game according to the degree of conviction they have in the subject, the institutional visibility it gives them (for example, a Greek head of unit, who was just passing through and not very committed to the sector's cause, had pushed the issue of migration very hard), their need to oil relations, take on ideas, the temperature or limit external mobilisation. We have seen this in other consultation relationships between the administration and stakeholders or civil society (the academic community is somewhere between the two), but in fact the Commission consults a lot; the transnational situation means that links are *a priori* weak with those on the other side of the table (in this case, some of them knew each other, but it had taken years). This reinforces the centrality of the civil servants, but also encourages them to reach out and build relationships with those in whom a kind of professional trust is being built up at the same time.

This sometimes means that the papers submitted are taken up directly. At the end of the process, thanks to the Athena Alliance, we drew up a paper on possible themes, which was largely taken up¹⁹. Nobody in the Commission had gambled on the threefold increase that we finally achieved at the triologue, and we had to deliver quickly, which opened up an opportunity. There was also a loyalty to Philippe. But most of the time, it's more complicated, because of the formal process of validating topics, with the programme committee, inter-institutional and inter-service discussions, etc. In any case, it's a very complex process. In any case, it's hard to know what's going to come out of the sausage machine. Only the officials in charge have the ability to control more or less. If you are in a relationship of trust, you will be asked for advice. Others push according to classic self-interest (such as a university that wants to boost one of its sectors, etc.). But it seems to me that, in practice, civil servants make a lot of use of networks of acquaintances. As I have written, trust seems to me to be an important part of the capital required to produce effects.

On a more formal level, hearings define a situation that is interesting to observe by participating in them. It is an objectification of the meeting between the protagonists, interests and values in every sense of the term. It's about taking the temperature of the 'community', reactivating contacts, but just as much about delivering messages about what is playable and what is not. It's an opportunity for the administration to define the possibilities into which the stakeholders are more or less moulded. Sometimes, and particularly at times of budget negotiation, the aim is to enlist them in the defence of the sector. That's when civil servants tell you: "It's time to make your voice heard". From J. Richardson to Laurens, much has been said about the ambivalent relationship between civil servants and interest representatives. The value of observing participation undoubtedly allows us to insist on the time factor. With time, your eyes get used to the darkness, and you are quicker to understand and act; time also helps to build trust (or not, depending on how you behave). This is one of the great inequalities: not everyone has the time. Presidents of associations have short terms of office, which is what makes associations with employees so strong. In ten years, we've had 3 or 4 presidents of the European Sociological Association, and the same goes for the representatives of the EPCR, and so on. And permanence is linked to residency, to borrow a term from Vimont in the RFAP²⁰. You've been there for a long time and you're also on the spot, available for a coffee or a meeting that is decided at the last minute, which is more complicated 800 km away. This is clearly a crucial point, an inequality of access, but also a potential weakness in the autonomy of the position, because you are caught up in field effects (of dependency, *of illusio*).

To make an initial link with your work, could it be said that this long-term involvement has made you a "permanent fixture in the field"?

¹⁹. See *Graspe, op.cit.*

²⁰. CLOOS Jim, VIMONT Pierre, "Les rouages du Conseil et du Conseil européen", *Revue française d'administration publique*, 2021/4 (N° 180), p. 979-994.

Permanence is not a state, it's a type of capital, which you acquire over time, but which you lose by being less assiduous. As a professor of European affairs, teaching in Bruges and based in Brussels, in friendship networks made up of people in the environment of the institutions, I was already a bit on the periphery of the field. But entering its political domesticity, to put it that way, is something else. Compared to a more external position, you accumulate more central resources. From the outset, you identify the key players: the director general, the directors in charge, the SHS teams and some of their competitors, their internal differences and nuances, their sociology (including their objective constraints), sometimes their psychology in a spontaneous form (never sufficient, but useful, a player who is afraid of his shadow or who is there to make himself look good does not necessarily carry the same weight as another...). You gain access. Then you learn to play by the rules or the constraints and resources of the field... At the start of the process, I was asked to meet a member of the Irish Commissioner's cabinet and speak on behalf of the nascent SHS alliance. Initially she received me in French and as J. Monnet, but as soon as I raised the fact that the Director-General was implementing the budget in a spirit different from the political agreement promoted by her Commissioner, the language changed and I was entitled to a full-scale defence. I later realised that the role of Directors General was obviously crucial in getting cabinet members back down to the departments at the end of their term of office. In short, I had been a bit naive (or a victim of a form of politicking which consists of over-estimating the weight of political authority compared to administrative mechanisms).

