

# Structuring Effect of the EU Framework Programmes in Estonia? The Case of Sociology

Teele Tõnismann

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## Article abstract

This article analyzes the extent that a European funding instrument, the Framework Programme (FP), has affected the structuring of sociologists' project collaboration practices in a post-communist Estonia, which joined the EU in 2004. It is hypothesized that to better understand how the FP has structured the sociology discipline in Estonia, its usage should be studied in two distinct levels of academic context; the national and disciplinary levels. Science administrative elite have used the FP as a normative model for implementing national research funding policy reforms. In the case of sociologists, these reforms have engendered a partial auto-exclusion from competition for national grants perceived as highly competitive and resulted in an orientation towards commissioned contract funding both at a national and European level. This exposes the limited structuring effect of the FP in Estonia, a country otherwise considered an exemplary participant in EU programs.

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*By Teele Tõnismann<sup>i</sup>*

## **Abstract**

This article analyzes the extent that a European funding instrument, the Framework Programme (FP), has affected the structuring of sociologists' project collaboration practices in a post-communist Estonia, which joined the EU in 2004. It is hypothesized that to better understand how the FP has structured the sociology discipline in Estonia, its usage should be studied in two distinct levels of academic context; the national and disciplinary levels. Science administrative elite have used the FP as a normative model for implementing national research funding policy reforms. In the case of sociologists, these reforms have engendered a partial auto-exclusion from competition for national grants perceived as highly competitive and resulted in an orientation towards commissioned contract funding both at a national and European level. This exposes the limited structuring effect of the FP in Estonia, a country otherwise considered an exemplary participant in EU programs.

**Keywords:** Europeanization, research policy, project-based research funding, framework programs, sociology, Estonia.

## **Résumé**

Cet article analyse le degré avec lequel un instrument européen de financement, le programme-cadre (FP), parvient à affecter la structuration des pratiques de projets collaboratifs entre sociologues dans un pays anciennement communiste qui a rejoint l'UE en 2004 : l'Estonie. Il est émis l'hypothèse que pour mieux comprendre comment le FP structure la discipline sociologique en Estonie, son usage doit être étudié dans deux dimensions universitaires : la dimension nationale et la dimension disciplinaire. Le FP a été mobilisé par les élites des sciences administratives comme modèle normatif pour mettre en œuvre des réformes dans les politiques nationales de financement de la recherche. Dans le cas des sociologues, ces réformes ont conduit partiellement à leur auto-censure dans les candidatures aux subventions nationales considérées hautement compétitives, ce qui résulte en une orientation vers des contrats de commandes tant au niveau national qu'europpéen. Ceci révèle l'effet limité du FP en Estonie, un pays habituellement considéré comme exemplaire dans sa participation aux programmes de l'UE.

**Mots-Clés :** Européanisation, politique de la recherche, financement sur projet de la recherche, programme-cadre, sociologie, Estonie.

## Introduction

The Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP) has a central role in the European Union's (EU) research and development (R&D) policy.<sup>1</sup> Both the political ambition of, and earmarked funding for, the FP increased significantly after the establishment of the European Research Area (ERA) in 2000, which situated R&D at the frontline of European economic development (Kuhlmann, Edler, 2003; Biegelbauer, Weber 2017). Created in 1984, the annual budget of the FP averaged EUR 640 million over its first iteration; by 2015, and now known as "Horizon 2020" (H2020), it has reached EUR 9.9 billion. Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) projects are not exempt from the scope of the program and have been included since the beginning of the 4th edition in 1994. An example of such an SSH-driven project has been the quest to unite expert groups and create enabling environments for the development of networks by instigating what some have termed the construction of the "European SSH community" (Schögler, König, 2017; Palne Kovacs, Kutsar, 2002). In line with the thematic focus of this issue (see Dakowska, Visier, introduction), this article investigates the structuring effect of the FP on the discipline of sociology in Estonia, a small former Soviet Republic that joined the EU in 2004.

The question of "Europeanization"<sup>2</sup> has drawn increasing attention from researchers studying Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries' research policies, especially after the establishment of the ERA. Similar to research conducted about western European countries—be it through an institutional (Trondal, 2002, Nevada, Stampfer, 2012) or organizational theory approach (Geuna, 1999; Van der Meulen, 2002; Edler, Frischer, Glanz, Stampfer, 2014)—studies about CEE countries have mostly focused on analyzing the compliance of national science administrative systems with the policy objectives in the EU (Radosevic, Lepori, 2009; Suurna, Kattel, 2010). Some other, mostly western authors' works, have shown the prominence of European-wide institutional and organisational arrangements, including for SSH, that represent an increasing range of opportunities for researchers in transnational collaboration (Sapiro, 2009; Heilborn, Boncourt, Schögler, Sapiro, 2017; Gingras, Heilbron, 2009; Heilbornet, Guilhot, Jeanpierre, 2009; Boncourt, 2016). Focussed on the development of professional networks, such works are less concerned about specific policy contexts where these arrangements are operating. However, due to the specific nature of the research policy resulting from relatively high claim for professional autonomy, there

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<sup>1</sup> The author recognizes the change in the official name of the EU over time, from the European Economic Community to the European Community and finally the European Union. For the sake of simplicity, EU will be used throughout.

