

Preface

In 2017, the International Council of Philosophy and the Human Sciences (CIPSH), in collaboration with UNESCO, commissioned a World Humanities Report (WHR). This report is designed to be a tool to better understand and reflect the contributions of the humanities to knowledge and society. It shows selected examples of academic practice in the humanities, and recommends new directions for the field in the twenty-first century, focusing especially on the next five to ten years. The preparation of the WHR was assigned to a team headed by Sara Guyer, with Rosi Braidotti as Senior Advisor, coordinated by the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI). Different regional hubs were established for the completion of the project, to address the diversity of contexts, perspectives, intellectual traditions and resources.

While aiming at highlighting the strengths and contributions of the humanities to contemporary society, the World Humanities Report also confronted the threats faced by the field today and proposed ways to respond to them. Threatening aspects include both the dismissal of the value of the humanities in public discourse and underfunding of teaching and research. More fundamental risks are the challenges to intellectual freedom, critical discourse, diversity and imagination by political forces and organisations.

The report assumes the positive and multidimensional impact of the humanities on core areas of human experience which extend also to the formulation of new frames of reference for and representation of our collective and individual relation to the world and our experiences. Further, it aims at exploring new ethical social imaginaries and spaces of decolonial transculturality, which may support new modes of identity formation. These may be found 'in-between' cultures, along with forms of multi-lingual polylogues, which may overcome dichotomous and divisive constructions of the world.

Moreover, the report challenges dualism on all levels and assesses patterns of systemic exclusion and disqualification of agents of knowledge. It proposes innovative tools to increase collective awareness within the humanities of forms of injustice, exclusion and suffering. This enhanced sense of social responsibility informs the scholarship presented in the report, which strongly argues that the people and the planet require new ways of thinking.

The European branch of the World Humanities Report aims more specifically to demonstrate the rich, varied and necessary contributions of the humanities to knowledge and society throughout the world, with special focus on the European region. This project focuses on established universities and highlights where and how the humanities are practised, and makes recommendations to ensure that the humanities flourish in and beyond the 2020s.

In order to develop the WHR-Europe Report, the European Research Group began its work on 10–12 September 2019 with a conference in Göttingen in cooperation with the Volkswagen Foundation's international conference about 'Positioning the Humanities in the 2020s'. The core European report on the World Humanities was produced by five European research teams, at the Universities of Belgrade, Bologna, Göttingen, University College London and Utrecht. European experts from a wide range of academic fields contributed articles on the central topics of the new humanities. Additionally, fifty external experts were asked to provide short statements on the further development of the humanities, which were also appended to the report and summarised in a chapter of the book.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the European Research Team to revise both the planned working conferences and the schedule. Five working scientific conferences were organised online by Belgrade, Bologna and Utrecht. The digital platforms offered support and continuity to the project of drafting and discussing the contributions to the report. In between the working conferences, Rosi Braidotti, of the University of Utrecht, assessed the progress of the project in monthly online workshops together with the participating starting researchers. Finally, the work of the European Research Team was addressed publicly at the Lisbon European Humanities Conference, supported by CIPSH, UNESCO and Portugal (Foundation for Science and Technology), and was held online in May 2021.

Parallel to the development of the European Research Group's World Humanities Report, a new network on the European Humanities was established to serve the sustainability of the WHR project. It is coordinated by the University of Göttingen and is called 'The Network of European Humanities.²¹', or, in short, NEH21.

NEH21.net aims to develop European perspectives on the humanities and to do justice to the rich diversity of languages, identities and traditions of researchers working in this region. It also supports the project of the European Universities of the EU Commission, to develop new educational and research projects fit for the challenges of our times. It focuses on the development of critical and creative perspectives on European social cultural values, such as: human rights, solidarity and critical democratic participation, tolerance, equality and non-discrimination. Accordingly, the network presents an opportunity to study the extent to which these values and aspirations play out in the public life of multiple communities in Europe today. Furthermore, NEH21.net supports some of the key principles in humanities research today, including integrity, academic freedom, trustworthiness, responsibility, diversity and openness. In its research mission, the network focuses on the environmental humanities, biomedical humanities, public humanities, digital humanities and intercultural humanities.