But tenure also affects the way in which you are both perceived (whether or not you count) and perceived. Part of my leeway probably came from the fact that I was one of the few active lecturers. At an EASSH meeting, I asked who around the table had papers to mark and there were barely a tenth of us. The others came from the representative offices of one association or another, and then the VPs of the universities joined in. Others had been researchers or teachers at some point in their careers, but had gone over to the side of what Bourdieu called the "research apparatchiks". The term is a bit violent because people also do it for causes, but let's just say that they very quickly become more bureaucrats than researchers. This can make a big difference to interactions. First of all, you're not economically dependent, but above all you're sometimes listened to differently, as a representative of an association, but also as a J. Monnet professor at the Sorbonne and the College of Europe. In an environment where people don't like generalities, it wasn't out of place for me to defend a general vision of the humanities and social sciences and also of the European interest and democracy, which was actually more difficult for others to hold. The fact that I was less at ease when it came to getting into the detail of instruments or budget calculations also gave me a certain freedom, and enabled me to experience things in a disinterested way. Over the long term and with consistency, this undoubtedly gave me more credibility than a 'pure' lobbyist.

In this case, tenure has mainly been a question of personal or individual capital, insofar as the position of the collectives had to be built up. But in a world of representatives, you are nothing without collective capital, i.e. as a representative embodying (with varying degrees of success) the material and symbolic weight of what you represent (an institution, a group, a country, etc.). This was the strength of the LERU, which can still promote its flagship universities such as Oxford and its allies (Leuven, etc.). In the case of ECPSA and EASSH, we had to showcase the unified dimension, our networks and the potential of our contribution. ECPSA's access was crucial on a number of occasions, particularly during the last dialogue. In addition to collective capital, personal capital counts, both as cultural capital (i.e. knowledge of the institutions and the game) and as personal social capital. It compensates for organisational weaknesses: here ECPSA had no permanent staff, and EASSH only one. From this point of view, my former students were a precious asset; they gave me information and contacts, and some of them were really crucial at pivotal moments. I also had contacts through my field research into the field and its players. Taking part in conferences and symposia was also a way of mobilising people. For example, at the European Sociological Association, I was asked to give a keynote speech on European SHS policy, which enabled me to

mobilise people and make useful contacts. In other places I met Portuguese people who were important to Moedas. This is how I was able to raise the urgent need for a research budget on democracy with the new Director General for Research even before he was appointed, and even before I knew he was going to be. During the last dialogue, my arguments were refined by the advice of an acquaintance who knew the EPP well and the discourse of the German Presidency... After that, permanence can be a trap if it leads you to follow the bandwagon. There's a constant balancing act between commitment and distancing, and in a context where those you are presenting are not very keen on you, intellectual rupture is a useful tool.

Specifically, to make the link with your research and your work, you mentioned the confirmation of various hypotheses about the field; were there any elements that surprised you in this mobilisation experience?

There was a lot of confirmation of the role of players, capital, the place of the permanent staff of the machine, intermittent investments, disconnections between spaces, the functioning of representation and organisations, or more generally the struggle to define the European interest, and so on. However, I have the feeling that if I had started out with classic hypotheses, such as the balance of power in Parliament, partisan or ideological cleavages, or anything else of the order of major variables, I would quickly have concluded that it was mission impossible. The field is a space of permanent exchanges and transactions which, in everyday relations, cuts across rigid institutional or political blocs. It includes fragilities, mental barriers linked to positions (and the authority that derives from them) and also opportunities when appointments are made or positions changed. Entering the domesticity of the field opens up the gaze and the margins for action. This presupposes that we take the field seriously (as a field of forces and struggles) and do not limit ourselves to its objectification through prosopography. Prosopography is methodologically useful, but it is used to analyse structures of strength and therefore the chances of taking action or achieving results in a struggle. This has always been my project, even if I have written too little about public action.