<sup>2</sup> In this article, "European integration" and "Europeanization" are handled separately. The former precedes the latter as it is the prior institutionalization of supranational political structures that gave rise to questions about the changes in domestic political orders. Europeanization focuses on consequences once the EU's institutions were in place or about to become the major institutions of the national political game (Baisnée, Pasquier, 2007).

is a growing need for analysis that reconciles policy level developments with professional level developments (Whitley, Gläser, 2014). Due to rapid political changes these countries have undergone the few past decades, CEE countries are particularly sensitive to multi-level analysis.

Over the last quarter century, the CEE region's academic sector has developed within the context of substantial political change. Within the collapse of the Soviet Union, organizational and funding systems were disconnected from the all-Union apparatus and developed proper national settings. Subsequently, together with European integration, the EU has become the dominant actor in forming national systems (Suurna, Kattel, 2010). Given this background, Estonia can be seen as a singular case. On the policy level, it has developed one of the most competitive national funding environments of the CEE countries. It is overall one of the most successful CEE countries in gaining FP grants.<sup>3</sup> On the level of academic profession, together with the other Baltic States, its SSH discipline's environment of cooperation has undergone profound changes. Distinct from their counterparts in former Eastern Bloc satellite countries, and the natural science disciplines, Western science actors' activities in interacting with SSH scholars in the Soviet Union was hindered due to political factors (Engelbrecht, 2003). After joining the EU, the Baltic states were the only region out of former Soviet Republics where SSH researchers gained access to participate in the FP scheme. This leads to question to what extent FP has acted to structure the Europeanization of Estonian sociology researcher communities' funding collaboration practices. And what does this case study suggest more generally in terms of understanding the development of research policies in the CEE region in the context of European integration?

By being attentive to the different levels of analysis in tackling the specific context of the CEE within the context of Europeanization, this study enters into the continuity of works denoted as a government of disciplines (Benninghoff, Crespy, 2017, p. 2). The underlying assumption of these studies is that by focusing on professional evolution within disciplines, it is possible to articulate research collaboration practices together with the national-level institutions and the cognitive and normative references diffused from international cooperation. Adopting this approach in the study, it is hypothesized that in order to better understand the effect of the FP in Estonia, the use<sup>4</sup> of the program should be studied at the level of the discipline in conjunction with national research funding policies. Hence, instead of focusing on the institutional compliance of national science administrative systems with the policy objectives

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<sup>3</sup> By measuring the "juste retour" share of a country in FP7 through its relative contribution to the EU budget, only Estonia, Cyprus, and Slovenia are FP7 "net recipients" (Schuch, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> For Jacquot and Woll (2003), the concept of usage of European integration covers "practices and political interactions which adjust and redefine themselves by seizing the EU as a set of opportunities, be they institutional, ideological, political or organisational" (p. 4).

promoted within the FP, the interest of this article concerns European integration through a more sociological perspective by examining the issue from the “bottom up” perspective. This could also allow better consideration of the specific complexity of European integration and Europeanization, which operates on a multitude of levels (Saurugger, 2013).

This article is structured as follows. After presenting the study’s methodology in the first section, focus will turn to the relationship between national- and European-level policies by outlining the implementation of national reforms through the selective usage of European policy frameworks. The second and the third sections examine the two logics of the Estonian sociologist community’s use of the FP, notably the logics of non-usage and limited usage. Pragmatic orientations are seen as having a major role, notably with regard to more easily administrative and secure projects on the margins of the hierarchy of funding sources.

## 1. Research Methodology and Methods

To understand the uses of the FP in the Estonian sociology community, the first aim was to examine research income from different financial sources. For this, a sample was formed of 63 (total headcount) sociologists working in 2017 within the different social science-related sub-units of two prominent Estonian universities (henceforth named as Univ1 and Univ2).<sup>5</sup> As these are the only universities in Estonia offering sociology courses and containing specific sociology structural units, the sample can be considered to formally represent 100% of sociologists within Estonian academia.<sup>6</sup> Using the Estonian Research Information System (ERIS) portal,<sup>7</sup> which consists of a detailed account of researchers’ projects for the period 2007–2017, a cross-sectional

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<sup>5</sup> The sample included sociologists from Univ1’s chair of media and communication, chair of social policy, chair of social work, and chair of sociology; and from Univ2’s sociology study area and Institute of International Social Studies. The selection of sub-units was made within explorative interviews and based on auto-identification of individuals working at both universities’ social science sub-units.

<sup>6</sup> During interviews with sociologists, it was revealed that some researchers identify themselves at least partly as sociologists, but have left to work in other faculties and higher education institutions. The magnitude of this group of individuals remains difficult to estimate.

