

Article

Research “Values” in the Humanities: Funding Policies, Evaluation, and Cultural Resources. Some Introductory Remarks

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Abstract: In her capacity as guest editor, the author introduces a set of essays examining the trends, risks, needs, pressures, and prospects of the humanities after recent reforms to tertiary education throughout Europe. By focusing on the educational, cultural, and social value of research in the humanities, which also provide economic and democratic benefits, this special issue focuses on three key topics: “funding policies”, “evaluation”, and “cultural resources”. This article provides the background to the subject matter (Section 1); a reflection on the controversial issues of quality control, measures of research productivity, and funding decisions as key drivers changing the humanities (Section 2); an overview of the current difficulties and prospects for “modernizing” the humanities (Section 3); the rationale for this special issue (Section 4); the context and a synopsis of the contributions, showing how and why these position papers by members of the humanities cluster of the Academia Europaea can provide this debate with new tools of analysis and diagnosis (Section 5). Finally, the concluding remarks highlight the Academia Europaea’s actions for the humanities (Section 6).

Keywords: humanities; modernization; quality control; research funds; knowledge production; values; risks and needs; Academia Europaea

1. Introduction: Background for This Special Issue

In response to challenges “too big to be dealt with by any one country acting alone”, such as the economic crisis, changing demographics, and unemployment (especially for young people), in 2011 Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and

Sport issued an agenda conveying this key message: “[...] we need more creative, flexible and entrepreneurial young people who are equipped for the challenges of today’s ever changing work environment. This is the key message from the Europe 2020 strategy, and from the Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education that I put forward in 2011” ([1], p. 4). According to it, by 2020 the EU should have provided at least 40% of its youth with a university-level qualification ([1], p. 4). In recent years the “modernization” of higher education in Europe has developed along some common lines. This process has changed the academic scene of Western societies even more uniformly than the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration (signed by the higher education ministers from France, Germany, Italy, and the UK), the 1999 Bologna Declaration, and the 2000–2010 Lisbon Agenda, with their emphasis on ensuring comparability and competition, curricular reforms, the introduction of a three-cycle system, internal quality assurance, and the establishment of nationwide accreditation systems.

These new common trends include the development of mass university to guarantee a higher level of education and competence for as many individuals as possible, so that they can make a qualified economic contribution to the society; and a growing pressure on resources and the demand on universities to support innovation and to foster graduates’ employability, according to the leitmotiv that universities must develop “entrepreneurial” strategies. The result was the extension of the functions of higher education systems, their growing openness to their social and economic environment,¹ the urgent need to find new funding sources, and the spread and intensification of assessing procedures for the allocation of resources to universities.

Parallel explicit goals exist for national governments, such as reducing or ceasing direct public funding to universities, decentralizing control (distant steering), promoting universities as autonomous corporate bodies, and assessing closer links between funding and performance, leading academic institutions to respond by involving stakeholders in research funding, developing new patterns of managerial control, increasing the demand for “relevance” of higher educational system, and assessing research evaluation with external reviewers in the attempt to raise its standards of quality.²

¹ In [2] Alessandro Cavalli (Center for Study and Research on Higher Education, University of Pavia), and Roberto Moscati (University of Milano-Bicocca) have investigated the changes in the academic systems of five different European countries connected with this growing opening of higher education institutions to their social and economic environment.

² Timo Aarrevaara (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki) has examined the consequences of the increasing demand for and growing expectations of “relevance” on the freedom of research and teaching, in light of a survey on the universities of Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, and the UK [3]. According to Michele Rostan (Center for Study and Research on Higher Education Systems, University of Pavia), “managerialism” (the strengthening of the role of the administrative staff) and governments’ systems of distant steering imply the “stronger accountability of universities and the use of assessment devices”, viewed as an attack on the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself, without regard to its financial value [4]. A special issue of *EuroScientist* devoted to research evaluation [5] argues against the fairness of the current systems, and questions the “dogma of excellence”, with contributions by Arran Frood [6] and Francesco Sylos Labini [7].

2. University Dynamics within Europe

These newly re-styled universities, together with what has been called “the utilitarian pressures that dismissed the arts as self-indulgent pursuits incapable of addressing real-world problems” ([8], p. 73), have set new and controversial targets for the academic humanities. For example, Stefan Collini has argued against the 37 categories designed by the Research Excellence Framework—the UK method of selectively allocating research funds to universities—as indicators of “research impacts”; 36 of them account for creating new businesses, commercializing new products or processes, and attracting investments. Only the last indicator remains indeterminate, to appear more suitable for the humanities, blandly headed “other quality of life benefits” (quoted in [8], p. 75). John Armstrong has suggested, however, that the humanities might themselves have contributed to their troubles; they require radical reform and should pursue great educational endeavors and contribute powerfully to the good education of executives: “Business is such a vast and central part of the contemporary world that it would be crazy to write it off as unworthy of serious attention from the humanities” ([9], p. 15). Indeed, changes and pressures had been justified to overcome the humanists’ “ivory-tower syndrome”, to counteract the parasitism of some established researchers (who are state employees), and to be progressively marginalized as irrelevant. According to Armstrong, “the humanities need to become more eloquent, more focused on other people, more adapt at facing competition, more connected to the economy, more sympathetic to aspiration” ([9], p. 37).

Recently, in the *New York Times*, the historian of philosophy Robert Pasnau noted that members of philosophy departments are mocked by scientists, quoting, among others, the renowned theoretical physicist and mathematician Freeman Dyson’s characterization of philosophy today as “a toothless relic of past glories”. Pasnau asks whether there are “broader cultural factors at work, perhaps something to do with a general decline in respect for the humanities”, to frame such dismissal of philosophy as “an antiquated relic of our prescientific past” within the wider context of the erosion of the social value of the humanities: “if even philosophy is dismissed as a waste of time for being insufficiently scientific, where does that leave those other modes of humanistic inquiry?” [10]. Since no one would question the relevance of the natural or social sciences, whereas the presumed marginal contribution of the humanities to our societies is so often stressed, it is no wonder that throughout Europe governing boards of public universities have invited humanities faculties to shift their focus towards delivering “useful knowledge”, to reorganize themselves operationally, to compete for prominence based on scholarly “output” by demanding that staff adapt their research activities to maximize the faculty’s performance in national evaluation systems, to play more visible roles in the global educational market, in the international job market, or in the regional labor market, and to favor networks of cooperating universities to improve the visibility and “impact” of their area of expertise.

As is well known, such reforms have also raised a widespread “litany of discontents”,³ this time involving both humanists and scientists, especially regarding quantification of qualitative aspects of research products (e.g., originality, creativity, and innovation) and the fallacies and shortcomings of bibliometrics. For instance, in a 2010 article published in *Chimia* (volume 64), with the provocative

³ The expression is from Keith Thomas, Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford and former President of the British Academy [11].

title “The follies of citation indices and academic ranking lists. A brief commentary to ‘Bibliometrics as weapons of mass citation’”,⁴ the 1991 Nobel Prize Laureate in Chemistry, Richard Ernst, highlighted the inadequacy of quantitative measures for judging the quality of science publications and projects, insisting “Start reading papers instead of merely rating them by counting citations” (quoted in [12], pp. 1, 30, 92, 108). As has been remarked, “in the life of scholars today too much time is taken up by evaluating others and being evaluated by others” ([12], p. 2); the scientific community is increasingly critical of the “*perpetuum mobiles* of evaluations” and of the strategies used to allocate available research funds, and it is increasingly aware of the risks these pose to research, didactics, and the university mission. Metrics for research quality remain highly controversial.

