

HUMAN PLUS 2004

**First Conference of the Archipelago of Humanistic Thematic Networks
"The role of the humanistic arts and sciences in European society, education and
research"**

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Definition of the "Humanistic" area

It seems to me impossible to define the area. It is probably fair to say that the area includes what are normally referred to as "the humanities and social sciences", the arts in the widest sense, and areas on the fringes of medicine proper. One could also look at it from the other end and say that the *Humanistic area* includes everything outside the hard sciences, medicine (incl. dentistry, veterinary medicine, and pharmacology), engineering, agriculture and the like.

What seems to me to be more interesting and important is the fact that the TNs in these areas are by and large not devoted to traditional disciplines, but constitute a variety of responses to changing needs in European society.

Structural issues

I do not think that we shall get very far by describing how subjects, subject areas etc. are structured and organised in different institutions and in different national traditions. More often than not, people working in these structures – faculties, departments - have little to say to each other anyway.

The relevance of the "Humanistic" area to society, culture, research, citizenship etc.

To my mind, this is the most important issue. It should be at the centre of our discussions. I would rephrase the question asked in Kl's email message of 21/11/04 as follows: **What is the relevance of the *Humanistic area* to the creation of a European knowledge society?**

Background

In the knowledge society, the value of knowledge first and foremost derives from the application of knowledge – primarily knowledge produced in the hard sciences, in engineering, and in economics. However, whilst the creation of a knowledge society and of a knowledge based economy is of fundamental importance to economic progress and social cohesion, there are important "humanistic" issues that need to be addressed if the ideals which underpin the creation of a European society are to be realised.

- The Humanistic area is to enable students to understand the present as a result of past developments.
- The Humanistic area makes sure that Europe will not lose sight of its past.
- The Humanistic area will enable students to understand phenomena of various kinds as culture bound; it will enable them to develop an intercultural understanding of European society and culture as well as of non-European societies and cultures.
- The Member States and regions which make up the Union adhere to different sets of values. Not only is it important that these sets of values be described and analysed both on a vertical and on a horizontal axis; it is also important that the Humanistic area should contribute to the discussion about the values upon which the European society we are creating should be based.
- The Humanistic area should make it its business to seek to anticipate and to shape future developments.
- The Humanistic area has considerable potential for interdisciplinary / multidisciplinary work that can respond to changing needs in society.
- An important aspect of the Humanistic area is its concern with the transmission of knowledge, with teacher education.
- In any knowledge based society, communication is of utmost importance. It is particularly important in a society characterised by linguistic and cultural diversity. Notice the importance attributed to the knowledge of foreign

