



Horizon Europe: Will new or old European Union take to the field?

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The next program Horizon Europe will have a mission-oriented approach, as is best suited to identifying global challenges with ambitious goals, across multiple disciplines, and maximally productive in relation to investment. Such an innovative approach is aimed at solving problems that are relevant to people's everyday lives and stimulating the research interest throughout Europe (Mazzucato 2018).

The missions will emerge from the five thematic pillars that recall, with minor variations, those of Horizon 2020: (1) Adaptation to Climate Change, including Societal Transformation; (2) Cancer; (3) Healthy Oceans and Natural Waters; (4) Carbon-Neutral and Smart Cities; (5) Soil Health for Sustainable Food.

The path to defining these missions is still under construction, in terms of negotiation between the representatives of the member states, and as dissemination of the hypotheses formulated thus far and presented at events, organized by the European Commission, where what is left unsaid is more telling than what is communicated. Indeed, this path remains obscure and appears more limited to lobbying circles than to the transparent participation of researchers who have to apply to it. The information provided is limited to the progress stages of the negotiation without addressing the nature of the disputes and the real discussion venues, showing that lobbies between states or supranational interest groups play, as in the past, a fundamental role. It seems therefore that instead of a new mission-oriented approach it is once again old lobbies—privileged one which directly contradicts the declared will to bring research closer to citizens.

So far, there is no trace of the proposed methodological innovation, but the simple re-proposal of an old and consolidated method aimed at reaffirming a vision of a self-pleasing Europe, strongly oriented toward commercial

development rather than the ethical and ideal value of research. The statement of a mission-oriented research program as the most suitable to resolve issues relevant to the daily life of citizens risks remaining more a theoretical declaration of intent than a true new process of bringing scientific research closer to people's everyday realities. This not only applies to Europeans but citizens from all over the world, like the often tragic events linked to the populations migration teach us. An actual methodological and substantial innovation would be to go beyond “European borders.”

The real challenges that globalization poses consists of the role of science in reducing inequalities, and subsequently, a new view on scientific interrelationships with the low- and middle-income countries as scientific research can play a fundamental role in promoting development improving quality of life and transferring knowledge and well-being even where these struggle to emerge. The scientific leadership that Europe is applying with Horizon Europe to pursue and lead societal challenges will not be achieved by increasing the gap with areas and populations with less scientific and technological development, but exchanging and sharing ideas with them.

This is precisely the challenge that awaits Europe's science and research teams if they really seek to undertake an innovative path that gives substance to issues like Global Health (Abubakar et al. 2019), including eHealth, and its technological extension topics related to the role of health in universal development. In addition, and in close relationship with the first, Science Diplomacy (The Madrid Declaration on Science Diplomacy 2019) describes the deterministic role of science and the quality of international relations, as oriented to global development, which should be included in the Horizon Europe Missions as call-oriented research promotion to share and aggregate with research groups from low- and middle-income countries.

In conclusion, the upcoming events promoted by the European Commission aimed at updating Horizon Europe program progress should: (a) organize the upcoming events in order to guarantee more space and opportunities for

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researchers to express their opinions and assessments both on the organization of the program and on its strategic value and (b) include issues such as Global Health and/or Science Diplomacy within the missions. This could be a first step to give the signal of a Europe that wants to assert a more inclusive vision of European research that is no longer concentrated on procedural uncertainties and opposing interests of the individual member states but that is oriented to create a new, innovative, research era.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interests.

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