Cases in point are league tables, especially when connected to funding decisions. While universities from Western Europe and USA still play a leading role, many of the East Asian countries (especially India and China) have strategically invested in developing their higher education for their economic growth, and are increasingly emerging in worldwide university rankings as world-class universities. The problematic “reliability” of influential rankings, which orient educational choices and academic careers, such as The Times Higher Education (THE), the QS World University Rankings, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking (ARWU), to cite just a few, is therefore global. Interviewed about the increasing influence of university ranking over the years, Simon Marginson, professor of international higher education at the University of London, remarked: “Largely managed by non-state organizations in publishing industry or within universities themselves, ranking has become a form of regulation as powerful in shaping practical university behavior as the requirements of States” (quoted in [13]). Onora O’Neill, honorary professor emeritus of ethics and political philosophy at the University of Cambridge, observes:

The very diversity of universities, and the fact that ranking is a high stakes affair that matters *all too much* to university administrators, and indeed to academics and students, paradoxically ensures that the league tables will *not* offer good ways of holding universities to account: they hold universities to account for *achieving or appearing to achieve* some *comparative* success. But that success is not always evidence of excellence, and excellence is not always reflected in rankings in league tables ([14], p. 43).

Research evaluation has become pivotal, with career progression hinging on judgments by peers and worthy recipients of grant funding. Evolving solutions for research evaluation that react against the “diktat of the impact factor” and try to counteract the proliferation of papers (and fees to access them) are under study as viable alternatives to peer review, such as open peer review, downloads, media, and social media coverage—“the possibility for reviewers to share comments on each other’s reviews in advance of an editorial decision” [6], a practice that is not yet widespread but which offers the advantage of self-instruction, for each reviewer confronts different viewpoints on the same subject, and is led to appreciate both the limit and the additional value of her or his critical contribution. However,

⁴ In the title of his paper, Richard Ernst refers to A. Molinié and G. Bodenhausen’s article on bibliometrics, published in the same volume of *Chimia* (see [12], p. 30).

“altmetrics” (*i.e.*, “alternative metrics”)⁵ is still to be accepted by the scholarly community. Recent ways of avoiding problems with ranking academic institutions that do not share common standards of measure suggest featuring their differentiation in targets and classes of performance. For instance, to classify universities under such broad headings as the traditional duo of research universities *vs.* teaching universities widens the “reputation gap” between research and teaching. The U-Multirank, launched in May 2014 with the financial support of the EU, operates on a different basis: though it also provides “readymade” rankings (as to research, economy, and business), it is designed for students to help them create their own ranking and find the universities that match their interests; it does not focus only on research and provides no league table, but allows a comparative analysis among universities in different areas such as teaching and learning, knowledge transfer, international orientation, and regional engagement [15]. It is worth noting that this new tool has been criticized “for being complicated and meaningless but expensive”.⁶

Prominent issues and concerns raised by the vast literature and current discussion of research assessments include the vast amount of premature, unnecessary publications to meet deadlines for submitting “products” to various agencies for research evaluation; the stress on delivering “usable” results quickly, hence planning “successful” short-range products with narrow scope; and, more importantly, the shift in academic priorities to production of “units” in higher-ranked types of publications. This shift creates “perverse incentives” such as dismissing contributions in lower-ranked products (often so classified regardless of their scientific quality), for instance reviews, proceedings, collections of essays, or any publication in journals with only “local” authorship. A case in point is the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH), which in July 2014 issued ERIH PLUS, the new reference index for scientific journals in the humanities and the social sciences, now accessible at the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) website [16]. As usual, the index’s goal is “to enhance the global visibility of high-quality research in the humanities and social sciences across Europe”. Unfortunately, if one looks at the “criteria for inclusion of new journals”, one sees that scientific journals with local authorship “will not be included in the ERIH PLUS list”. NSD determines the authorship of journals merely on the arithmetic basis that “two thirds of the authors published in the journal are from the same institution”. The rationale for excluding the valorization of any possible high-quality research output in journals issued by academic institutions (e.g., universities, departments, or research centers) as a forum from (not for) their members, is the puzzling and questionable consideration that for a journal which primarily represents an institution’s own researchers, “questions can be raised as to whether external peer review can function satisfactorily” [*sic*]. It is worth mentioning that only journals with national or international authorship can be listed (the former is when more than two-thirds of the authors published in the journal are from the same country and the latter when fewer than two-thirds of the authors are from the same country).⁷

⁵ Alternative metrics were born in a digital environment: they account for new ways of communicating scientific research and can be used to complement traditional methods; their goal is to capture data that cover downloads, views, and citation counts, to measure the impact of a video abstract or a blog, *etc.*

⁶ See [13]. See also *infra* O’Neill’s essay.

⁷ I expect a rapid decline of journals with so-called “local” authorship, irrespective of their tradition, institutional prestige, and dissemination roles, for academic institutions will reconsider investing in them and no good researchers will feel

Furthermore, it has been observed that making reported peer-review the ultimate arbiter fosters conventionalism and conservatism, discouraging innovation and insight. In the same vein, in order to make review easier for panelists, the prevailing evaluation system encourages concentration on small incremental steps, penalizing comprehensive interdisciplinary work (which is more difficult to classify). Last but not least, the current criteria of evaluation reward hyperspecialization (the standard for academic excellence has become the highly specialized article in an English language journal with high impact factor for all the disciplines, humanities included), but to orient research production along these lines, seeking to achieve better scores, fosters narrow, fragmentary reference frames, almost inevitably undermining the officially desired relevance of “research products” to other fields, the public, and other activities and concerns.

Regarding didactics, it has been noted that the new-style programs require conceiving education as transmitting pre-packaged knowledge and favor proliferation of small didactic units, in which course materials are made easy to acquire and use in a short time, but which risks fragmenting course content. Moreover, when universities are ranked also according to completion rates, an easier way to ensure that more students pass their exams is to pressure teachers to be less demanding by generally lowering standards of evaluation for exams and dissertations; grade inflation has been generally observed, often linked to increasing students’ appreciation and teachers’ popularity. Finally, consequent risks for the university mission include a notable shift in academic priorities: to demote teaching as an inferior activity. Hiring, tenure, and promotion of academic staff is increasingly based upon collateral, “quantitative” indications of “quality”, whereas these are (at best) supplementary to actual expert review of an individual’s research and teaching.

This tendency has been countered by the 2013 report of the “High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education”, which has adopted the guiding principles that “both teaching and learning are fundamental core missions of our universities and colleges”, that “the preference of research over teaching in defining academic merit needs rebalancing”, that public and private funders “have an obligation to promote quality in teaching with the same commitment that they invest in research”. In this way, the report recommends that advancement in professional careers should take account of assessed teaching performance among other factors, because “good teaching, unlike good research, does not lead to easily verifiable results but consists rather in a process” that governing bodies should foster, reward, and make visible: “most of the international university rankings are biased heavily towards the more easily countable research publication citation indices, rather than looking at the wider university mission in areas as fundamental as teaching and learning which are less amenable to such head counts” ([1], pp. 15–16, 33, 36).

3. Humanities under Reform in a Digital Age

In no other research area is the situation so dramatic as to threaten the very existence of traditional fields of study (e.g., palaeography, philology, theoretical philosophy, geography, history of music) as

further motivated to submit contributions. It can be argued that scientific publishers and marketing strategies foster the opinion that in-house production of scientific literature is synonymous with low quality.

in the humanities.⁸ Against the common backdrop sketched above, humanists express specific concerns about the distorting effects of the link between funding and “performance”, where performance is misunderstood in terms of evaluating research only in regard to the name of the publisher, the number of citations,⁹ the influence of the journals, the fundamental value assigned to “impact factors”, and trusted citation indices and databases (e.g., Web of Science by Thomson Reuters, Scopus by Elsevier) that do not cover publications as translations or commentated editions, or mention whether a publication is international or national. Other areas of distinctive concern include the adjustment of research topics to panelists’ classifications, choice of topics based on the ability to deliver usable results quickly, and the closing of university programs on the basis of the number of students and exams.

