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Sciences with the Science

Alliance Athena

Foreword

Préface

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Foreword

In the current European environment where the main orientations of research are being redefined, the directors in charge of Alliance decided that it belonged to their mission to foster re-thinking the major principles at the root of the Social Sciences and Humanities, as well as their role in science in general and in Society at the same time.

An approach was accordingly implemented to the concerned scientific bodies and government officials as well as about a hundred individual consultants, from France and abroad, on the basis of their specific capabilities and specialties. While the scheme does not pretend to be part of a logic of representative democracy, as exists in the research bodies and in universities, it undoubtedly has as its reference a form of participative democracy, put at the service of the future of the Social Sciences and Humanities.

Such are the framework and spirit in which the present text was conceived. It is the result of an exceptional mobilisation as

regards the quality of the contributions as much as that of their authors, whose exclusive inspiration was the general interest.

While Alliance would not pretend that the text be representative of the entire French network for Social Sciences and Humanities, it is however in our eyes a contribution to a particularly meaningful debate at a historical moment when a lot is at stake for the future of research. The debate is certainly worth continuing at both the national and the European levels, with no dominance of one instance over another, in the spirit of this Alliance's objectives : a space for exchange and dialogue at the service of all concerned scientific communities.

When referring in the text that follows to their various statuses, the Social Sciences and Humanities are shown in their diversity ranging from humanities to social sciences. This variety should be envisaged, not as an invalidating heterogeneity but rather as a wealth well worth exploiting at a time when all sciences are moving closer to one another. Indeed, they even are more than ever worth delving into in order to escape from the growing scientist temptation and from the diktats of short-term lures.

The Social Sciences and Humanities are at the core of what will shape up the scientific minds. They are therefore critical sciences, not in the sense of simply denouncing what exists, but rather in the sense of unveiling or perceiving what is hidden or minute but is nevertheless an active part in the constitution of what is human and of how the social world works.

The Social Sciences and Humanities do not shun the question of their usefulness, but rather include it in a wider perspective where this question is not dissociated from questions regarding the conditions of being scientific through the quest of paradigms, theories, concepts and methods. The Social Sciences and Humanities forcefully underline the demand for being scientific-minded. Observance of the rules for producing knowledge will not justify keeping the citizens away from research, that is to say from the question of the conditions of creating scientific information or even the question of the participation of the general public, including their implication in the process of production, dissemination and appropriation of scientific knowledge.

Confident in their own identity, the Social Sciences and Humanities reassert the place which is their own within the phenomena studied by the other sciences in as much as any of the phenomena studied by other sciences, any new technology, comprise human and social dimensions which needs be taken into account as a condition for the success of the objectives pursued.

And lastly, the SSH aim at making a strong contribution to a major issue haunting our societies as much as science itself : the issue of sense in all its multiple dimensions, from comprehension to direction, time-frame, pertinence and ethics.

Such are some of the orientations in re-thinking as developed in the present text aiming precisely and positively to include all the Social Sciences and Humanities into science in general and define a common future for them.

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