

Puiu Ovidiu

Universitatea Constantin Brâncoveanu din Pitești Facultatea Management – Marketing în Afaceri Economice Adresa de contact: Pitești, Calea Bascovului nr. 2 A Email: ucb_prorektorat@yahoo.com Telefon: 0248. 21 26 27

Șerbănică Cristina

Universitatea Constantin Brâncoveanu din Pitești Facultatea Științe Juridice, Administrative și ale Comunicării Adresa de contact: Pitești, Calea Bascovului nr. 2 A Email: cpantelica@yahoo.com Telefon: 0248. 21 26 27

Study financed through Romania's National Plan for Research, Development and Innovation: Developing academic interdisciplinary research to support Romania's universities competitiveness at international level (Code: 91-058/2007/ANCS/CNMP)

This paper highlights the role of socio-economic research in the European Research Area, while putting focus on emerging trends in the field. In the meantime, the paper presents and analysis the projects that won the "Ideas" competition: ERC Advanced Investigators Grant (at European level) and Exploratory Research Projects (at Romanian level), in the Socio-economics Sections. The conclusion is that Romanian projects are more narrowly focused (even if their formulation is by far very complex) and fit very well the general objectives of FP7 activities in Social Sciences and Humanities. Finally, the paper proposes a simple schema that could frame Romanian research projects in socio-economic field.

Keywords: socio-economic research, "Ideas" competition, trends in socio-economic research

JEL Code: A1, I2

1.Introduction. Socio-economic research in the European Research Area

European societies are changing very rapidly and we need to better understand how and why. The dynamics of science and technology interact with social, economic and political developments and this leads to new production, consumption and learning models. Activities that aim at a stronger engagement of society in the debates on the directions of research are an essential part of a modern research policy environment. This is where the "Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities" (SSH) and "Science in Society" (SIS) programmes of the Directorate-General (DG) for Research make a valuable contribution.

(José Manuel Silva Rodríguez, Director-General of DG Research, European Commission)

In a changing world characterized by the accelerating globalization of research and technology and the emergence of new scientific and technological powers – notably China and India – the European Research Area (ERA) is more than ever a cornerstone for a European knowledge society. The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 endorsed the objective of creating the European Research Area that combines a European «internal market» for research, where researchers, technology and knowledge freely circulate, effective European-level coordination of national and regional research activities, programmes and policies and initiatives implemented and funded at European level (European Commission, *The European Research Area: New Perspectives*, 2007).

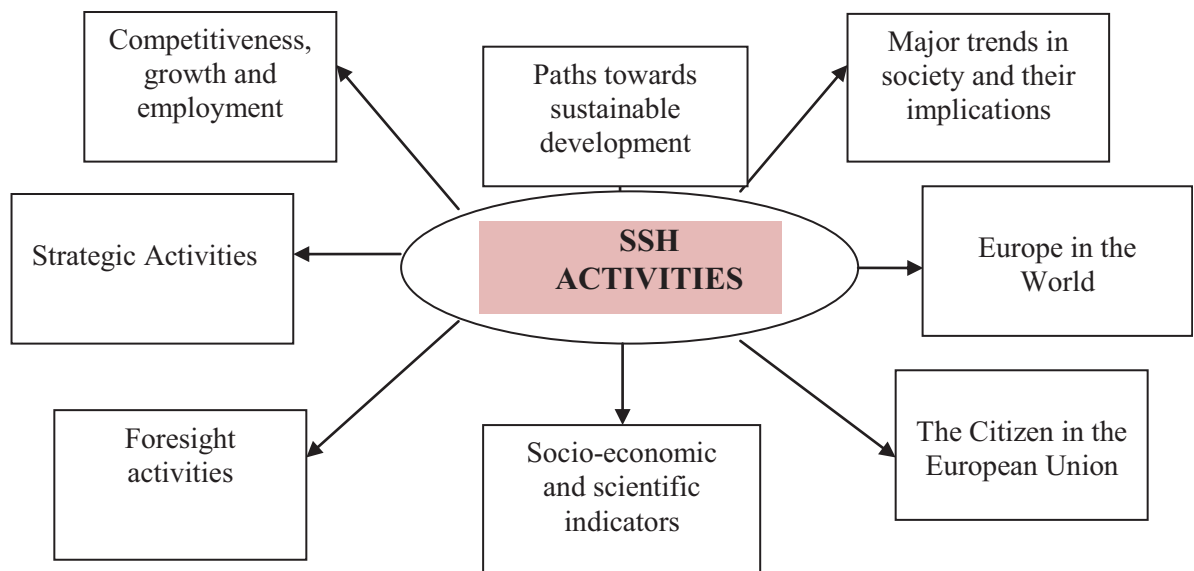
The **socio-economic research** theme is in widespread use in the ERA funding programmes and elsewhere. In the Fourth Framework Programme, for instance, there was a programme entitled 'Targeted Socio-Economic Research' (TSER) and in the Fifth Framework Programme which succeeded it in 2000, there were numerous calls for proposals to carry out socioeconomic research related to information society technologies and to other issues of relevance to EU policy. In the Sixth Framework Programme, which came on stream in 2003, there were signs that the

