

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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Work group: **4.** (mapping the 'missing' or 'emerging' islands in the humanistic Archipelago)

Thematic Network: **HERODOT** Geography Higher Education Departments

HERODOT's mission is to promote Geography and the professional development of academic staff. The project consists of three main thematic pillars for research:

- [Europeanisation of geographical education curriculum, activities and policy](#)
- Co-operation strategies for the professional development and training of geographers,
- [Exciting Geography - Innovation in geographical learning and teaching](#)

Geography as a discipline is facing a number of challenges, although these can also be seen as opportunities for exciting research and teaching:

- A paradigm shift away from the "quantitative revolution", to qualitative approaches
- A physical/human divide within departments, where "environmental issues" fall in the gap
- Limited articulation of theory in Academic Geography, that leaves the discipline "exposed" to competing disciplines
- A perceived lack of vocational training for graduate Geographers, that leaves them "underskilled" in an increasingly competing labour market

Some of the above challenges are also experienced by other humanistic disciplines within Archipelago, but one of our aims, as educators and researchers, should be to turn them into exciting opportunities. In order to undertake such a task, it may not be enough to revisit old concepts; we are instead expected to identify new territories and encourage their exploration, from researchers and students, alike. I suggest there are 3 distinctive islands awaiting exploration, with multi-disciplinary approaches, using multi-method research:

1. Pan-European identities

Humanistic disciplines tend to approach the European identity from their own, rather limited, perspective. It may be the case that European integration is currently at a much more advanced state than we are capable of perceiving it through the limited evidence at our disposal. European citizens have almost certainly adopted a range of identities, through their actions, but our methods constrain them to identify with a specific group.

2. Social Capital

This is likely to be the social currency of our future. Some national governments (e.g. UK) are not grasping the importance of social capital for social well-being and develop policies to encourage social cohesion. Others are still in their infancy, maybe because they already possess this social currency. However, social capital is difficult to define and even more difficult to "measure".

3. The "others"

If we have almost developed our Pan-European identity and social capital, then how do we perceive the rest of the world as pan-Europeans? Does our new identity help us understand the "others", or is it just an amalgamation of stereotypes? Does our social capital suffice to overcome not only domestic, but also European challenges, or do we have to rely on the "others" (in economic, technological and military terms)?

The Humanistic Thematic Networks have the capacity to explore the above challenges!