<sup>7</sup> The Estonian Research Information System portal (<https://www.etis.ee/Portal/News/Index/ENG>, accessed on 15 October 2018) contains information on research and development institutions, researchers, research projects, and various research results. At the universities under study, an obligatory regular data submission to the portal has been in force since 2006/07. There are two possible limits to using the ERIS portal. The data on research projects includes unique projects where funding is reflected in the universities’ budgeting systems, while contracts signed directly with the institute and individual researchers are not included. Also, the data can contain other information shortages, as some information provided by researchers (particularly those less active in the profession) might not be complete. However, according to the interviewed sociologists, the data shortage is not considered important enough to compromise the validity of the analysis.

analysis was conducted comparing different funding sources<sup>8</sup> against variables collected from the CVs of the sample group such as their age, institutional belonging, and research topics. The method of collecting the data on an individual basis was chosen because (a) it is reliable as it allows one to analyze the articulation between different sources on an individual basis and (b) there was a lack of budget information specifically for the community of sociologists.<sup>9</sup> It is also important to note that these research budgets are supplementary to national institutional funding and ESIF (European structural and investment funds) funding. According to research interviews, in 2017 and in previous years, project-based research funding made up around 50% of total research funding at Univ1 and 75% at Univ2.

**Table 1: Accumulated individual funding sources of Estonian sociologists in 2017**

	Total funding		National grants	National government grants	Other national	FP grants	Other EU institutions grants	Other international
<b>Univ 1</b> (total: 41 sociologists)	EUR 5 004 619	% out of total funding	32 %	41 %	3 %	16 %	4%	2 %
		No. of grants/ No. of grant holders	(19/12)	(39/12)	(14/8)	(8/5)	(11/5)	(7/5)
<b>Univ 2</b> (total: 22 sociologists)	EUR 4 987 851	% out of total funding	31 %	9 %	10 %	30 %	9 %	11 %
		No. of grants/ No. of grant holders	(12/7)	(26/9)	(40/9)	(12/5)	(13/6)	(9/6)

Source: author's compilation

As a result of this analysis, a segregation was observed in the selection of sources between the sociologists according to institutional membership (Table 1). In short, while sociologists at Univ1, compared to their counterparts at Univ2, are more oriented to gaining “national government grants” (41% of income at Univ1 versus 9%

<sup>8</sup> The following research funding sources were distinguished: national competitive grants (allocated by research funding agency), national (commissioned) government contracts, other national contracts (such as foundations), FP grants, EU institutions (commissioned) contracts, and other international contracts. As private sources are almost non-existent, these were categorized either under “other national” or “international contracts.”

<sup>9</sup> The social science faculties have, since their establishment, undergone several structural reforms and name changes. The only budgetary information available at Univ1 that reflects part of the Univ1 sample group's sociologists' activity is for the years 2011–2013. The budgets of the sub-structures of Univ2 were not available for this research.

at Univ2), Univ2 sociologists are oriented more to “other national” and international sources (60% of income at Univ2 versus 20% at Univ1). Univ2 sociologists also exceeded Univ1 in gaining FP grants (30% of income or EUR 1.47 million at Univ2 versus 16% or EUR 0.8 million at Univ1).<sup>10</sup> Placed into the wider context of Estonian FP participation, Estonian sociologists’ participation in FP programs has been structurally low. For example, sociologists gained around 1.3% of funding from H2020 SSH-oriented objectives (SC6, Europe in a changing world— inclusive, innovative, and reflexive societies) (Table2). Contrarily, looking at total EC contribution to Estonia from FP7 and H2020, sociologists received around 22% of total funding allocated to Estonia under the SC6.<sup>11</sup> Compared to the other CEE countries, the overall participation of Estonian researchers in SSH thematic projects has been relatively high (Must, 2001). For example, under FP7, 36 SSH projects were funded, placing Estonia as the most successful CEE country after Hungary and Poland (Kovalenko, Titarenko, 2014). Moreover, individuals who gained national grants at Univ1 had almost non-existent participation in FP projects. Conversely, there is a group of researchers at Univ2 who simultaneously accumulated national grants and FP projects.

**Table 2: Estonian participation in H2020 SC6**

<b>Total EC Contribution</b>	<b>EC contribution SC6</b>	<b>Sociologists in SC6</b>	<b>Univ1</b>	<b>Univ2</b>
EUR 70.38 million (263 projects)	EUR 4.42 million (19 projects)	EUR 0.98 million	16% (1 project)	84% (2 projects)

Source: author’s compilation<sup>12</sup>

To better understand these differing orientations, 17 sociologists were interviewed between September 2017 and January 2018. These include, nine current and three former Univ1 sociologists, and four current and one former Univ2 sociologists. Those interviewed were selected in order to provide the most extensive selection of profiles regarding funding practices. In these interviews, particular focus was on their identity as a researcher and in the way that their past educational and professional trajectories structured their use of EU programs. This information was systematically contrasted with empirical sources available on the subject, such as government policy papers,

<sup>10</sup> Altogether, the analyzed group of sociologists participated, between 2007 and 2017, in 19 FP-funded projects. These were 4 FP6 projects (CITIZEN); 5 FP7 projects (4 SSH, 1ERC); 5 H2020 projects (2 INFRADEV, 3 SOCIETY); 1 ERA-NET; and 4 COST action projects. Estonian sociologists (from Univ2) coordinated 2 projects (FP6 CITIZENS and H2020 SOCIETY). Five projects were led by researchers from the UK.