It has also been stressed how humanistic studies written by non-Anglophone scholars from institutions outside the Anglophone world have significantly less chance of being accepted ([19], p. 13). This is underscored by the high rate of rejected papers that leading journals are often proud to show in order to obtain credit.¹⁰ In consequence of what has become standard practice in the sciences, the “traditional” humanistic way to present papers by *reading* pages of text, which requires prolonged and focused attention, has been challenged; however, when humanists who are neither digital natives nor Anglophones adopt forms of communication borrowed from the sciences, they risk renouncing their rigorous vocabulary and the complexity and nuance of arguments, and delivering simplified and unsatisfactory accounts to their audience. Hence, problems widely recognized in the humanities are: monolingualism (dominated by English); publishing conglomerates that impose their diktats on libraries; a

⁸ In Italy the “collapse” of the social cultural models embedded in the important humanistic national tradition has been exposed in “An appeal to the human sciences” signed by Asor Rosa, Esposito, and Galli della Loggia in December 2013 and published in the review *Il Mulino* [17]. The distinctive feature of this appeal is to regard the current economic crisis as a political crisis, which in turn mirrors the general decline of humanistic culture in Western societies. The political dimension is viewed as the interpretive key of Italian culture. According to the authors, to acknowledge the crisis of the humanities in the Italian universities implies acknowledging the crisis of Italian political thought, historically rooted in a literary, philosophical, and historical production, which from the 14th to the 19th century supplied intellectual tools, self-representation, ethical understanding of what is really human in mankind, cultural identity, and unification to a fragmented country. In this context, the elimination of the independent study of geography from the curricula of high schools is seen as a symptom of the loss of that national tradition that is *humanism* as a historically inherited set of cultural values, which should constitute the necessary background for conscious political agents.

⁹ Against the qualitative blindness of merely quantitative indicators, it has been observed that some frequently cited papers are cited by other academics precisely because they are flawed rather than excellent, and that citation counts “are highly vulnerable to gaming and manipulation” (see [18]).

¹⁰ The same bias towards Anglophone publication is also, Ken Westphal notes, a bias against the research of scholars at Anglophone institutions that they conduct, write and publish in other languages, though such scholars’ research is undoubtedly international (personal communication). As Lars Engwall (Emeritus Professor of Management at Uppsala University), Wim Blockmans (former Rector of The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences), and Denis Weaire (Emeritus Professor of Physics, Trinity College, Dublin) remark, taking issue with the applicability of bibliometrics to the distinctive publication cultures of the humanities and social sciences: “In these disciplines, Anglophone researchers may even be uninformed about a considerable body of knowledge published in other languages” ([12], p. 2).

lack of appealing, comprehensible communication of disciplinary results to the public; and, most importantly, the leadership of allegedly trustworthy citation indexes.

Marin Dacos, founding director of OpenEdition (CNRS, Aix-Marseille University), inquired into the reliability of Thomson Reuter's Web of Science (WOS) in 2014, regarding francophone humanities and social sciences. It turned out that "99% of French thousand most preeminent journals are entirely absent from the WOS, with a few (arbitrary) exceptions. *Annales*, a journal founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in 1929, and which gave rise to the eponymous and internationally renowned Annales school, is entirely overlooked by the WOS [...] and yet, it is the WOS that presides when it comes to defining the impact factor. [...] The slogan 'Covering the leading scholarly literature' is therefore bogus. [...] In its dealing with non-English speakers, the WOS's attitude smacks of arrogance, scorn and—some would claim—geographical, linguistic and disciplinary protectionism. The core of the HSS is thus absent from the WOS. Consequently, research organizations that [...] have grown accustomed to using the impact factor as a fundamental—if not unique—evaluative mechanism, have become inclined to think that the humanities and social sciences do not exist" ([20], p. 150).

A successful, viable strategy to overcome these difficulties, to adapt to ever more restricted budgets, and to modernize and re-invigorate the humanities, is disseminating research results through open access policies, to maximize efficient use of funds and to reach a wider public ([20], pp. 152–58); this is not without risk, in view of current proliferation of vanity presses, predatory publishers, and pseudo-scholarly journals that exploit the open-access model.¹¹ Other strategies include improving public engagement with academia, involving students in professional scholarship, and collaborating with computer science and cognitive research.

In 2006, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) roadmap [22] placed digital technology foremost (the next updated roadmap is slated for 2016), and the common strategic framework for the new 2014–2020 EU Research and Innovation Funding has "for the first time codified the social sciences and the humanities in its guidelines", fostering research on inclusive, innovative, reflective societies and on the exploration and preservation of the European cultural heritages ([21], p. 15). This unprecedented acknowledgment that helps the peoples of Europe face and understand large-scale social challenges (such as migration, demographic change, dynamics of assimilation, exclusion and self-exclusion, processes of "othering" and prospects for integration, and identifying cultural heritages) requires the resources and results of the social sciences and the humanities, and also offers genuine prospects for combining humanities and information sciences with social impact, and for outlining an intellectual and cultural European identity through scholarly cooperation, interdisciplinarity, and data-intensive, trans-national projects. Such measures "can be understood as an acknowledgment of the eminent role of SSH research" and research infrastructures are increasingly seen as "an indispensable foundation for cutting-edge research in Europe" ([23], p. 15).

In association with ESFRI, the framework of Horizon 2020 thus represents a turning point, strengthening the role and visibility of the social science and humanities (SSH) cluster in Europe,

¹¹ Critical analyses of scholarly open-access publishing are available at dedicated websites. As Joseph Stromberg remarks, the number of predatory journals has exploded. They spam scholars, offering to publish their work for a fee without actually conducting peer review. This malpractice is usually uncovered by submitting totally incoherent papers written by a random text generator and having them accepted for publication; see [21].

confirming a global trend also apparent in East Asia, where the 8th Humanities Research Forum in Thailand showed the necessity to rethink and “adapt” the humanities to respond to grand social and individual challenges.¹²

The interactive possibilities of the digital humanities have also nourished creative and critical forms ([8], p. 74), enabling and encouraging students to make online annotations and to contribute to translations of digital versions of ancient and modern classics.¹³ This is also apparent in Gregory Crane’s pioneering work since 1985. Crane is the editor-in-chief of The Perseus Digital Library [25] and professor of both classics and computer science at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts (USA). In 2012 he moved to Europe as an Alexander von Humboldt Professor. The University of Leipzig called him “with the aim of transforming its Department of Computer Science into a Digital Humanities Centre of world renown” ([26], p. 18). “Reimagining” humanities using the tools of the digital age and incorporating computer technology into the humanities has created an open source database for accessing primary documents, thus digitally conserving threatened cultural heritage goods and providing search engines (*i.e.*, “algorithms”) to trawl through huge collections of data. This has enabled scholars in the humanities to work on an unprecedentedly large scale with small teams and often within short periods of time. According to Gerhard Lauer, founding director of the Göttingen Centre for Digital Humanities, new computer-based infrastructures like the digital libraries have changed the speed of cultural analysis and deepened scholarly research, integrating data into “corpora” ([27], pp. 36–38). For instance, this is the new type of achievement offered by the project on the current destiny of European dialects, led by John Nerbonne, former President of the European Association for Digital Humanities and computer linguist at the University of Groningen ([26], p. 16), or by the use of large-scale data analysis to observe culture and trace broad social trends in analogy with genomics, launched by the computational lexicology of the American Erez Aiden and the French Jean-Baptiste Michel at Harvard University ([26], pp. 16–17). They called their e-research method “Culturomics”, evaluating millions of books in partnership with Google [28].

