

## SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

**Action number: CA15137**

**STSM title: Societal impact of SSH research: the case of Switzerland**

**STSM start and end date: 23/10/2018 to 05/11/2018**

**Grantee name: Corina Balaban**

### PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

(max.200 words)

The aim of this STSM was to enable an open discussion with policy-makers about research impact, through research. It was also a means to conduct fieldwork (interviews and document analysis) to produce research insights that support the objective of ENRESSH in developing recommendations regarding societal impact of SSH research. The study set out to investigate the following research questions:

- How do different actors in Switzerland think about societal impact of SSH research?
  - How is impact conceptualised and enacted across different levels (national, organisational, departmental/ disciplinary, individual)?
- How can the insights from the question above be used to create new synergies between academics and policy-makers that could support SSH research in achieving its highest potential?

The questions built on the idea that novel approaches to impact and its evaluation need to include some form of socially distributed responsibility and stakeholder involvement, as well as be subject to multiple accountabilities (professional, managerial) (Galleron et al, 2017).

Switzerland was selected as a particularly good case to investigate these questions, given its high performance in terms of research and innovation yet its relative lack of specific policies on research impact.

### DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

(max.500 words)

The research stay took place at the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, which enabled me to gain access to influential actors in science policy in Switzerland, and facilitated the organisation of interviews with academics at two Swiss universities (University of Zürich and University of Lausanne). The host (Dr. Marlene Iseli – ENRESSH member) kindly provided me with a working space in Bern (also with the approval of the secretary general Dr. Markus Zürcher). Their expertise in research funding and their knowledge of the Swiss science system was particularly useful during my stay. In turn, they also benefitted from my long-standing expertise in higher education research through exchange of ideas and talks.

Prior to the visit, and with the support of my host Dr. Marlene Iseli, I mapped the key actors in Swiss research policy in Switzerland and secured access to most of them:

- Swiss National Science Foundation
- Swiss Science Council
- Swissuniversities (rectors' association)

- Swiss Academy of Arts and Sciences

In addition, we also identified university-based respondents and scheduled interviews with them; these were university leaders, heads of school, and academics in selected fields: Philosophy and Anthropology. During my stay in Switzerland, I managed to conduct a total of 12 interviews (of approximately 45 min each) and scheduled further interviews to be conducted over Skype with those respondents who were not available for an interview during my stay.

The research stay was also an excellent opportunity to collect a whole range of documents and policy briefs issued by different stakeholders. I am currently analysing these alongside the interviews.

Furthermore, my host also helped me set up individual appointments with researchers/ academics who were based in Switzerland and had knowledge of impact-related issues in the Swiss context (e.g. Dr. Michael Ochsner, Dr. Sven Hug, Prof. Mike Shafer, Prof. Dietmar Braun). These discussions were very fruitful for the overall development of the project as they enhanced my understanding of Swiss research policy.

I also gave a presentation at the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences (SAGW), organised as part of a series called science@noon. The talk was attended by Swiss national policy-makers and research funders and discussed the case of the UK in relation to societal impact of the SSH.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED**

As detailed above, the main two purposes of this research visit were 1) to conduct interviews with stakeholders and academics, and 2) to facilitate a conversation with policy-makers about societal impact of the SSH. These two goals were successfully achieved.

In terms of data collection, I conducted 12 interviews with stakeholders and academics, I had numerous conversations with Swiss-based academics and I engaged in fruitful discussions with key national stakeholders in Bern. The next steps are to get the interviews transcribed, coded and analysed alongside the documents that I have collected during the STSM. In addition, these will also be analysed alongside equivalent data from the UK – which I have been collecting throughout the past year and is still in progress. At this stage, however, a few preliminary findings/ observations have emerged:

- The Swiss context for research – and impact – is very different from the one in the UK. In Switzerland there are a lot more bottom-up initiatives, more freedom to pursue curiosity-driven research, and less focus on the evaluation of impact. In fact, ‘impact’ as a concept is rarely used and there is no strong narrative about it. Instead, the discussion is more centred on ‘innovation’. There is, however, a trend towards more metrics and accountability.
- Policy-making in Switzerland relies heavily on the notion of ‘consensus’. Therefore, many decisions about governance are made informally rather than being embedded in formal structures. It was pointed to me by various interviewees that this is because Switzerland is a small country, which creates the need for people to collaborate amicably and maintain relationships. This has implications for how ‘policy-making’ is done and how certain initiatives are implemented in universities (e.g. unclear promotion structures/ formal incentives for impactful research).
- This last point is quite speculative, but the fact that Switzerland is a direct democracy also seemed to influence the ways in which people thought about the roles of research in society. On the one hand, because citizens vote quite frequently on a whole range of issues and therefore have the power to change laws, it is in the interest of science to keep the public informed by participating in public debate/ media. On the other hand, citizens are responsive and relatively engaged because they want to be informed on these issues. I believe this is a very particular national context that heavily influences the role that SSH research has – and could have – in society.

Secondly, by giving a presentation at the SAGW and having discussions with stakeholders about the SSH in Switzerland – and beyond – I created a space for reflection on the topic of societal impact and the possible consequences of different kinds of policies and actions. For instance, in presenting the UK case, my talk raised awareness about the implications of measuring and rewarding impact in certain ways; it ultimately pointed to the responsibility of stakeholders to create – through the right funding incentives – the kind of research environment that would enable the SSH thrive.

#### **FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)**

The STSM developed a collaboration between the Institute of Innovation Research at The University of Manchester (MIOIR) and the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as its umbrella organisation, the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences.

Overall, this was a very productive and successful research stay that enabled me to build networks and take the time to understand the wider context for impact in Switzerland that I would have not been able to do otherwise. Long-term, I believe this kind of immersive research stay will enable me – and the ENRESSH network – to establish a constructive dialogue with stakeholders based on a nuanced understanding of the importance of national characteristics for impact-related policies and practices.

The next steps now in terms of collaborative outputs are the following:

- I have been invited to contribute a short entry for the upcoming *Bulletin on Social Innovation* of the Swiss Academy of the Humanities and Social Sciences (SAGW).
- I am currently drafting a joint blog entry in collaboration with my host Dr. Marlene Iseli. We are targeting the LSE Impact blog to reach a wider audience.
- I have been invited by Dr. Stefan DeJong to disseminate the findings of this STSM to the ENRESSH community through the newsletter.
- Within the next year, when the interview data has been coded and analysed, I anticipate a co-authored academic publication discussing the links between characteristics of research spaces and the ways in which impact is conceptualised and enacted.
- More recently, I have also become more involved in ENRESSH activities. I participated in a CARES meeting organised as a joint initiative between Work Group 2 (led by Dr. Paul Benneworth) and the Early Career special interest group in ENRESSH. The workshop took place in Vienna on the 1st December 2018 following the Austrian Presidency of the EU Council Conference on 'Impact of Social Sciences and Humanities for a European Research Agenda – Valuation of SSH in mission-oriented research'.