Be that as it may, the dialogue between theory and practice was constant and the vision of what was possible was forged over time. It was not a rational calculation to say at T + 2, we're going to hit such and such an area of the map, as lobbyists do. From this point of view, questioning the structures of authority and the way in which they structure practices, beliefs and visions of the game was crucial. It implied that there was, by definition, a game; the break with any model based on the dichotomies structure/agency, actors/institutions or on the reification of institutional collectives, also reveals possibilities, between the desirable and the fatalism of structure. But other models were also useful. The managing director we 'fought' had all the attributes of the sectoral elites analysed by Genieys and Hassenteufel, and there are other examples to be taken from the sociology of instruments and their uses, of course. When you are in practice, you refine your reading grids, and moreover your pedagogy. They are more firmly anchored, provided that you situate what you observe in relation to what you don't see, and don't over-generalise. There are lots of arenas that I haven't entered, and that I've only reconstructed on the basis of insider information. It's better than a remote interview, but it's still just information that has to be situated in the history and sociology of the sector, its stakeholders, and its relationships with other sectors, in a kind of constant back-and-forth or triangulation between what we're told, what the appropriate literature says, and the interpretative model we're building.

You asked me if there were any surprises. The discreet strength of the *insiders* seemed to me to be really strong, in both camps. Without the resistant faction, we wouldn't have had access to important information, the ability to read and understand the implementation of the budget, the decoding of official discourse (this is very important to take into account for those who work on discourse or 'ideas' from a distance). The effects of followership are also impressive; the European institutional field is not prone to them, but the investments that have to be made (transnational and

institutional networks, language, technical dimensions) to avoid falling into them are in fact considerable. Once again, we know this, but seeing it...

There were also some instructive disappointments. One failure, which is a learning experience and puts heavy political logic back into interpretation, is the disappearance of democracy from the title of the cluster (which has become "Culture, Creativity and Inclusive society"). I don't know at which levels of the institutions this was decided: was it a compromise within the EPP to avoid antagonising the Hungarians or the Poles? Was it a compromise within the EPP to avoid antagonising the Hungarians or the Poles? Was it the de facto influence of the strong lobbies that exist on culture and cultural heritage? I don't know, but it's typical of the decoupling and display games at play in the manufacture of compromise and of the fact that democracy is never a long quiet river. Another instructive frustration was that when Olivier and I indicated that we were in the process of winning over the major orientations, we can't say that we aroused much interest: the authorities in France took us for gentle mythomaniacs at best, even though they have since been considerably strengthened at the Ministry, the NCP and the CNRS. I had dreamt that the tripling of the budget and the emphasis on democracy would encourage researchers with something to show for their efforts to seize these levers, but that *was* typically *illusory*, as a colleague and friend told me. In the same way, I wasn't surprised, but I can't help feeling disappointed when I see the effects of routinisation and reclusure. In the way the topics are written, democracy is equated with the rules of transparency of the union or the rule of law, proven instruments rather than going further. In short, the categories of bureaucratic understanding quickly regain their form and their power.

Can you give any examples of intellectual development after the experiment?

There are aspects that I've had to re-evaluate. For example, in my scientific work, I sometimes downplay multi-scale games, which are extremely important. At some point, if you want to get MPs, yes, you have to go back through the national channel. This is because the president of the Spanish scientific association also mentioned it, and we've had a lot of contact with Polish allies of the Italians, etc., to get messages back, depending on the distribution of rapporteurs. I've always thought that on the intermittent side, we were already a bit more capitalized on representativeness than on the permanent side, which is stronger on consensus-building and embodying the general. When you talk to an MP through their language, you don't represent more people, but the cause is much more embodied. This suggests more vertical or horizontal action depending on the position on the axis of the field, i.e. more vertical on the intermittent pole, more horizontal on the permanent pole. Theory allowed us to subsume this, experience illustrates it, and for someone who has focused a great deal of his research on the European civil service, this rebalances the picture.