¹² See the rationale of the forthcoming international conference, “Changing Humanities in a Changing World” (Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand) to be held on 27–29 November 2014, organized in collaboration with the 8th Humanities Research Forum: “Our world is rapidly changing, and these changes—in communication, technology, politics, the economy and the environment—deeply and widely affect people across the globe. The problems these changes cause, whether at the personal or societal level, have become increasingly and overwhelmingly complex. Today’s digital world, for instance, has caused instability in the existing contrasts between globalization, nationalism and localism. It has also resulted in a reshaping of human thought and emotion. New ethics and values, new worldviews, new questions of the self, spirituality, and identity, have emerged even as some of the old standards persist. This requires a new understanding of the world and our societies beyond the existing frameworks. Scholarship in the humanities must adapt, both in its epistemological and methodological assumptions, to facilitate critical thinking and better responses to these challenges and complexities. The humanities, not in its confined, narrow role and specialization in language and communications, but in its broad approach to surrounding socioeconomic, political and cultural conditions, need to be rethought” [24].

¹³ See *infra* Mads Rosendahl Thomsen’s and Jan Baetens’ contributions on *Digital Humanities* and *Creative Teaching* in “No Future without Humanities: Literary Perspectives”. Thomsen’s position paper examines the cultural, pedagogical, and research sides of the digital approach in literary studies, focusing on Franco Moretti’s “exemplary scholar working”; Baetens explores the influence of digitalization on the invention of new forms of teaching and studying literature.

Last but not least, to design and manage collective, interactive, and collaborative projects addressed, say, to the global community of Latin learners, such as Internet platforms to translate and analyze classical texts, has dramatically raised not only the scale, but the funding ambitions of research programs in the e-humanities. For instance, the Alexander von Humboldt Professorship is valued at five million euros, providing Crane “with a level of funding almost undreamt of in the humanities” ([26], p. 20).¹⁴ It has also represented a huge source of inspiration for digital ideas in Germany, where the first Center for Digital Humanities was founded in Trier in 1998 to digitize the linguistic national treasure of the Brothers Grimm Dictionary. Germany is leading these developments in the digital humanities (DH), handsomely funding digital research infrastructures for cultural studies, university chairs on DH, courses, summer schools, associations, and centers.¹⁵ In June 2013, young researchers in the digital humanities met in Paris to discuss how the impact of research products such as databases and software could be properly evaluated, recognized, and included in assessments for jobs, research funding, *etc.*

This trend has not only raised nostalgic and outmoded concerns, such as “What will happen when mathematicians and technicians rush in where previously only intuition and interpretation, genius and poetry dared to tread?” More serious criticisms regard the impressive amount of research funds swallowed up by large-scale digital projects, granted the public sector’s funding orientation that “only bigger projects have a great impact factor” and that many decision-makers are natural scientists fascinated by quantitative, digital methods, and so are inclined to reward the use of software to support research in the humanities. Not only has humanities research often been on the periphery of funding agencies’ attention, but when it is on the agenda, the underlying belief that bigger projects, requiring major funds, have a greater impact factor also for the arts and the humanities, have often cancelled the provision for individual projects, regardless of scholarly caliber, as is apparent in many current procedures for distributing universities’ funding to departments¹⁶. In view of this exclusion, the risk of

¹⁴ According to Lilo Berg, in Germany: “The Federal Ministry of Research is investing some 19.5 million EUR” in Digital Humanities projects up to 2017, “and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft has announced a bilateral programme to expand infrastructure and develop services in cooperation with the American National Endowment for the Humanities” ([26], p. 21). By contrast, financial cuts plague the humanities in the rest of Europe as well as overseas. Paul Keen mentions the threat of the State University of New York at Albany to close their French, Italian, Classics, Russian, and theatre programs ([8], p. 75) and the Canadian federal government’s \$7 million dollar cut to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, which is the main source of research funding for academic humanists and social scientists ([8], p. 76).

¹⁵ Lilo Berg [26] refers to two major infrastructures: DARIAH [29] and CLARIN [30]. The German Federal Ministry of Research has granted funding DARIAH-DE of nearly 11 million euros up to 2016. The article also mentions the activation of 15 DH chairs at German Universities, with 15 Bachelor’s and Master’s courses in Digital Humanities (specializations in Digital media Computing, Digital History, Educational Technology, *etc.*); the Göttingen, Cologne, Mainz, Heidelberg, Munich, Frankfurt/Darmstadt Centers for Digital Humanities, the Tübingen e-Science Center, and two centers, in Leipzig and Berlin, under construction; among the associations, the DHD (Digital Humanities im deutschsprachigen Raum) was founded in 2012.

¹⁶ As an example of a more nuanced approach to supporting research, I wish to mention that, having adopted for years the exclusive model of “research teams” to allocate university funds to the various departments, in 2014 the governance of the University of Trieste decided that research projects could be submitted by departmental teams, interdepartmental groups, and also by individuals.

a cultural involution is twofold: on the one hand, to set up groups *ad hoc*, to invent artificial collaborations, to improvise research plans flawed by methodological heterogeneity; and on the other to promote and reinforce previously established research groups organized according to dominant academic hierarchies, which can easily work against originality, creativity, and merit.¹⁷

Other worries are the growing number of jobs given to computer scientists instead of subject specialists, despite the lack of guarantee for the longevity of the digitized material, and the increasing dependence on technology. More importantly, Martin Hose, Professor of Classical Philology at Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich, warns against “the danger of losing the general overview that enables us to differentiate between what is important and what is less important. A grasp of things in their entirety often emerges when ploughing through the books, but almost never when googling key words” ([26], p. 18). In the same vein, Gerhard Wolf, Professor of German at Bayreuth University, after surveying in 2012 students’ aptitude to study humanities subjects, warned against increasing deficits in orthography, punctuation, and grammar, declining vocabulary, and difficulties recalling data (when they can be seen on the Internet) and in textual comprehension. An interview in 2014 reports: “This negative trend is unbroken—Gerhard Wolf notes two years on—and Digital humanities are actually encouraging it” ([26], p. 16). This remark can also apply to forthcoming e-programs of teaching aids for classical languages, where the digital format will be used to also offer “computer games” ([26], p. 21).

4. Rationale for This Special Issue

This special issue of *Humanities* constructively addresses the range of problems just sketched, avoiding both simple pleas for the relevance of the humanities in Europe today, and also general complaints about the pervasive imperialism of the market-economy in our postmodern age with its devaluation of non-negotiable human values. By focusing on the educational, cultural, and social value of research in the humanities, which also provides economic and democratic benefits, the target of this issue is not to dismantle the “pernicious myth” that the humanities “are too subjective, or of unclear relevance, or of limited practical use and thus less vital than science or business or medicine” ([31], p. 7);¹⁸ but rather to examine three key topics: “funding policies”, “evaluation”, and “cultural

¹⁷ According to Donald B. Dingwell (Professor in the Department for Earth and Environmental Sciences, Ludwig-Maximilian-University of Munich, Chair of the Academia Europaea Section “Earth and Cosmic Sciences”, and 3rd European Research Council Secretary General): “Typically the choice of which activities are funded follows one of two approaches. The first involves some branch of the public sector, arriving at a set of priorities which should ‘guide’ the potential applicant in their choice of research theme. The second involves the establishment of an institution of considerable autonomy which then undertakes to accomplish all further aspects of the administration of funding selection, monitoring, and ex post evaluation. In the daily life of a researcher largely supported by public sector funds there has no doubt been a shift in very many countries towards the first model over the second. This creeping programming of the research ‘agenda’ is sometimes argued to be the result of a fair and comprehensive canvassing of the research community itself. The European Research Council marks a new point of departure for the research agenda of the European Commission. The ERC is an unrivalled model for the support of the intellectual health of Europe. The key attributes to which its funding decisions adhere are: researcher-driven decisions, excellence of the recipients, individual initiative, high-risk projects and no thematic prioritization” (personal communication).

