

# Nurturing Transnational Collaborative Research Projects in the Social Sciences and Humanities

## About the Project

This policy brief builds on insights from the EUROMOBI Conference, part of the EU-funded EuroMobi project (Horizon Europe, Grant No. 101232335), which explores mobility, demographic change, and socio-economic resilience in Europe.

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## The Challenge

Collaborative working is the cornerstone of innovation and wider systemic change. Yet in the humanities and social sciences, mechanisms to nurture and sustain meaningful and complex collaborations that bridge academia, industry, government, the third sector and other professionals are underdeveloped and skewed towards those with existing relationships. Just as ethics protocols and research reward practices regularly favour the sciences, so too do opportunities for collaborative transformation. The usual enablers of long-term cooperation need urgent rethinking to address the unique challenges and successes of the humanities and social sciences research landscape.

## Key Recommendations

- Facilitate **more varied matchmaking** opportunities between academics and stakeholders, alongside increased support and training around stakeholder relations.
- Explore opportunities to develop a **European system to promote peer-reviewed or quality-assured non-academic publications and other outputs** from social sciences and humanities research.
- Work with academic and non-academic stakeholders in developing **novel and broad-ranging funding opportunities**, including trialling **new systems to generate nuanced policies and other rapid real-world applications based on emergent research findings**.
- Invest in **flexible grant-giving parameters** for transnational collaborations in the humanities and social sciences to cater to their unique needs.
- Support academics at all career stages, especially those in senior roles without existing skills and knowledge, in **developing and modelling their aptitude for knowledge exchange and collaboration**.
- Support policy makers and government bodies to **accurately model and compensate for the time and expertise sought from research advisors to inform policy**.