phrase ‘research in the social sciences’ was replacing ‘socio-economic research’ at least in the programmes related to issues of citizenship and governance (Huws U, 2004). Under the Seventh Framework Programme - run from 2007 to 2013 - “Research in Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities” remains one of the main research themes.

Within the European Research Area, socio-economic research should facilitate an understanding of the complex interactions between humans and nature. It can be used to investigate the social and economic costs and benefits of various scenarios, and for helping to find the causes and solutions to problems (European Commission, *Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities and Science in Society in 2007*, Highlights of the Year, 2008). The purposes of socio-economic research may be: to improve human knowledge and understanding in the general and abstract sense of adding to the existing store of knowledge (this could be the case, for instance, in much academic research); to improve public policy (this could apply in the case of a great deal of research carried out or commissioned by public authorities or charitable trusts); to improve the quality of human life (this could apply in the case of health-related or environmental research, or research related to the development of new products and services or the improvement of existing ones; indirectly, it could also relate to a range of research whose aim is to improve industrial organization or economic competitiveness).

The 7th Framework Programme (FP7) focuses on building a better understanding of the socio-economic challenges facing Europe, such as economic growth, employment and competitiveness, social cohesion and sustainability, quality of life etc. Its Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) activities are implemented by means of the Work Programme and are grouped into eight areas:

Fig.no.1. Social Sciences and Humanities Activities in FP7



The broad objectives of FP7 have been grouped into four categories: Cooperation, **Ideas**, People and Capacities. For each type of objective, there is a specific programme corresponding to the main areas of EU research policy. All specific programmes work together to promote and encourage the creation of European poles of (scientific) excellence. The specific programme ‘**Ideas**’ – that will be in debate within this paper - aims to reinforce excellence, dynamism and creativity in European research and improve the attractiveness of Europe for the best researchers in “**frontier research**”. In terms of the official document, “frontier research pursues questions irrespective of established disciplinary boundaries. It may well involve multi-, inter- or trans-

disciplinary research that brings together researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds, with different theoretical and conceptual approaches, techniques, methodologies and instrumentation, perhaps even different goals and motivations” (Kafatos F., 2009).

2. “Ideas” Programme in the European Union

At the European level, the “Ideas” Programme is managed through the European Research Council (ERC), through two types of projects: (i) ERC Starting Independent Researcher Grant and (ii) ERC Advanced Investigators Grant. Applications can be made in any field of research - including the social sciences and humanities - with particular emphasis on the frontier of science, scholarship and engineering. Specific socio-economic proposals can be submitted in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SH) section, in the first panel (SH1: **Individuals, institutions and markets**), on the following topics:

SH1_1 Macroeconomics, growth, business cycles

SH1_2 Microeconomics, institutional economics

SH1_3 Econometrics, statistical methods

SH1_4 Financial markets, banking and corporate finance

SH1_5 Competitiveness, innovation, research and development

SH1_6 Consumer choice, behavioral economics, marketing

SH1_7 Organization studies, strategy

SH1_8 Human resource management, employment and earnings

SH1_9 Public administration, public economics

SH1_10 Income distribution, poverty

SH1_11 International trade, economic geography

SH1_12 Economic history, development

The first *ERC Starting Grant Competition* has started in 2007: from the 9167 applications submitted, 201 proposals were put on the “priority list”, while other 229 proposals were put on reserve list for getting funded. The first call for *ERC Advanced Grants* started in 2008; in total 2167 proposals were submitted to this call. The distribution of proposals per domain was the following: 41.5% in Physical Sciences and Engineering, 30.5% in Life Sciences, 17.5% in Social Sciences and Humanities and 10.5% in the Interdisciplinary Research domain. **52 proposals are expected to be funded in Social Sciences and Humanities**, from which 14 in the SH1 (Individuals, institutions and markets) panel:

Table no.1. Social Sciences and Humanities Funded Projects in ERC Advanced Grants.
Panel SH1: Individuals, institutions and markets

No.	Project title	Host country
1	Social capital and enforcement of informal contracts in developing economies	BE
2	Labor Markets, Economic Fluctuations and Monetary Policy	ES
3	Evaluation and management of collective long-term risks	FR
4	Regulating Retail Finance	DE
5	Game Theory and Applications in the Presence of Cognitive Limitations	FR
6	Quantitative dynamic macroeconomic analysis of global climate change and inequality	SE
7	Nonparametric and Semiparametric Methods in Economics and Finance	UK
8	Bounded rationality and social concerns in decision processes: theory, experiments, and applications	IT
9	Money, Liquidity and the Aggregate Economy	UK
10	Bounded Rationality in Industrial Organization	UK
11	How do values influence the functioning of institutions and the effects of	IT

	policies?	
12	Information and Competition	ES
13	Policy and Culture in the Development Process	CH
14	<i>On defining and implementing re-distributive policies* (on the reserve list)</i>	BE

BE= Belgium, ES = Spain, FR = France, DE = Deutschland, SE= Sweden, UK = United Kingdom, IT = Italy, CH = Czech Republic

As it can be seen, three projects come from United Kingdom, two from Spain, Italy, France, Belgium and one from Deutschland, Sweden and Czech Republic. Projects can be hardly grouped after JEL classification: nevertheless, some of them are **macroeconomic approaches** (labour markets, economic fluctuations, monetary policy, macroeconomic analysis, aggregate economy, redistributive policies etc.), while others can be included to **Mathematical and Quantitative Methods** (nonparametric and semiparametric methods: JEL: C1, Game theory - JEL: C7). The “social” approach appears twice (social capital, social concerns) and the same with “bounded rationality”. It should be noted that a special attention is paid to **general economics** (relation of economics to social values) or to **cultural economics** (relation of economic policy and culture).

3. “Ideas” Programme in Romania

The Exploratory Research Projects “Ideas” have as main goal the development of the knowledge broadening in all the research domains, including the socio-human sciences, both by fundamental research and by advanced research in order to solve complex issues, of frontier, by obtaining new knowledge regarding processes and phenomena, by formulating and validating original suppositions, concept models and theories. There are also some **derived objectives**, that refer to: (i) promotion of original research and increase of research capacity, with favorable implications on the international competitiveness of the Romanian research, (ii) increase of full-time researchers financed through research projects, as well as funding of PhD positions, encouraging/promoting researchers’ formation in an environment of high scientific quality and (iii) increase of the Romanian research visibility on international level, especially European, by increasing the quality and the better knowledge transfer.