¹⁸ Peter Fettner refers to [32].

resources”. This issue thus aims to offer a specific, multifaceted critical examination of the means, tools, and strategies for understanding what now transpires in the academic humanities, in order to devise better corrections or solutions from various perspectives and areas of expertise, and to explore new models and forms of research projects and communications, in order to reassess and reinforce international standards of quality for the humanistic studies.

As guest editor of this special issue and as a member of the Academia Europaea and also of the Department of Humanities at the University of Trieste, I conceived and solicited this set of position papers to provide and further promote contextualized diagnoses, more balanced judgment, and detailed awareness of the complexity of these controversial issues and developments, and of the risks involved in the exclusive adoption of one model over the others—as if there could be a “universally applicable” system to evaluate scholarly quality and support research (in the humanities, the social, medical, natural, and exact sciences). Taken together, these essays aim to provide better orientation within the shifting contours and constellations of groups, needs, efforts, and their effects (witting or unwitting) upon higher education in Europe today, by considering the specific strengths and weaknesses, and the *pros* and *contras*, of a rich variety of innovative solutions to these problems and dilemmas, while recognizing the need for sound practices and procedures for assessing the merits of research and teaching. Wim Blockmans noted that, for all disciplines, evaluation instruments should incorporate “a far greater breadth of indicators than just the bibliometric parameters, which tend to measure communication between peers over the short term” ([33], p. 94). There is an urgent need to relaunch humanistic studies and improve their visibility by exploring new opportunities and prospects, such as the advantages of experimenting with e-humanities methods in research and teaching, while remaining conscious of their limits and providing for bottom-up individual projects. Martin Wynne, in his article, “The Role of CLARIN in Digital Transformations in the Humanities”, remarks:

We need to follow the sciences in deciding priorities, adopting standards, reducing complexity and variety, but only as pragmatic measures to promote shared facilities and infrastructures. At the same time, we need to avoid the promotion of an excessively data-driven, empirical and scientific view of the humanities, and continue to defend the traditions of qualitative research in the humanities, and pursue the humanities for their own sake (quoted in [34], p. 132).

So within the framework of the Academia Europaea’s mission and position in the humanities, I have attempted to take full advantage of the components of its (AE) Humanities cluster and especially the unique pan-European membership of the Academia. Indeed, the uniformity of the changes and reforms in the modernization of the higher education system in Europe and the similarity of challenges, risks, and needs require pan-European reflection upon the many issues of common interest and experience, to enable a sound “modernizing” of the humanities. I therefore commend to the reader this special issue: a cohesive collection of position papers to provide an insightful overview of the issues sketched above from diverse disciplinary researchers, unified by their common focus. The papers of Naomi Segal (Literary & Theatrical Studies Section), Jürgen Mittelstrass (Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies Section), and Carolyn Gianturco (Musicology & History of Art & Architecture Section) were presented at a workshop I organized at the University of Trieste in May 2014, and form the original nucleus of this issue. A call for papers addressed to the Sections of the AE

Humanities cluster prompted several position papers, which enrich the picture from the Behavioral Sciences (Peter Scott), the Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies Section (Onora O’Neill), and the Literary & Theatrical Studies (the collective paper collated by the Section Chair, Svend Erik Larsen). The one essay here not from the *forum* of the Academia Europaea is a further contribution on funding policies presented by Henrik Stampe Lund (Center Administrator and Senior Executive Consultant of the Center of Excellence for International Courts, Faculty of Law, University of Copenhagen). From his perspective, focused on “codes”,—the principles stated in official documents and on aspects of research management—he helps extend the range of represented disciplines, approaches, and points of view.

5. Synopsis and Context of the Contributions

“Interdisciplinarity” has become a key word to set the agenda to relaunch the humanities. A research and teaching project promoted by a working group from five different faculties and departments of the University of Roma Tre (Italy), combining different competences and areas of expertise, was called “New Humanities”. By developing their practices of knowledge and learning, the leading researchers apparently went beyond the usual “academic dialogue between the humanities and the sciences (including social sciences)”. The experience of new research methodologies and teaching curricula, breaking institutional disciplinary barriers, led them to claim that these practices “would question the present epistemological order of the European university system”, with reference to the obsolescence of the Humboldt model with its disciplinary fragmentation ([35], pp. 415–35). A new model is seen to emerge in terms of the organization of competences and collaborative practices around problems: the shift is from “canons” or disciplinary labels to “clusters” ([35], p. 416); as Mario Biagioli, professor of the history of science at Harvard University, writes in his “Postdisciplinary Liaisons: Science Studies and the Humanities”, the emphasis is on “networks, assemblages, experimental systems, trading zones, and so on” (quoted in [35], p. 418).¹⁹

This and similar post-disciplinary moves have the merit of challenging the institutionalized abstractions of clear-cut disciplines and questioning the habitual soft/hard dichotomy between humanities and the sciences. They force the humanities to confront problems of definition and determination, of territory and position. This fundamental challenge is addressed by Naomi Segal’s paper “From Literature to Cultural Literacy”,²⁰ which presents a successful project focused on strategies for supporting literary studies within the framework of European research policy, as “a way of looking at social and cultural issues, especially issues of change and mobility, through the lens of literary thinking”. This project combines and catalyzes many of the problems in the humanities sketched above (*i.e.*, funding, social values, internationality, interdisciplinarity, multilinguism, and knowledge transfer), by examining four key topics: “cultural memory”, “migration and translation”, “electronic textuality”, and “biopolitics and the body” as “readable” social and cultural phenomena. Their legibility is defined

¹⁹ As remarked *infra* by Segal and Thomsen in “No Future without Humanities: Literary Perspectives”, it is worth noting that in 2000 (and 2013) Franco Moretti argued for abandoning “close reading” in literary studies in favour of a “distant reading” which focusses on kinds of “units” such as: devices, themes, tropes, genres and systems [36,37].

²⁰ See also *infra* Segal’s contribution in “No Future without Humanities: Literary Perspectives”, where she outlines the main changes in the field of literary and cultural studies.

through four categories: textuality, fictionality, rhetoricity, and historicity. By moving to trans-area studies, Segal's paper highlights characteristics of the literary studies in the humanities regarding their distinctive objects, purposes, and methods, warning against the risk that interdisciplinarity can clash with the sense of their specificity.

It has been observed that "in order to achieve the high aims set by Horizon 2020 and to come to a deeply-rooted grounding of SSH in the grand/societal challenges, it goes without saying that one of the major prerequisites is the enhancement of the 'visibility' of existing Humanities" ([34], p. 123). The issue of their visibility, organization, and model of funding within the European research context is brought to the forefront by Juergen Mittelstrass's thought-provoking analysis of the internal and external difficulties currently faced by humanistic studies. In "Humanities under Pressure," his critical comments on the situation today, with its overdoses of "paradigm shifts", "interdisciplinarity", and cross-border research, uncover a tendency towards mutual estrangement and isolation, with the eclipse of a common language among disciplines. In continuity with Segal's concerns for the sense of the humanities' specificity, Mittelstrass identifies problems of legitimacy, status, definition, and active role. According to Wim Blockmans, the humanities and social sciences' research observations "are primarily intended for society with the aim of providing deeper insights into people's actions and policy-making and to help direct changes in behavior", and the "target groups" of their studies are also non-scientists, informed citizens, and the national research communities ([33], p. 92); against this background, Mittelstrass's paper stresses that the humanities are to an increasing extent unable to cope with the fact that they not only *study* culture but are also *part of* culture. According to him, what we need is a broader concept of culture as the cultural form of the world, where the role of the humanities is to provide orientation and meaning to its work and life forms. His diagnosis highlights the need for new institutional models of European research in the humanities, overcoming national identities.