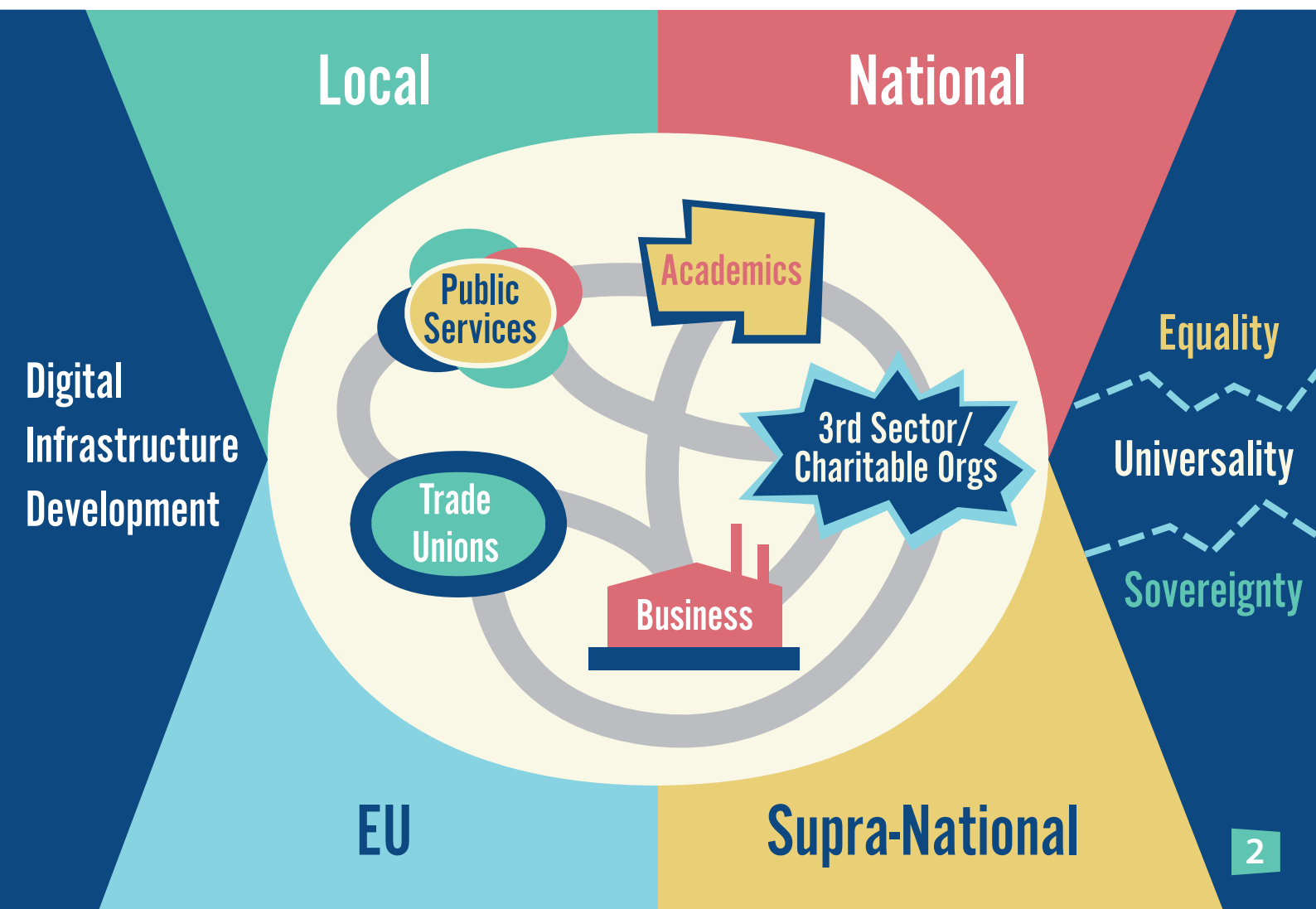
# The Context

This brief derives from the plenary session **“European Research Area Potential in the Social Sciences & Humanities”**, held on Thursday 5th June 2025 as part of the Europe and Mobilities EU Presidency conference in Warsaw. The panel included multiple contributors to projects funded through the Collaboration of Humanities and Social Sciences in Europe (**CHANSE**) programme, including project leads, collaboration partners and those supporting, funding or overseeing transformation-oriented collaborative research in Europe.

Panellists were invited to reflect on how the wide ecosystem of actors implicated in European digital development (e.g., business, trade unions, academics, regulators, public services) often operates at variance (for example, local versus national government) and how their actions may also be inherently contradictory (for instance, relying on proprietary platforms to disseminate crucial information related to public good).

At once, they considered how European values (e.g., universality, equality, sovereignty) regularly and increasingly sit in tension with one another and with rampant (digital) infrastructure development. Using two project case studies - **Public Media in the Age of Platforms (PSM-AP)** and **Time experience in Europe’s digital age - TIMED** - as starting points, the discussion aimed to examine the complexities of conducting collaborative humanities and social sciences-based research on topics focused on transformative digital outcomes.

The recommendations and action points included in this brief are directed at academia, funding bodies and other policy makers, calling for more abundant, flexible and consistent support for those working in transnational, transdisciplinary, socio-culturally-focused collaborative projects.



# Stakeholder relations in humanities and social sciences research

## Call to action

The development and running of an impactful collaboration between academic research projects and external partners are not easy feats. **Building meaningful reciprocal relationships - particularly transnational relationships - is a long-term process** which entails breaking down barriers and building trust and familiarity between different stakeholders. **It requires careful planning, compromising, flexibility and managing risks, all of which demand consideration by researchers in project design phases but also by funding and policy bodies when developing funding opportunities.**

Current collaborative grant funds, such as CHANSE, are limited in length (usually just three years), and tend to require strong existing relationships between collaborators before potential applicants can pursue them. This predicament poses challenges for collaborative research in the humanities and social sciences, particularly when operating on a transnational scale: it favours those already in meaningful networks where trust and compatibility are relatively secure. In contrast, new or more weakly-linked partners are at risk of tokenistic or extractive engagement, without the possibility of developing durable ties.

### **What fuels such structural disadvantage in collaborative research?**

The time spent building and maintaining relationships with partners prior to a project's start, or after it ends, tends not to be accounted for. This gap poses the risk of introducing problematic behaviours amongst academics, including leaving partners behind once a project is over. It also imposes extra barriers on Early Career Researchers, and others seeking to evolve their practice, whose networks may be still emergent or non-existent. Moreover, it means collaborators' range of needs and requirements may be ignored or neglected, owing to lack of time and opportunity to develop full awareness of them. A constant cycle of grant application and reporting every three years maintains the status quo, limiting opportunities for extended knowledge exchange or longstanding benefit.