Thus, systematic teamwork research and an intensive process of discussion on the current and further developments of the humanities in Europe was conducted online over the course of eighteen months. It involved over 150 researchers from the most diverse regions of Europe and a broad disciplinary range.

Apart from a situated European perspective, the research team has benefited from close links to vast international networks of researchers and academic and educational institutions. As a European group, the team acknowledges its commitment to the global research and education system, and to the humanities in both the European and global contexts. The research produced by the European network therefore actively supported both the preparation of the European World Humanities Report as a whole, and also provided a specific contribution to cover specifically the European region.

Following the spirit of the final report of the 2017 World Humanities Conference, organised by CIPSH, which commissioned this report, the European Research Network of

the WHR does not pursue or adopt one umbrella definition of the humanities. Rather, we take on the field of humanities in its diverse and differentiated historical, linguistic and cultural traditions. They include the designations of Humanities, Geisteswissenschaften and Sciences Humaines, as sets of specific methodologies, approaches and perspectives. Moreover, in this project, the humanities are not defined only according to conventional academic partitions and thus are not limited to traditional disciplinary canons and curricula. The focus is instead on cross-cutting themes of urgent societal relevance, with the aim of highlighting the specific contribution of the humanities to the contemporary world. These transversal interdisciplinary approaches are articulated in close cooperation with researchers from other areas of scholarship, such as the social, natural and life sciences, engineering, information technologies, medicine, and climate change sciences. Priority is given to the discussion of educational and scientific methods and policies, as well as processes of outreach and societal dissemination of knowledge.

Out of the diversity of voices and cultural pitches, a choir has developed out of the research process, over the course of time. The multiple different positions have become synchronised and merged into harmony, after intense and varied discussions. Readers will find the echo of these collective efforts in this publication, which works in tandem with the foundation of a new European network, and a set of recommendations to UNESCO. This synchronisation of voices could not have been achieved without the cooperation of every researcher, at each partner university. More specifically, this book is driven by the shared awareness of the recent rise of programmes, curricula, centres and institutes in new fields of enquiry, which are known as the new humanities. These key new areas of research have been given a prominent role in the report, including the Environmental, the Biomedical, the Public, the Digital and the Intercultural Humanities. Let us outline each of them briefly below.

Firstly, the Environmental Humanities are an interdisciplinary research field which aims to connect human activities, such as culture, politics and economics, to the environment, understood in the broadest possible sense. Environmental Humanities afford attention to non-humanities disciplines such as physics, biology, geology and geography, amongst others. They address head-on the challenges of the Anthropocene, the place of humans in planetary history, and their ability to self-destruct. But they also consider, however, visions and motivations to construct sustainable futures, both in practice and in the collective imagination. We find it especially urgent to develop cultural scenarios and social imaginaries that move beyond the alternation of apocalypse and utopia in relation to technology and ecology. The humanities are well placed to provide concrete ways to raise public awareness about critical global challenges. The report will move accordingly from the level of observation and demonstration of humanities-based enquiry into core areas of human experience (migration, inequality, relations between human and non-human entities, artificial and algorithmic intelligence, climate change, genetics) to establishing a deeper understanding of where and how the humanities are threatened, and where and how they can make an impact with regard to these core areas of experience.

Similar interrogations of the future are currently formulated by the Biomedical Humanities, which move beyond bioethics to develop an interdisciplinary field. Biomedical Humanities scholars and scientists study the impact of genomics, synthetic biology, stem cell research and the neural sciences. They engage not only with the impact of these disciplines on medical practice, but also on culture and society as a whole. Closely related to the Biomedical Humanities are therefore fields such as the Bio-humanities, the