<sup>11</sup> Author’s calculations, based on Must et al. (2014).

<sup>12</sup> Author’s calculations, based on ERIS portal and EstRC policy analysis (Ukrainski et. al, 2018) In these calculations, the timeframe 2007-2017 is not taken into account.

policy reviews, and archive materials collected about sociology development in their respective universities.<sup>13</sup>

## **2. Competitive National Research Funding System in Favour of the FP?**

This section analyzes the articulation between the national and European policies by outlining the development of the former's structure through the selective usage of European policy frameworks (Biegelbauer, Weber, 2017). Although Estonia joined the EU in 2004, the European Commission (EC) R&D policies generally, and the FP specifically, had previously been used by the national research administrative elite as justification for national policy reforms, resulting in a highly competitive university research funding system.

### **2.1 Reforms Within Research Funding System to Meet "International" Standards in Research**

By 2017 Estonia had developed one of the most competitive university research funding systems out of CEE countries. Contrary to some other studied CEE countries' policy reforms, such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Latvia or Lithuania, (Lepori, Masso, Jablecka, Sima, Ukrainski, 2009) the Estonian university research funding system and organizational arrangement was reformed on the example of several western-European and US policy models already present in the early 1990s. The main change was the progressive dissolution of the Academy of Science system and introduction of a research funding council that started to allocate funding on the project-based principle.<sup>14</sup> By 1997, the system was fully competitive (Raudla, Karo, Valdmaa, Kattel, 2015). One of the consequences was that funding was progressively concentrated into the largest institutions and disciplines such as the exact sciences (Masso, Ukrainski, 2009). Funding was allocated by the Estonian Science Foundation (EstSF) established in 1990, and the Ministry of Education and Research (MER)<sup>15</sup> advisory Council of Scientific Competence (CSC) established in 1997 - these two were

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<sup>13</sup> This work was supported by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, in cooperation with the Archimedes Foundation. The author is grateful for the comments and suggestions made by editors of the number Dorota Dakowska and Claire Visier and anonymous referees. The author also wishes to thank Cécile Crespy and Rainer Kattel for their support in producing this paper. She also thanks Marge Unt, Ellu Saar, Veronika Kalmus and Erkki Karo.

<sup>14</sup> In the Soviet Union, research activity was mostly carried out in industrial institutes linked to relevant Soviet ministries and individual republics, or in institutes of the academies of sciences, thus being ultimately dependent on the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Funding for research was provided directly or indirectly by state sources on a per-institution basis, but was also allocated via military contracts and state programs (Meske, 2004). Amid the political turmoil surrounding the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the former republic's research funding systems were disconnected from the all-Union apparatus and stable sources of funding dried up.

<sup>15</sup> The Ministry of Education was reorganized into the Ministry of Research in 2003.



consolidated into the Estonian Research Council (EstRC) in 2012. Some institutional funding was re-launched in 2005, but according to the Technopolis assessment, the budget remained scarce and favored development of older research areas at the expense of newer ones, as funds were allocated based on research quality and efficiency (Technopolis, 2006). The change in funding supported another policy objective, namely the consolidation of former Academy research institutes with universities. The latter was implemented through extensive reform carried out between 1996-1998. The removal of the basic institutional funding for research institute was, therefore, part of the overall research organizational reform.

The specific trajectory of Estonian university research policy was hence set up already in the early 1990s. The underlying principle in conducting these reforms was the “rapid incorporation of Estonian science and its R&D system into the world science mosaic” (Martinson, 2001, p. 67). Keeping “high standards” in research was regarded as the “only option for a small country” (Engelbrecht, 2003, p. 13). As studied previously, these policy ideas could emerge mostly due to early and simultaneous change in the Estonian political and academic elite. In research, the main reformers were mostly from natural and exact sciences and had acquired knowledge resources from different international spheres to establish a funding system with criteria favoring international competitiveness. The furthering of Estonian public research funding policy was assured with their arrival to national level administrative positions (Tõnismann, 2018). For the new elite, the FP was seen as one of the sources that could be accessed through competitive “exercise” at the national level.