**Such challenges speak to the need to ensure that a holistic approach is taken when developing funding opportunities and wider policies and structures supporting collaborative research** so that they are fit for purpose. This fit demands that the voices of academics and external partners are centred in decision-making and that special attention is given to the unique circumstances of non-academic collaborators. **Strategic, long-horizon investment in new or unexpected partnerships should be considered.**

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# Stakeholder relations in humanities and social sciences research



## Recommendations

### For academic employers:

- **Include dedicated time for stakeholder relations in academic FTE allocations.** While this time allocation can aid in breaking down barriers between academia and non-academic sectors, it also offers the opportunity to establish and maintain long-term relationships, allowing for follow-on projects and continuous learning.
- **Provide training opportunities on stakeholder relationship building and maintenance for both early and mid/senior career staff.** Training of more established staff is crucial to shift long-held mindsets and to model collaborative behaviours as a means of supporting and encouraging early career team members. For those at the start of their careers, such training should contribute to self-belief and tenacity when it comes to stakeholder relations.

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### For funding bodies and other policy makers:

- **Invest in longer-term, more flexible, and dynamic transnational funding models.** This funding should allow time for impacts to manifest, and provide projects with the freedom to reallocate monies to address emergent issues or to leave some monies unallocated from the outset to cover the costs and challenges (legal, logistical, etc.) that manifest over time while collaborating transnationally. Alternatively, or in addition, a small portion of funding should be available to maintain or develop relations post-project. This money should not require lengthy application procedures, nor focus on novel research. Rather, it should seed follow-on activities and longer-term development of impact and relationships from collaborations formed during the project.
- **Develop a Stakeholders Hub for the humanities and social sciences,** e.g., modeled on existing initiatives like **Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority Stakeholders Hub.** This proposed counterpart for humanities and social sciences should include a matchmaking platform that can facilitate transnational collaborations and partnerships between academic and non-academic entities.
- **Scope possibilities for strategic, long-horizon investment in novel non-academic collaborations.** This scoping exercise would aim to develop mechanisms (financial and otherwise) to support new non-academic collaborators to establish trust and stable ties with potential scholarly partners in the humanities and social sciences. The intent is to decrease extractive tendencies and increase equity in relationships with unfamiliar collaborators.

# Impactful transnational collaborations

## Call to action

Academic success is frequently measured against normative outputs such as peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and monographs. However, a plethora of more accessible options continues to be undervalued despite the significance and potential for real-world impact. As demonstrated during the Presidency conference, these outputs, especially when derived from collaborations with non-academic partners, can inform policy or public services on topics such as worker's rights (see the [Digital Bargaining Hub](#)), amongst countless others. They can equip individuals with tools to influence policy development and implementation (as seen in [PSM-AP's policy briefs on public service media](#) and [TIMED's Understanding Digital Life for Healthier Digital Futures](#)) or to support, for example, contract negotiations.

However, while these outputs can benefit the public good, there is a risk, particularly in transnational projects, that differing national priorities and predilections lead them to be recognised or valued in discrepant ways. For example, at multiple points during the conference, panellists discussed expectations in some countries that research could only be published in approved journals, limiting reach and potential impact. In other countries (e.g., the UK), impact-oriented outputs and partnerships are increasingly rewarded, but elsewhere (e.g., where a more traditional approach to impact-oriented outputs is followed), such work may be met with disdain or indifference. Some individuals may be regularly sought after by policymakers for expert guidance, but accurate modelling of the time and resources required for provision of this expertise is lacking, leading to non-engagement or burn-out by the expert. Even at the outset of projects (before input into policymaking is actually possible), collaborators may be expected to perform their research on top of their normal duties (e.g., as overtime), with inequitable outcomes seemingly inevitable. A one-size-fits-all model for assessing and rewarding collaboration is not possible at this time, but nuanced mechanisms that support partners in reaching new potentials and being recognised for the rigour of – and time and resources invested in – this work are necessary.