The 2008 Romanian Competition for “Ideas” Exploratory Research Projects was organized around 32 areas of interest. For the “Economics” Section, there were 244 submitted projects, from which only 76 have been proposed for funding. A brief analysis of these projects highlighted the following issues and results:

-40% of the projects aimed at the creation of economic models or at modeling economic phenomena: (*econometric models, operational models, operational-behavioral model, nonlinear models, mathematical-statistical models, multicriterial models, conceptual models, neurofuzzy modeling etc.*); **a significant part of the projects was devoted to exploratory research or anthropological research, scenarios, analysis, interdisciplinary approaches, best practices etc.**

-by subject, most of the projects relate to macroeconomics (*fiscal policy, labour market policies, decentralization, price balance, environmental policies, public performance, economic development etc.*), **finances and accounting** (*accounting standards, financial reporting, auditing etc.*), **management and marketing topics** (*leadership, decision process, learning organizations, corporate governance, intellectual capital, consumer behavior, corporate social responsibility, blogs - as marketing tools etc.*); *not least, there are some projects related to IT topics* (*software quality, mobile application, TIC, e-learning strategies etc.*);

-at a sectorial level, most of the projects aimed at SMEs, but there are also themes related to *corporations, educational institutions, health organizations or public entities;*

-24% of projects use the concept “knowledge”: *knowledge management, knowledge based- economy, knowledge-based society, knowledge-based leadership etc.*

-20% of projects use the concept “European”: *integration in European Union, European business environment, convergence with the European Union, European values, European level etc.*; at the same time, there are some approaches related to the new member states, *international markets, emergent countries or global economic environment*;

-there are also some other widely used concepts: **competitive/competitiveness** (14%): *sustainable competitiveness, competitive position, competitiveness and dynamism, national competitiveness etc.*, **risk/uncertainty** (*risk analysis, operational risk, uncertainty – volatility - risk*), **sustainable/sustainability** (*sustainable development, sustainable strategies etc.*), **efficiency** (*economic efficiency, social efficiency, investment efficiency etc.*). It should be also noted that there were other two descriptives: **intelligent** (*intelligent development, intelligent organization, intelligent systems etc.*) and **creative** (*creative control, creative industries etc.*) that were used prevalently.

4. Conclusions. A comparison between Romanian and European socio-economic “Ideas”

The comparative analysis of the two types of competitions should first take into account their objectives: thus, if the European competition aims to reinforce excellence, dynamism and creativity in European research and to improve the attractiveness for the best researchers in frontier research, the Romanian one has as a main goal the development of knowledge in all the research domains, in order to solve complex issues of frontier, with favorable implications on the *international competitiveness of the Romanian research.*

The first major difference between the two programs can be seen in the topics addressed by them: at the European level, there is a preference for **general economics**, while at a national level one can find more focused researches, often with a sectorial application. For example, a theme on "competition" topic is addressed - at a European level - through a project like *Information and Competition*, but more narrowly at a national level, through a project like: *Transformations in the competitive behavior of institutional and economic actors in the European business environment.*

Analysis of issues used in the two types of projects shows that Romanian projects are much better anchored in the overall objectives of FP7’s socio-economic field: the eight priority themes identified at the European level can easily find a correspondent in Romanian projects (*competitiveness, growth and employment, strategic activities, sustainable development etc.*).

Probably the most obvious difference arise from the titles of research projects: if European project titles have, on average, 5 words per title, Romanian projects’ titles have, on average, 11 words/title. As a general observation, most European projects aim to establish links between two or three economic phenomena (*labor markets, economic fluctuations and monetary policy, money, liquidity and the aggregate economy, information and competition etc.*). Analysis of the Romanian projects’ topics can lead to the creation of a simple scheme:

Research Object	Research subject	<i>In the context of...</i>
(Develop, create) a model/ modeling Exploratory research Analyses, anthropological research etc.	Financial reporting Decision process Accounting standards Fiscal policy Labour market policy etc.	Knowledge-based society/ economy European Union Competitiveness and growth Sustainable development

This scheme framed all Romanian winning projects in the 2008 “Ideas” Competition (“Economics” Section) and can still be used by economists and academics in launching (successfully) a project proposal.

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