In the same vein, experience leads me to believe that we need to go beyond capital and focus our analyses more on investment. This is important, in terms of commitment, as a civil servant in the sector, as a stakeholder, and at the same time in terms of disinvestment or the absence of investment in other areas of the region. It's a question of individual or collective energy, of libido if you like, but also of the institutions that invest or disinvest.

And then there's something of a more epistemological reflection, not yet complete, but which I'll leave you with as such. In practice, we also spend a lot of time going back and forth between multiple hermeneutics. To test our interpretations, we move from agents to collectives, from history to the situation, from the field to the institutions (with the tempo of the procedure, the formal hierarchies and the structure of different arenas counting for a lot), and the same applies to the cultural dimensions (institutional cultures, national cultures). In my research, I used my sociology of professions and then of fields to break with the monopoly of institutionalist and culturalist perspectives. But once you've deconstructed them, you have to reintroduce them. It's a bit obvious,

but it's important to remember that there's a school vision of research that consists of opposing models rather than integrating them. I had a disconcerting experience with culture. At the EASSH Constituent Assembly, I proposed that it should set itself up as a parliament for the SHS. Beforehand, I had met someone in the office of the President of the Economic and Social Council who supported the idea of formally inviting the members of the institutions and the relevant members of the ESC to a kind of plenary session. The benefits seemed obvious to me. I was told that we were not legitimate (which was not the case for me, since I had been elected by the AFSP and then by the ECPSA as vice-president), and above all, for many of my British, Nordic and German colleagues, parliament was something of a sacred institution. A fine illustration (and above all manifestation) of a national political habitus, their reaction was visceral, and in the Richelieu amphitheatre (despite the fact that it had been explained as the place to be in 1968) only Gisèle Sapiro reminded them that there had been a writers' parliament. In short, my idea, tinged with the 'night of the fourth of August', failed miserably. In any case, when you're an actor, you spend your time navigating between different interpretations of reality. I think it's worth practising double hermeneutics, or this multiscalar hermeneutic, to refine the analysis by varying different objectivations of the structure in which the action takes place, rather than opposing them like variables. While the field makes it possible to break with institutional, cultural or ideological boundaries, it is necessary to succeed in reintroducing them at certain points in the reasoning. In the same way, other models seem to me to remain abstractions without knowledge of the players and the field (not to mention the field). This is important in the context of Europe, which is precisely a game of scale and whose institutionalisation is very much at stake.

To conclude, I'd like to say that it was an unprecedented success from a political point of view: we thought the budget would disappear and we ended up tripling it. Nobody would have bet on that. As I said earlier, this is the result of various processes, of which I know only a tiny part, but I can't help thinking that a reflexive return to practice and the construction of its knowledge tools, at the time or afterwards, is a prerequisite for trying to free ourselves, at least temporarily, from what seems to be a foregone conclusion, and for advancing scientific knowledge and the conditions for political action together. For me, this is also a kind of *acquis*, and all the more reason for us to share more of these experiences.

Appendices

List of acronyms

AFSP: French Political Science Association

ALLEA-ALL European Academies

ANCMSP: National Association of Candidates for Professions in Political Science

AECSP: Association of Teachers and Researchers in Political Science

EASSH: European Alliance of Social Sciences and Humanities

ECPR: European Consortium for Political Research

ECPSA: European Confederation of National Political Science Associations

ENA: École Nationale d'Administration (National School of Administration)

ESA: European Sociological Association

DG Research: Directorate-General for Research at the European Commission

DG Connect: Directorate-General for Communication Networks, Content and Technologies at the European Commission

GRASPE: Reflection Group on the Future of the European Public Service