Such differing approaches to impact are accompanied by variable skills and training for academics on, for example, how to engage with policy makers or how to use the most impactful language to produce accessible outputs for national or international audiences. Equally, non-academic partners might not have the confidence or support to engage with academia-bound researchers. **This predicament suggests that complementary training and tools are needed for all potential collaborators who seek transformative outcomes from their cooperation.** A variety of toolkits are already available to support transdisciplinary research on complex problems (e.g., [Integration and Implementation Insights \(i2insights\)](#)) suggesting that awareness building about these resources may be important, alongside critical consideration of how they foreground the insights and requirements of social sciences and humanities-based practices.

Funding opportunities in the humanities and social sciences tend to follow traditional patterns, including being constrained by assumptions about what these disciplines entail, as well as suffering from curtailed budgets and low expectations about the transformational possibilities of social sciences and humanities collaborations. This situation arguably results in opportunities with limited flexibility and limited potential for impact. Yet research within the humanities and social sciences lends itself to large-scale transdisciplinary approaches and comparative studies. These comparative studies, when pursued transnationally, have the potential to reveal cross-cutting patterns and unexpected findings. **Greater flexibility with funding agreements and openness in research themes and collaboration parameters should provide more room to nurture the unexpected and speculative which can emerge from humanities and social sciences studies.**

“Accessible options continue to be undervalued despite the significance and potential for real-world impact.”

# Impactful transnational collaborations

## Recommendations



### For academia:

- **Explore opportunities to develop an international system to promote reviewed and quality-assured non-academic publications and other outputs.** The system should ensure that outputs such as policy briefs, video and creative productions, toolkits and other more accessible forms of publication satisfy expectations of high intellectual rigour, while being comprehensible and useable by relevant stakeholders for the public good.
- **Support and encourage academic researchers to take on greater policy advisory responsibility at national and international levels.** This will increase potential for evidence to be meaningfully translated into policy and policy outcomes.

**“Greater flexibility with funding agreements and openness in research themes and collaboration parameters should provide more room to nurture the unexpected and speculative which can emerge from humanities and social sciences studies.”**

### For funding bodies and other policy makers:

- **Ensure follow-on funding is available for transnational collaborative projects in the humanities and social sciences,** to capitalise on the rich datasets being generated and to extend the impact of their extensive and emerging networks and results.
- **Design research grants with greater awareness of differing national priorities and expectations,** to ensure that the desired impact from projects can be achieved even in contexts where impact-focused work may still be less common in comparison to traditional scholarly outputs.
- **Accurately model the time and resources expected of advisors (whether academic or not) who inform policies and decision-making based on their collaborative research findings.** Fairer valuing of the expertise of advisors could increase engagement and ensure more equitable outcomes from social sciences and humanities research.
- **Invest in more opportunities for transnational comparative research in the humanities and social sciences on open topics,** allowing practitioners across countries to develop shared methods, pool ideas and reveal patterns that might not otherwise be found where themes are pre-determined by funding agencies.
- **Trial new systems for feeding emerging research results directly into local, national and international policy development.** If tied to follow-on funding opportunities, such systems could support rapid application of findings outside of academia, further bolster new collaborations, and reduce expenses and duplication of effort related to the commissioning of separate independent horizon scans to inform new policies and practices.

## Recommended reading

Augenstein, K., et al. (2024). Five priorities to advance transformative transdisciplinary research. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 68, 101438. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2024.101438>