Medical Humanities, the Neural Humanities or the Evolutionary Humanities. Special innovation in this field is introduced by Disability Studies (Goodley et al. 2014). But also social studies of the life sciences (Rose 2013; Franklin 2013) and philosophical revisions of ways of caring for both the human and the non-human inhabitants of the planet, are fast-growing areas of research (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). The relevance and urgency of the Biomedical Humanities, as well as the social transformations they reflect and enhance across the enlisted disciplines, cannot be overstated in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet even broader changes and opportunities are explored by the Public Humanities, which aim at using the academic capital and cultural potential of the humanities to connect to broader societal purposes. They critically assess issues of heritage, civic culture and traditions, academic freedom, democratic participation and criticism, the role of intellectuals and scholars in the world and in the media. The public humanities try to (re)connect the humanistic studies, which gathered their basic information from human society, back to that society (Quay and Veninga 1990). Associated with this endeavour are, for example, the Experimental Humanities, the domain of Cultural Heritage Studies, Engaged Humanities (Jay 2010), the Academic and the Civic and Public Sociology.

All fields of knowledge are currently changing because of the unprecedented levels of technological mediation, and the Digital Humanities have emerged as the research area that connects the new digital media and information technologies to the university's civic mission to train responsible, active and informed citizens. A related term is Humanistic Informatics and Computational Humanities. This research field raises issues of governance, privacy, digital citizenship, security and surveillance, warfare, and cyber-crime. Special attention is paid to the historical, cultural and literary aspects of the field (Hayles 1999, 2005). The Digital Humanities covers the wide range of efforts to deploy and develop digital data and digital methods in and for the humanities as a whole.

Where the Digital Humanities aim to cross and benefit the entire field, the Intercultural Humanities focus on how to benefit everybody. Common concerns within Intercultural Humanities are, for instance, the appreciation or recognition of the cultural Other/the others and of symbolically different constructions of reality. By repurposing differences as resources, new forms of (self)-reflection on the Other/the others can emerge, with a focus on commonalities and margins of negotiations, to achieve cooperative designs and trigger synergies. Interculturality is a research perspective that has been adopted in many humanities disciplines, such as intercultural German studies, intercultural theology, intercultural art, etc. Its influence is, however, not limited to the humanities alone, but has further benefited the sciences, pedagogy, economics and political science. The field questions the meaning and relevance of culture and culturality, as a crucial dimension of texts and also of research objects and knowledge. Interculturality also shapes horizons of experience and perception by the reader, the teacher and the researcher. It is an intermediate position, an in-between, in which the processual and reciprocal production of the self and the Other takes place. From the perspective of the actors, interculturality is a cognitive process that emerges from this self-reflexive perception and experience of cultural plurality. It helps to overcome ethnocentrism by enabling all parties to include and anticipate the perspective of the other within one's own construction of reality, as well as within individual actions, research and teaching.

With all these ambitious goals in mind, the ultimate goal of the report is to establish areas of value from within the field of the humanities itself, not just to show how the humanities can 'help' or 'support' problems defined outside of the humanities. We actually want to define areas of urgency and attention through the humanities as a specific field,

demonstrating the advantages and benefits of supporting the humanities and thus answer its critics.

The key terms that structure our advocacy of the humanities are: subtlety, complexity and crossovers or transversal connections. The field of the humanities today allows us to focus our attention on emergent areas of knowledge production, where experimental modes of thinking, the quest for alternative values, and a dose of perplexity before the great challenges of the day are welcome and encouraged. These critical orientations are taken as indicators not only of sharp minds and well-trained intellects, but also of human ethical compassion and decency and of active and discerning citizenship. In the broader sense, they express an unshakable commitment to the democratic exercise of social and cultural criticism. Such an approach requires both an ongoing understanding of meanings, of the past and of value as open processes that need to be constantly re-examined and contested. But it also demands respect for artistic and literary practice as major components of the capital of knowledge the humanities have built over centuries of subtle, complex and transdisciplinary study and dialogues.

This report aims to foreground where and how core framings and new knowledge are generated from within the humanities.

We hope that the European report will manage to affect changes in institutional funding for the humanities and policy recommendations that support humanities research. We aspire to be included and cited in the recommendations put forth in the World Humanities Report and by its stakeholders, including CIPSH, CHCI and UNESCO, as well as the partner universities. We strive to increase institutional, intellectual and financial investment by other organisations and individuals in the European region and beyond. We hope to contribute to the struggle for inclusivity and diversity and to provide a representative and stable organisation to represent the humanities in the European region and beyond.

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