Whereas Mittelstrass's essay concludes by calling for our speaking "with one voice", the defense of the role that single national governments—which are supposed to be interested in nurturing and preserving their distinctive historical heritages and specific identities—should play in supporting and funding the humanities is central to Gianturco's comparative analysis on the relatively neglected sector of musicology. Centered on the Italian situation, her essay "Schemes of Funding Music Research in Italy: A Case Study in Comparison with other European Countries" examines policies of four further states: Spain, France, England, and Germany. These form a chorus, leaving Italy's voice in an isolation not at all splendid. As a *contrappunto* to the fundraising policy for musicological research expressed in research projects like the *Intelligence of the Patrimonies* mentioned earlier, Gianturco highlights the risks of *linear* financial cuts in state research funding for musicology, which paradoxically is neglected in Italy, especially as compared to the rest of Europe. In line with the claim of the Trieste workshop that "investments in culture creates economy", she highlights the reverse of the coin by remarking that current Italian state funding policies marginalize studies of high cultural and social value (and also an equally significant economic resource) by selling a considerable amount of musical goods at a loss to a German firm. Finally, Gianturco's paper indirectly contributes to the issue of the increasing monolingualism of the humanistic studies mentioned earlier and examined in Segal's essay, and to the debate about today's "dogma" that a publication is either in English or lacks "value" in the global

academic market.²¹ Indeed, the humanities have made considerable efforts to respond positively to the challenges of the evaluation standards currently imposed, *in primis* internationalization. Western non-Anglophone humanists, constantly under pressure by “measurement” of academic quality, know very well that it is difficult to compete or to score good marks if they publish in their own national language; in this context, Gianturco’s paper further supports Win Blockmans’s view that:

For those disciplines of the humanities and social sciences that specifically focus on problems within their own society, the *primary forum language* should be that of that particular society [...] For example, Italian and German are not only the designated *forum languages* to study Italian and German languages, societies and cultures of the past and present, but are also most appropriate to study the history of music ([33], p. 92).

As mentioned earlier, major changes in state policy priorities for higher education in the last decade eroded idealized, elite, “ivory tower” conceptions of teaching, research, academic freedom, and educational standards, and raised questions about the organization of disciplines, about quality control or accountability, and about the “measurement” of excellence (especially in the humanities and social science) in mass universities. What is the driving force behind the present state research policies within Europe? How can the humanities communicate and negotiate with the dominant market-like conditions for research activities? What should new types of university aspire to be and how can they compete on a global stage, in an age of targeted investments? How can “excellence” be defined, in principle and at a methodological and operational level, when traditional disciplines have been broadened and intermingled, and research activities have been rebranded as “productive outputs”? These issues are the common topic of Henrik Stampe Lund’s, Onora O’ Neill’s, and Peter Scott’s essays.

In May 2013, an initiative originated by the American Association of Cell Biology (the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment: DORA) challenged the over-reliance on the journal impact factors, with a petition to Thomson Reuters to change the JIF significantly [40]. Showing the errors in the review system, Lars Engwall has given reasons “to be cautious in drawing the conclusion that high-impact journals publish high-quality papers” [41]. Sabaratnam and Kirby remark that “whilst metrics may capture some partial dimensions of research ‘impact’, they cannot be used as any kind of proxy for measuring research ‘quality’” [18].²² The “modernization” of the humanities and the

²¹ See *supra* note 10. Consider in this regard A. Cavalli: “the pool of indexed journals under-represents publications that are not in the English language. The scientific communities of Slavic, German and Latin languages (not to mention Chinese and Japanese) risk marginalization if scientific productivity is measured only, or even predominantly, by the number of citations in English language publications [...] these shortcomings are particularly relevant in the humanities and social sciences. Obviously, the quality of research in, for example, mediaeval law of the late Carolingian age cannot be adequately measured by the number of citations in journals predominantly in the English language. The opposite holds in the case of all branches of physics” ([38], pp. 2–3). Westphal points out that “monoglot scholarship” and monoglot scholars only developed after 1950, an untoward result of 20th-century nationalism ([39], pp. 194–96).

²² Giovanni Abramo (Laboratory for Studies of Research and Technology Transfer at the Institute for System Analysis and Computer Science, University of Tor Vergata, Roma) and Ciriaco Andrea D’Angelo (Department of Engineering and Management, University of Tor Vergata, Roma) have argued for the inadequacy of publication-based and citation-based indicators—such as the renowned h-index (Hirsch-index)—to measure research productivity and to inform decision-makers. They propose an alternative measurable form of productivity (the indicator Fractional Scientific Strength), which requires information on different factors by unit of analysis (e.g., the average yearly salary of the researcher, the number

increasing relevance of “the impact factor” in funding policies, along with the need to develop new research management tools for humanistic research projects to be competitive and the fundamental “values” embedded in humanistic studies, are at the core of Henrik Stampe Lund’s “The Humanities as a Public Good—and the Need for Developing Accountability Strategies”. He argues for a counter-strategy to face current pressures on the field, by highlighting previously neglected funding opportunities for the humanities within the EU framework and stressing their significance as social resources for critical and mature civic judgment: recognition, wisdom, and common sense. His approach involves three levels of analysis—understanding the policy agenda, the role of research management within the humanities, and the humanities as a public good.

The principal focus of O’Neill’s essay—“Integrity and Quality in Universities: Accountability, Excellence and Success”²³—is the tension between the integrity of a university’s ideal or mission (academic freedom, innovation, excellence in research and teaching) and accountability (ways of monitoring standards of universities’ performances in research and teaching as criteria for funding their activities). Her analysis indicates the zones and margins of manipulation and mischief permitted by new evaluation systems and the distorting effects of the incentives they may induce, especially when different ‘metrics’ are assembled to rank academic institutions. By magnifying with her lens the powerful modifications induced in academic behaviors in response to new “inputs”, expectations, and measures, O’Neill shows how league tables force universities to achieve—or to appear to achieve, as she notes—“comparative success”, rather than excellence, which is not a positional (comparative) good. It is worth noting how O’Neill’s position—which implies reference to Aristotle’s *Ethics*—counteracts the global definition of quality in international rankings, described as a shift from “learning to earning” by Linda Wedlin (Department of Business Studies, Uppsala University), who has recently noted, referring to the Bill Readings’s 1996 book *The University in Ruins*:

the term “excellence” is an essentially empty concept, meaning it has no natural referent and no particular ideological content. The notion of excellence reaches beyond the related notion of quality, as it is inherently relational. [...] This emptiness makes the concept of excellence useful as a political tool, but requires practices and procedures that can fill it with content [...] As referents for excellence, rankings formulate and help to institutionalize measures for, and practices to assess, success. Even if there is great

of years of work, the number of publications and their subject category in the period of observation, the fractional contribution of the researcher to publication, *etc.*) [42]. See [43] for a sophisticated bibliometric analysis, which includes science maps to identify developments and knowledge flows in the increasing mass of publications (each year approximately 1 million scientific articles are published).