## **2.2 Selective Usage of the European Policy Frameworks**

The EU R&D policies had a central role not only in direct research funding but also in structuring the national policies. For example, between 2007 and 2013, the EstSF (and subsequently EstRC) personal grants total budget was EUR 52 million, CSC and EstRC competitive institutional grants EUR 158.9 million, and FP7 EC contribution EUR 94.2 million (Must et al., 2014).<sup>16</sup> With the aim of reducing social and regional inequalities, the European Commission had already intervened in the region from the early 1990s. For example, together with opening up specific R&D programs, the network “Fellow Members to the Innovation Relay Centres” (FEMIRC) was established, and later transformed into part of the National Contact Point (NCP) network.<sup>17</sup> It aimed to make available and accessible to potential users relevant information concerning national, regional, and EU R&D programs. In Estonia the NCP project became part of the

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<sup>16</sup> In addition to direct research funding through the FP, the EU funds were used to finance infrastructural development, establish tertiary educational standards, and encourage finance mobility. However, besides ESIF subsidies meant for the Centres of Excellence Program, research had no direct financing (Karo, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> FEMIRC was established in 1997 for the ten CEE countries under FP4: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The NCP as a concept was established by the EC in 1998.

Archimedes foundation, established in 1997 for the implementation and coordination of EU educational, science, and youth programs.<sup>18</sup> In 2012, the NCP office was transferred to the EstRC and an office funded with ESIF was created—the Estonian Liaison Office for EU RTD in Brussels, which is part of the Informal Group of RTD Liaison Office (IGLO). These developments contributed to developing the network of national “European Union experts” in EU R&D policies, a part of the Commission’s strategic activity to support and to foster specialization between European and national policy sectors (Robert, 2003).

Beside new organizational settings and financial means, the EU provided normative scripts for national policy objectives. For example, FP participation is promoted by the MER’s strategic policy documents, known as “Knowledge-based Estonia”, with consecutive versions produced according to the EU strategic planning periods: in 2002–2006; 2007–2013; and 2014–2020. In the most recent iteration, a specific objective for FP participation was set out for the first time, stating that Estonia has to be “active and visible in international R&D, and Innovation cooperation and the success rate of Estonia in EU R&D FP Horizon2020 should be reflected in funding received per capita—100% of the EU average” while in 2011, Estonia gained funding of about 87% of the EU average. Furthermore, in accordance with FP objectives (Martinson, 2001), the first document agreed on key scientific fields: information technology, biomedicine, and materials technology.

Hence, the national research policy formation and its correspondence to the EU policy objectives were developing conjointly. While national research policy reforms were conducted for facilitating the access to the EU funding sources, the EU policy also structured the local policy objectives and organizational set-up in a specific way. For example, local authors have pointed out the lack of “EU policy systems” logic in Estonian policy mix—such as private sector R&D specialization or a socio-economically relevant public R&D system (Karo, Kattel, Raudla, 2016; Karo, Lember, 2016). From their side, authors concentrated on university research have argued that similarly to some other CEE region countries, in the context of promoting EU funding opportunities and using structural funding within the highly competitive funding system, the development of the SSH and particularly social sciences as strategic scientific field has remained in the background during the formation of these policies (Virtasalo, Järvinen, 2010). To better understand these effects of national policy level “selective perception” (Biegelbauer, Weber, 2017) of EU policy frameworks on disciplinary level the next section focuses on the development of the discipline of sociology.

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<sup>18</sup> In total, in 2016 at least 15 individuals (total headcount) were concerned with FP affairs in the Estonian administration (by comparison, around 60 officials in total were working at the EstRC at the time). They participated in different EU-level advisory groups linked to the Horizon2020 steering system, which entails 19 advisory groups divided between three program sections.

### 3. Continuity in Research Practices and the Perception of the FP as a “Non-Resource” at Univ1

With only minor resources gained from the FP, the sociologists working at Univ1 in 2017 have been mostly oriented towards government-commissioned contracts to fund their research activity. As national funding is perceived as too competitive, this is perceived not only as a way to gain financial resources and to continue teaching activity with low administrative burdens, but also as a way to legitimize their research with regard to the government, administration, and media.

#### 3.1 Lack of “locomotives” for International Project Cooperation

Although different national and foreign support for research was occasionally received in the 1990s, and in the last few years international project participation is a growing trend, sociologists working at Univ1 gain relatively less from foreign cooperation projects than Univ 2 sociologists. In 2017, they had received 22% of their project funding from international sources, including 16% from the FP. There are few exceptional cases; for example, the most prominent researchers of the three chairs (social policy, sociology and social work) personally accumulate 85% of total Univ1 foreign project cooperation funding. However, in these cooperations Univ 1 sociologists are mostly participating as project partners and less as project leaders. Similarly to interviewed Univ2 sociologists, the relatively low participation is explained by the lack of general support mechanisms from the to reduce the administrative burden during the project application process. Moreover, the specific institutional context of Univ1 sociologists seems to keep influencing project cooperation practices.