Braidotti, R., Casper-Hehne, H., Ivković, M. and Oostveen, D. (eds) (2024) *The Edinburgh Companion to the New European Humanities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.  
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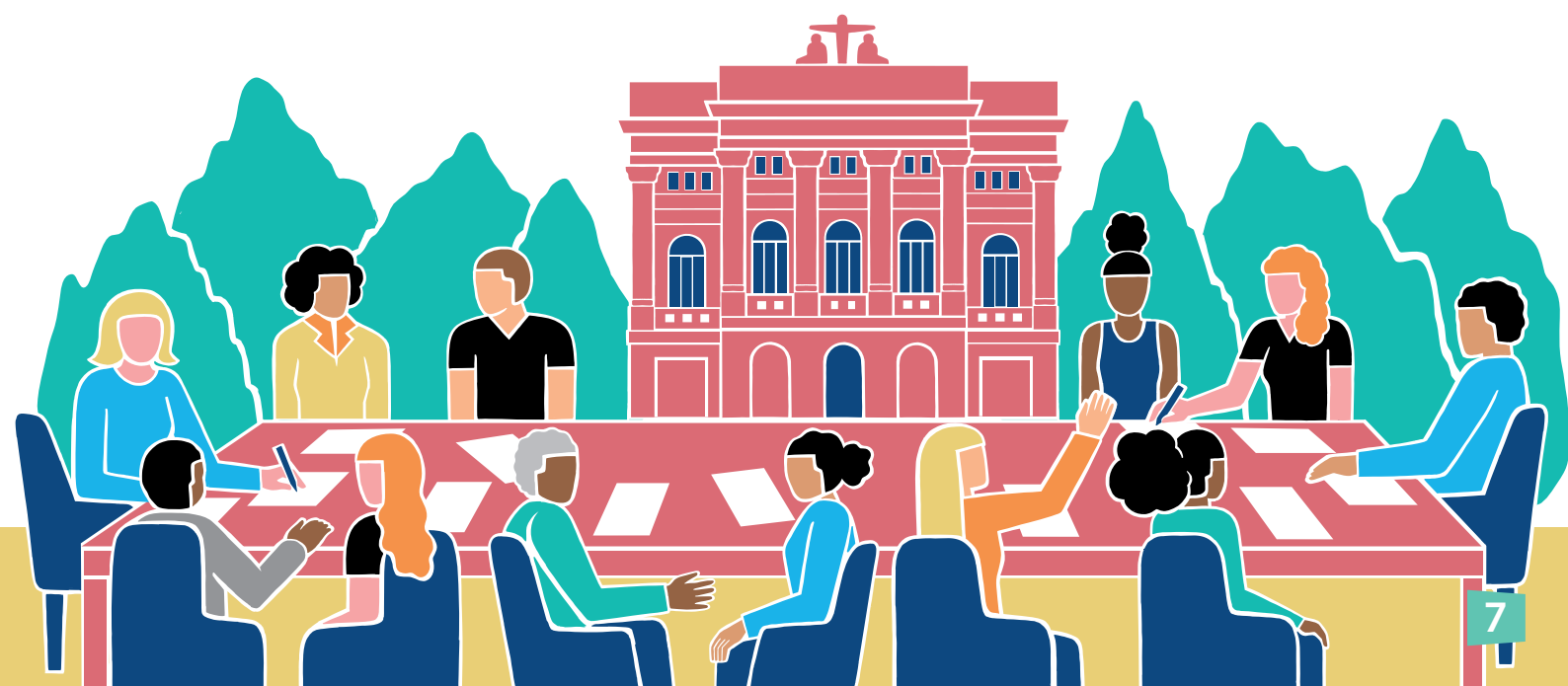
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<https://www.routledge.com/Institutionalizing-Interdisciplinarity-and-Transdisciplinarity-Collaboration-across-Cultures-and-Communities/Vienni-Baptista-ThompsonKlein/p/book/9780367654344>

Whittington, O. (2022). *Democratic Innovation and Digital Participation*. London: Nesta.  
[https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Democratic\\_innovation\\_and\\_digital\\_participation.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Democratic_innovation_and_digital_participation.pdf)

## Also see

Global Alliance for Inter- and Transdisciplinarity (ITD Alliance), <https://itd-alliance.org/>

Network for Transdisciplinary Research (td-net), <https://en.transdisciplinarity.ch/>



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- Ruth Ogden, Liverpool John Moores University, UK, and the **Time experience in Europe's digital age - TIMED** project
- Anna Ridká, Trade Union of State Bodies and Institutions (OSCE), Czech Republic
- Frank Siebern-Thomas, Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion European Commission
- Maksymilian Bielecki, SWPS, Poland

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