²³ Most of the material included in O’Neill’s essay has also appeared in [14]. The expanded and updated version published here contains an *Appendix* on accountability. The relation between trustworthiness and accountability was also a key topic of her Reith Lectures in 2002 ([44], quoted in [45], p. 30). For a discussion of O’Neill’s position on indicators and research quality assessments, see Jane Grimson’s examination of bibliometrics (to measure healthcare quality: Grimson is Professor of Health Informatics at the School of Computer Science and Statistics, Trinity College, Dublin) and her proposal to reduce “inbuilt biases, distortions and potential for gaming” by dividing research impacts into “academic impacts” and “external impacts” (when research influences civil society, business *etc.*), the latter being measured in a variety of different ways: [45].

diversity across rankings as to what they measure and how, they propagate a somewhat coherent ‘global definition of academic quality’ ([46], p. 71).

Finally, O’Neill suggests that better forms of accountability are possible by measuring in reasonably accurate ways educational achievements that are less vulnerable to manipulation, such as “hours of study, standards of writing, and the amount of feedback on written work received by students”.

Don Westerheijden notes that “the choice of instruments also has consequences for the concept of quality that is best served by it” ([47], p. 5), and Nicola Gulley (Editorial Director of IOP Publishing, Bristol), reflecting on the radical changes that scientific publishing is currently undergoing, remarks that with the emergence “of new ways of communicating in a digital environment, there is a need to find metrics that give a wider picture of the impact of a researcher’s work” ([48], pp. 80–81); that is, there is a need to build a more detailed picture of how research is used and affected by changing environments. Peter Scott’s contribution to the discussion—“Clashing Concepts and Methods: Assessing Excellence in the Humanities and Social Sciences”—encourages us to appreciate and bear in mind the complexity of the notion of “excellence” in the social sciences and the humanities when discussing, in an apparently neutral and technical though nevertheless prescriptive way, issues about different research assessment criteria. Scott shows how problematic is any satisfactory conceptual definition of “excellence”, given the dynamic internal evolution and intellectual reshaping of traditional disciplinary contents and borders, and the action of external pressures (mass universities, market-led exterior forces, and social changes).

He argues that it is important to “unpack” competing excellences, while avoiding the pitfalls of relativism, and that “decisions about their relative weight are not simply technical but also reflect underlying value systems”. Scott analyzes their major elements: outputs, methodologies (including ethical considerations), sustainability (reproduction of research capacity, funding systems, and academic careers), and relevance (especially difficult to apply to humanities, considering also that “all knowledge producing systems are socially embedded but as a process that shapes, in very practical ways, the ‘inner life’ of academic disciplines”). Scott’s paper provides an insightful overview of the diversity we find in humanities and social science research: a variety of “products”, languages, methodologies, traditions, and ways to adapt and respond to the current challenges, showing how it is difficult, within such a context, to set up research assessment.²⁴ Finally, at a more pragmatic level, he examines the main methods for measuring quality (peer review and its problems, the *pros* and *contras* of “metrics” systems, and performance indicators), pointing to the enhancement of their adaptability, transparency, and comprehensiveness.²⁵

²⁴ Milena Žic Fuchs (Professor in English Linguistics at the University of Zagreb and former Chair of the Standing Committee for the Humanities of the ESF) has explored the challenges of research performance assessment in the humanities and how to deal with them [49]. She refers to two databases, The Norwegian CRISTin (Current research Information System in Norway) and the VABB-SHW (the Flemish Academic Bibliographic Database for the Social Sciences and Humanities: see [50]), as “two stellar examples” among a number of endeavors in Europe “aiming at solving the national language issue or challenge with respect to the diversity of research outputs in the humanities” ([49], p. 114).

²⁵ Recent examinations of the problem of selecting applications for funding by the peer review system stress the systemic bias against minority approaches and suggest that it could be improved by substituting selection by random choice for selection by peer review [51,52].

It has been noted by Engwall and Weaire that the field of higher education is undergoing a process of marketization whereby organizations increasingly adhere to and act on market logic and rhetoric [53]. Against this background, as remarked earlier, in his paper Henrik Stampe Lund takes issue with the market-like “production” metaphor when applied to research in the humanities; according to him, the humanities are not characterized by any accumulating and expanding forms of knowledge, in so far as they represent “a historical resource, deeply integrated in the human history. Some of the most important insights are already uncovered in ancient literature and philosophy and then again rediscovered during the centuries”.²⁶ This is no mere commonplace when placed in the context of this special issue and linked to the proactive role of the humanities stressed in the final part. Svend Erik Larsen’s collation of short position papers from members of the Literary Studies Section (Jan Baetens, Susan Bassnett, Theo D’haen, Svend Larsen, Patrizia Lombardo, Naomi Segal, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen), aims to explore the complexity and richness of the humanities as cultural resources, in light of their response to historical changes: that is, in view of the humanities’ capacity to reflect and elaborate the challenging interaction of human beings with and within their contemporary life-world, by providing new insights, opening new fields of inquiry, and developing new ways of working and new forms of knowledge. “No Future without Humanities: Literary Perspectives” concludes this special issue by focusing on a range of topics including human rights; transnationalism and translation studies; cultural literacy, emotions, and memory studies; “the posthuman”; digital humanities; and creative teaching. As Svend Larsen, in his introduction to this essay, remarks, “the main concern is not the future of Humanities, but the future *with* Humanities”:

“The core of Humanities can be said to be the changing forms, means and conditions for human interaction with the surrounding world, whether natural or social. In contrast to many disciplines in sciences [...] a precondition for the Humanities is always to include the human component in this interaction and consistently to ask the basic research questions from this perspective also highly complex questions concerned with motivations, intentions, consciousness *etc.*”

6. Concluding Remarks: The Academia Europaea’s Actions for the Humanities

The cohesion of these contributions is rooted in the common membership of authors who share the same commitment. Indeed, the Academia Europaea (AE) is a unique transnational European Academy of Humanities, Letters, and Sciences, with a distinctive and long tradition of supporting the humanities and a specific concern for excellence in research, higher education, and social and cultural issues. It is not a federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities with different historical heritages and national roots, but is one senior body with officers deeply involved in European research institutions, running an efficient network of activities and a variety of interchanges among members of its academic sections which collectively share the same cultural vision and stimulating scholarly environment, as

²⁶ As the acknowledged expert on Plato, Professor of Ancient Philosophy at Cambridge M.F. Burnyeat, once said (in “The Master-Mind Lecture” delivered at the British Academy on 13 April 2000): “It is sometimes said that there are no eternal questions in philosophy. The truth is that there are some, and there will continue to be, so long as the philosophical tradition keeps them alive. It depends on whether we continue to find them relevant” [54].

demonstrated by its annual general interdisciplinary meetings, the initiatives of the “HERCULES” Expert Group,²⁷ and those of the three regional knowledge hubs cardinally distributed across Europe.²⁸ Since 2010 the official website of the AE has opened a forum on the role of universities [56].²⁹ In September 2004 it presented a Statement on the Role of the Humanities in European Research Policy [57] and in January 2012, responding to the approach of Horizon 2020, it issued a Position Paper on the role of Social Sciences and Humanities in European Research, stating that:

Modern mass universities are increasingly seen primarily through the lenses of costs, performance, number of students and exams. Protocols of benchmarking and statistical indicators applicable to the empirical and to the exact sciences are carried over to the humanities [...]. As a result, smaller fields and subject disciplines become marginalized, and in many instances are phased out altogether. Larger fields and disciplines that do not “deliver” along the lines of the preferred “industrial model” are stripped of research funding and reduced to rote teaching of ever larger groups of students. While the former development also affects certain areas of the natural sciences, the latter applies particularly to the humanities and social sciences. The result is that in these latter fields the very basis of scholarly research, which should be the foundation on which rests the competent teaching of future generations, our citizens as well as our scholars and scientists, is relentlessly being eroded [58].