All of the four chairs conducting research in Sociology in 2017 have grown out of former university-related laboratories. The most prominent of them, the Media and Communication Chair has grown from the Laboratory of Sociology, which was established in 1967 via the initiative of a group of activists who were earning their living carrying out public polls in a local newspaper. Working closely with the Leningrad University Sociology Laboratory and establishing contracts with socialist enterprises, it developed into the biggest unit for sociological research in Estonia and, according to its founders, was well-known throughout the Soviet bloc.<sup>19</sup> Although the laboratory was closed down due to a conflict with the Communist Party leadership in the mid-1970s some of its most active staff members continued to develop mass communication studies at other chairs (Titma, 2002). The group emphasizes their “legitimate” academic roots by classifying themselves as descendants of “non-official”

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with former sociologists from Univ1 (EstSo1).

Soviet sociologists<sup>20</sup> and occupies the leading positions at Univ1 notably through student-supervisor relationships.<sup>21</sup>

As in the Soviet Union, formal sociological study programs were non-existent (although social scientists were engaged in whole-university programmes), with the first study program in sociology launched in 1989 at Univ1. Its development into a full BA-MA-PhD degree program in 1995 served to extend the spectrum of former sociological researchers' professional activities. The new study programs were mostly developed through the initiatives of researchers from the sociology department, which was established in 1983 out of existing laboratories for sociological research (Rämmer, Kalmus, Käärrik, 2015). Concentration on teaching made sense due to the increasing number of SSH students, as well as the "dual-track" tuition system installed in the early 1990s, meaning that HE institutions could gain additional financing by admitting fee-paying students beyond the state admission quota (Tomusk, 2000).<sup>22</sup> Also, "open universities" were launched, where students were usually admitted without entrance examinations and were required to pay tuition. The system was reformed in 2013, when the state started to fund studies of all full-time students through performance agreements and the "open university" system was closed down, leaving sociologists without the financial stability formerly based on teaching.<sup>23</sup>

Concentration on teaching is regarded as one of the main factors in preventing the generation of local researchers that the community call "locomotives," an expression denoting staff members "whose CV enables them to become [a] project leader, [who] correspond to certain scientific qualifications, who thus have [a] bigger chance for getting support and who are also themselves more active, who could be project leaders, so they could lead the so-called wagons."<sup>24</sup> One interviewee describes

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<sup>20</sup> Interviews with contract workers at Univ1 (EstSo7, EstSo2).

<sup>21</sup> According to a series of publications on Univ1 staff members, edited between 1986 and 2008. Out of 31 sociologists in the Sociology Department at Univ1 in 1993, 16 had been working at the university in 1986 and seven since 1989. Five are still working as sociologists in 2017 and have, over the years, occupied leading positions in structural units. All of the chairs containing one to three researchers working at the university structure already from 1989 or earlier and have held leading positions of various social science related sub-structures throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

<sup>22</sup> In Estonia, as in other CEE countries, the number of study programs and students in SSH increased substantially after the fall of the Soviet Union (Palne Kovacs, Kutsar, 2002). Between 1994 and 2006 in Estonia, the proportion of undergraduate students in social sciences of all undergraduates increased from 24% to 40%.

<sup>23</sup> For example, 27% of funds of the accumulated budget of the Institute of Social Sciences and Social Policies for the years 2011–2013 (total EUR 1,511,554) originated from "open university" sources.

<sup>24</sup> Interviews with Research professor at Univ1 (EstSo18), Early-stage researcher at Univ1 (EstSo6), and Contract worker at Univ1 (EstSo8).

sociologists' role as "western organizations' subcontractors"<sup>25</sup> meaning that most of the work by local sociologists is linked to data collection for foreign research projects.

Against this background, cooperation as a project partner is preferred against leading the more voluminous, resource intensive and high-risk international research projects such as the FP which is "mostly not even considered as an option."<sup>26</sup> by Univ1 sociologists. Moreover, on an individual level, mostly national contracts are used for funding their research activity.

### **3.2 Partial Continuity in Research Practices**

Out of national projects, Univ 1 sociologists have gained next to national grants mostly government commissioned contracts. Contractual work for various government institutions comprised mostly applied projects funded by various ministries (such as the Ministries of Justice, Social Affairs, and Education and Research) or other governmental institutions (e.g., the State Chancellery). Moreover, up to 83% of funding from national grants and slightly more than half of total funding from contractual work for various government institutions had been gained by individuals linked academically (through studies or supervisors) to the Media and Communication Chair (8 individuals). Nevertheless, as national contracts are not considered sufficient and are highly competitive, there is a pragmatic orientation towards government-commissioned projects. The latter are described as "less voluminous" and with less demanding administrative procedures needed for application. Due to their nature, the concurrence between applicants is marginal and the rate of gain is considered to be rather high.<sup>27</sup>

The orientation towards government contracts has been not only a pragmatic choice regarding the simplicity of gaining financial support, but also for its symbolic meaning for the collective professional identification of Univ1 sociologists. Sociological research is viewed predominantly via its application on governmental decision-making process, and sociologists as mediators between social reality and government institutions. Some sociologists are actively mixing work at the university with work at government institutions. For example, out of sociologists holding posts at Univ1 in 2017, four (as opposed to just one at Univ2) have held higher administrative positions or been politically involved. During interviews, three highlighted occasional private consultations with political elites.<sup>28</sup> Notably, the former head of the Sociology Laboratory and later professor of journalism had entered active politics during a period of political turmoil. She was one of the founding members of the Estonian Popular Front, was elected as a Deputy Speaker in the Estonian Supreme

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Former sociologist at Univ1 (EstSo5).

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Research professor at Univ1 (EstSo9).

<sup>27</sup> Interviews with Senior researcher at Univ1 (EstSo3) and Research professor at Univ1 (EstSo9).

<sup>28</sup> Interviews with Contract workers at Univ1 (EstSo10, EstSo4) and Research professor at Univ1 (EstSo11).

Soviet, and, from 1992 to 1994, was Minister of Social Affairs of Estonia as an Estonian Social Democratic Party representative. In project selection, although applied projects are sometimes criticized due to their low funding, they are seen as a resource for collecting data and therefore “squeezing out” basic science.<sup>29</sup> Interviewees emphasize the importance of these projects, stating that otherwise the political and administrative elite “wouldn't know anything about us,” and that these projects result in sociologists “getting more media coverage.”<sup>30</sup> The perception of expertise is not only profitable for personal professional careers but also for increasing the overall prestige of the Univ1 sociologists research. Contrary to the logic observed in Western European social science disciplines, where there are long periods of “pure science” (Dahan, Mangematin, 2010), governmental contracts provide various advantages and are thus valorized amongst sociologists.

## **4. Dependence on Foreign Networks and Limited Usage of the FP at Univ2**

Mostly due to a need to gain a more stable source of funding in the context of national grants perceived as highly competitive and insufficient, the sociologists working at Univ2 in 2017 have oriented their project cooperation towards gaining more voluminous foreign contracts such as FP. This is accompanied by strategic mobilization of foreign partners.

### **4.1 Partial Auto-exclusion From National Projects**

The collective strategy of Univ2 sociologists has been to progressively orient towards applying for foreign research grants. Accumulated project funding of sociologists working in Univ2 in 2017 shows 50% of the financing is from foreign resources, but according to interviews the average percentage of foreign funding per year is even higher, around 75%.<sup>31</sup> Out of external sources, the FP funding is the primary source of income. Five sociologists have participated in twelve projects and two of them are fully coordinated by Univ2. Other international projects include EU institution contracts, mostly with different Commissions policy departments.

The specific institutional development of Univ2 can be seen as one of the factors influencing their relatively high orientation towards foreign projects. In the context of the cut-off of basic institutional funding in the 1990s, the institute research was funded solely through research projects. Contrary to Univ1, Univ2 sociological research has grown out of the former Academy of Sciences Institute. Although the institute was joined to the university during the national research organizational reform in 1997 and has subsequently increased through other structural mergers, the leading structural

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Early-stage researcher at Univ1 (EstSo6).

<sup>30</sup> Interviews with Senior researcher at Univ1 (EstSo3) and Contract worker at Univ1 (EstSo7).

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Research professor at Univ2 (EstSo13)

unit (the former Academy institute) was fully integrated to the University in 2015 when it lost its juridical status. Although the success rate in national grants has been similar to Univ1, both national grants and government contracts have been perceived as insufficient for research funding. The former are considered “too competitive” and the latter “too modest” to support long-term research.<sup>32</sup> External sources provide financial certainty for a longer time, so it is perceived that the institute “could not have endured” without external grants.<sup>33</sup> For example, the FP funding has been used for building up research groups. Finally, such external orientation has gained them support from the Univ2 administration (e.g. through allocation of extra funding for project preparation).

The pragmatic orientation is coupled with general implicit discontent regarding the position of the national university funding system. In several cases, foreign contracts were described as more “transparent and accessible”.<sup>34</sup> The perceived lack of transparency in funding allocation at the national level, taking account the time that the interviews might refer to, was evidenced by the fact that between 2012 and 2017, and *contra* Univ1, Univ2 sociologists have not participated in EstRC expert commissions.<sup>35</sup> External resources are viewed as a more pragmatic way for Univ2 researchers to reduce insecurity in a competitive national context. The orientation toward international resources has been supported also with collective capacity building to reinforce the ability to apply for projects.

#### **4.2 Mobilization of External Networks**

Univ2 sociologists are particularly concerned with “bricolage,” referring to an activity where different resources are matched between each other to find the most pragmatic ways for paying out salaries and keeping research activity on-going.<sup>36</sup> Foreign contacts have been established either during their studies in Western European universities (in Finland or the UK for the most active sociologists) or through research activity with foreign networks in Europe, particularly in Germany. Although since the 2000s, teaching activity has increased, a research-centered institute is seen as a part of the “institutional identity” carried along by long-standing researchers. Similarly to Univ1, the leading sociology research group has for years been guided by students of a former prominent sociologist and head of the Academy of Sciences. Overall, 5 out of 22 Univ2 sociologists working in 2017 started their career before 1989 (ERIS portal).