This position paper summarizes a long chain of activities and a deep involvement in quality assessment. The Academia Europaea has dealt with it in a number of workshops, since the inception of discussion of this issue: e.g., “New Challenges for the Academic Profession” (held in Rotterdam, in 1996), “Interdisciplinarity and the Organisation of Knowledge in Europe” (held in Cambridge in 1997), and the “Virtual University” (held in Stockholm, in 1999). Noteworthy is that in 1997, only six years after the first announcement of the World Wide Web by CERN, the Academia Europaea established a working group (coordinated by the late Ian Butterworth), which organized a seminal workshop in Stockholm, supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, on the “Impact of Electronic Publishing on the Academic Community”. At a time when the digital revolution in the humanities was still scarcely appreciated, the working session also focused on ethical, social, cultural issues, the content and quality of the academic communication, and digital libraries, concerning such issues as

²⁷ In 2004, the Board of the Academia established the Higher Education, Research and Culture in European Society (HERCULES) Expert Group, coordinated by Erik de Corte, to develop activities relevant to research and policy in European institutions of higher education. Its mission is “to identify and deliver initiatives relevant to the practises of higher education, research and cultural scholarship at the European level. The focus is always on interdisciplinary topics of broad interest, including preparation for research policy and practise statements on behalf of the Council of the Academia Europaea”.

²⁸ In his post-election statement, the new President of the AE (and next Vice-President of the European Research Council, Sierd Cloething) writes: “bringing together scientists from the highest possible calibre, irrespective of their scientific discipline and country of residence in Europe, to address, in a bottom-up manner, cross-border scientific challenges and issues of common interest. In doing precisely this, Academia Europaea has created a unique platform bringing all too frequently separated scholars from the natural sciences and the humanities together” [55].

²⁹ So far, the Forum hosts four contributions, posted between 2010 and 2013: “Universities–Saviours of mankind” (Kelly); “The Multiversity” (Koch); “The role for Universities” (Nivat) and “The Universities of the future” (Bergstra).

archiving of electronic information, preservation of research material, the organization of digital archives, user needs, open access to data repositories, and the passage from private data to public knowledge [59]. Over the past decade, the HERCULES group has organized every year international symposia focussed on higher education, resulting in the publication of Proceedings. To mention just a few of these activities, in 2006, the group, supported by the Compagnia di San Paolo (Turin, Italy) organized a conference on “Quality Assessment in Higher Education in Europe” at the University of Pavia; its proceedings were published in 2007 [60]. In May 2010 a special issue of the *European Review*, the official journal of the Academia published by Cambridge University Press, published the papers from the AE HERCULES group 2009 Symposium in Turin, “Diversification of the Higher Education and the Academic Profession”. In May 2013, still in a joint venture with the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the HERCULES group (convened by Wim Blockmans, member of the History Section) organized an international symposium in Stockholm, “Bibliometrics: Use and Abuse in the Review of Research Performance” [61], with one thematic session devoted to the Humanities and Social Sciences;³⁰ the proceedings were published this year [12]. The theme of the HERCULES symposium announced for May 2015 (still sponsored by and hosted at the Wenner Gern Foundation in Stockholm) is “Emerging Models of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: From Books to MOOCS?”³¹

Earlier this year, Philip Vendrix—Chair of the Academia Europaea Section “Musicology & History of Art & Architecture”, Director of the Center for Advanced Renaissance Studies (François-Rabelais University of Tours) and Research Director at CNRS—presented a project, the *Intelligence des Patrimoines*, which combines different scientific epistemological approaches to natural and cultural heritage (of the agricultural and monumental area of the Loire valley, with its châteaux and wine production) and fosters convergence of the humanities (history, archaeology, architecture, textual and musical corpora) with the natural and social sciences (the study of the eco- and hydrological system of the Loire valley, its biological heritage, and environmental restrictions; ecological engineering with societal interests), “in order to understand and to develop new social, cultural and political practices, as well as to valorize and to transfer these results” ([63], p. 137). An innovative aspect of this project is to assure the transition from the field “project” to “big data” management “by setting up an infrastructure regrouping all the collected data” ([63], p. 142). In this context, digital humanities will provide automation, stability, and data access to valorize the acquired corpora; the challenge will be to make these databases inter-operable (with the help of semantic language development), marking an advance in research. Vendrix writes: “the ambition of this project is to offer, for the first time in France, digital access to heritage data and a new scientific comprehension of cultural heritage in the Centre Region” ([63], p. 146).

³⁰ This Session included presentations by Pol Ghesquière (“The objectives and design of the Flemish Academic Bibliographic database for the Social Sciences and the Humanities”), Christine Musselin (“The use of indicators in French universities”), and Milena Žic Fuchs (“Bibliometrics: Use and Abuse in the Humanities”) (revised versions in [12], pp. 107–41).

³¹ The first Open Massive Online Courses (MOOCs) were launched in 2008, expanding rapidly. According to Erik de Corte, “In the fall of 2011 there were 160,000 students in 190 countries who participated in the MOOC of Stanford University on artificial intelligence” [62].

In May 2014, on behalf of the Barcelona Knowledge [Southern-European and Mediterranean] Hub of the Academia Europaea and with the patronage of the University of Trieste, I organized the workshop “Funding policies and research values: strategies and needs, risks and prospects”,³² supported by the Riksbankens Jubileumsfund (Sweden). The workshop in Trieste exploited the double meaning of the phrase “research values”: referring in one regard to the ranking of products, and also referring to the cultural resource (as societal and *economic* goods) that scientific research—including the arts and humanities—represents for our learned communities. The basic orientation of the workshop was to avoid asking the typical rhetorical question—whether education can be treated like a market good or service at all—by assuming instead that “knowledge” is also a key economic resource, that investment in culture *creates* economy, and that these two aspects, both covered by the term “value”, are deeply intertwined and interdependent, so that at present economic recession may all too easily provoke cultural involution and new forms of barbarism.

The expression “research values” in the title of this special issue draws from that workshop. Accordingly, the term “value” in this context refers both to research quality and to the economics of culture, including the recognition of the economic relevance of the so-called “merit-good”—including what I would like to call the “soul factor”³³—with its long-term character of public and private benefits, while avoiding treating scientific culture and research in the humanities only in terms of market perspectives and mechanisms, with citations as the “currency” with which “scientists make payments to their preceptors”.³⁴

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

³² As part of the Academia’s visible commitment to support these disciplines, the new Barcelona base is the academy’s hub for the promotion of multi-disciplinary activities that include the perspective of the social sciences and the humanities.

³³ The Academia Europaea supports the view that the impact of the humanistic studies is as individual as collective, as instrumental and heuristic as formative, both on societies and scientific research, and that humanities are essential to nourish our spiritual life, imagination and creativity. It is worth noting that, in a formal letter of December 2014, the Academia Europaea vigorously reacted to the proposal of the President of the European Commission for a significant change of policy and budget for Horizon 2020, expressing deep concerns at its potential negative impacts with respect to future funding for research and innovation. In particular, the letter remarks that, by contrast, “confidence in the strength of European creativity and excellence in all aspects of science, technology, training and intellectual scholarship [...] are tangible benefits that are of global significance and contribute in a substantial and real way to the “future proofing” of Europe’s capacity in our economic, technological and collective social security” [64].

³⁴ For economic considerations on the value of higher education and related quality assurance schemes, see [47]; on citations as “the currency of science” and a critical examination of the role played by scientific publishers, impact factor and citation indices, see [65].

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