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<sup>32</sup> Interviews with Research professors at Univ2 (EstSo12, EstSo13) and Former sociologists at Univ2 (EstSo14).

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with Research professors at Univ2 (EstSo12, EstSo13) and Former sociologists at Univ2 (EstSo14).

<sup>34</sup> Interviews with Research professors at Univ2 (EstSo12, EstSo13, EstSo16).

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Research professor at Univ2 (EstSo12).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Research professor at Univ2 (EstSo12).

During the Soviet era, the institute had developed into one of the most prominent research centers in Estonia. Its head, a member of the Communist Party, had established one of the largest “inter-bloc” cooperation groups in the social sciences in the field of youth studies during the Soviet period, after which he left to work at the United States in the beginning of 1990s. His research group was built around the two longitudinal data sets, namely the “Estonian longitudinal study” and the “path of a generation” data set; fieldwork that was carried out in 15 regions of the Soviet Union, including Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, three regions of Kazakhstan, Moldova, four Russian regions, six Ukrainian regions, and Tajikistan (Titma, 2002). A comparative “student study” was also carried out, one in which Estonia and Lithuania were part of a study with Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and the Soviet Union. The merit for further extensive development of Univ2 foreign collaboration networks is given to a former PhD student of the previous head of the Academy institute and particularly to her “capacity of reorientation” in the new context of national research funding. In the words of one of the sociologists “She achieved to reorient and found completely new links compared to the beginning of the 1990s. As the research group was created, there was need to preserve it and this was through foreign funding”.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, although direct cooperation partners have changed over time (between 2003 and 2018 there are no foreign partners together with whom Univ2 sociologists would have cooperated directly in the beginning of the 1990s), knowledge resources about networking and project preparation are transferred inside the institute. For example, interviews with two of the sociologists who together have gained 73% of FP resources, 66% of other EU institutions grants, and 76% of other foreign funding, show that both developed their most substantial cooperation networks partly based on contacts reaching back to the project cooperation started by their supervisor.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

Since 1994, the political aim of the EC has been to contribute to the creation of an SSH community by making available financial resources for pan-European research between member states and CEE social scientists. On the example of sociologists’ competitive income sources in two major Estonian universities (denoted as Univ1 and Univ2), this article questioned the extent that a European funding instrument, the FP, has had as a structuring effect on sociologists’ project collaboration practices in the context of European integration in a small CEE country, Estonia. It was hypothesized that to better understand how the FP structured the discipline of sociology in Estonia, it should be studied how it is used at different levels in academic contexts.

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Research professor at Univ2 (EstSo12).

<sup>38</sup> Interviews with Research professors at Univ2 (EstSo12, EstSo13).



On the national level, the EU RD policy (including FP) was used in implementing national research funding policy reforms and sustaining its highly competitive disposition. Simultaneously, on the disciplinary level, there has been only a limited use of the FP in national research competition. By positioning themselves as experts, Univ1 sociologists are mostly oriented towards teaching or to government-commissioned contracts. For Univ2, there is only a limited usage of the FP in a national context due to auto-exclusion from competition for national grants, which are considered highly competitive. This exposes the limited structuring effect of the FP amongst the studied Estonian sociologists.

It seems that the various orientations taken by sociologists are dependent on both formal arrangement of research activity as well as the overall institutional practices and identifications (Lagroye, Offerlé, 2011) transferred from one academic generation to another. Being formerly institutionally linked to the university or the Academy had an impact on sociologists' careers as researchers in terms of general orientations towards teaching or research. Regarding institutional practices and identifications, it is important to consider that the SSH in general and sociology in particular are sensitive to the attention received through contribution to the designation, standardization, and legitimization of political realities (Heurtaux, 2000). Although hardly trackable, there seems to be an inner segregation amongst the professional group of sociologists in Estonia which operates in the shadow of distinctions developed between different groups of researchers during the Soviet period due to their collective political identifications. At the observed universities, the chosen orientations towards specific funding sources are deployed to bolster the collective reputation of sociologists at both the university and national level. Hence, there is good reason to believe that the process of legitimization has gone in accord with orientations taken in the world of project funding.

This analysis may contribute to a better understanding of more general developments in CEE R&D policies, especially the idiosyncratic participation of CEE countries' scientists in FP projects (Schuch, 2014). If the participation of EU programs is mostly analyzed either by focusing on institutional and organizational developments on a national level, or through professional European exchanges and associations, the Estonian sociologists' case demonstrates that these forms of explanation might remain insufficient. Instead, benefit is to be gained in concentrating on how these programs are exploited by administrative elites from one side, and by specific disciplinary segments of the scientific community on the other. Further works with this focus will provide better understanding of the effect of these instruments.

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<sup>i</sup> Teele Tönismann is a PhD student under the joint supervision of Sciences-Po Toulouse (LaSSP), and Tallinn University of Technology, Faculty of Social Sciences (RNI).