



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 822705

SHAPE-ID: Shaping Interdisciplinary Practices in Europe

Deliverable 3.4 Recommendations and Measures to Maximise IDR Impact on Society – Policy Brief

Project Information

Project Acronym	SHAPE-ID
Project Title	Shaping Interdisciplinary Practices in Europe
Grant Agreement No	822705
Project Start Date	1 February 2019
Project End Date	31 July 2021
Call Identifier	H2020-SC6-GOVERNANCE-2018
Funding Scheme	Coordination and Support Action (CSA)
Project Website	www.shapeID.eu

Deliverable Information

Deliverable No	3.4
Deliverable Title	Maximising arts, humanities and social sciences integration in inter- and transdisciplinary research for effective responses to societal challenges
Work Package No	3
Work Package Lead	ISINNOVA
Contributing Partners	TCD, UEDIN,
Deliverable Type	Report
Dissemination Level	Public
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Contractual Deadline	30 June 2020 (delayed by COVID-19 rescheduling)
Delivery Date	15 January 2021

Version Management

Version	Date	Author	Description of Change
1.0	12/01/21	Doireann Wallace (TCD)	First draft
2.0	13/01/21	Doireann Wallace (TCD), Giovanna de Moura Rocha Lima (TCD), Carlo Sessa (ISINNOVA), Jane Ohlmeyer (TCD)	Revised with input from partners
3.0	13/01/21	[as above]	Revised with input from partners
4.0	14/01/21	[as above]	Revised with input from partners
5.0	15/01/21	Doireann Wallace (TCD), Giovanna de Moura Rocha Lima (TCD), Carlo Sessa (ISINNOVA), Jane Ohlmeyer (TCD)	Final version for submission



EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

SHAPE-ID

Shaping interdisciplinary practices in Europe

MAXIMISING ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES INTEGRATION IN INTER- AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FOR EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

This second SHAPE-ID policy brief presents additional recommendations to policymakers and funders on increasing and improving the quality of meaningful arts, humanities and social sciences integration in inter- and transdisciplinary research, maximising effective responses to societal challenges.

15 JANUARY 2021

INTRODUCTION

Interest in interdisciplinarity, policy narratives around innovation, and the increased attention to research impact, are highly intertwined in contemporary funding policy.¹ If we understand societal impact in a broad manner as those changes that “affect the cultural, economic, and social life of individuals, organizations, and institutions”², the need for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research (IDR/TDR) with arts, humanities and social sciences (AHSS) involvement makes perfect sense. Disciplines that deeply study the human experience, individuals, societies and cultures understand them in a nuanced way, sensitive to context, beliefs, values, interpretations and history, and are surely necessary to help tackle problems rooted in these human and societal contexts. **In this brief, we present recommendations to policymakers to increase and improve the quality of AHSS integration in IDR/TDR, thereby increasing the potential for societal impact from such research.** Recommendations are supported by evidence from a series of expert stakeholder workshops organised by SHAPE-ID throughout Europe.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

1. **Research Funding: commit to missions driven by socio-cultural challenges and embed questions that foreground the human dimensions of challenges.** Incorporating AHSS perspectives into the design, language and framing of funding calls can redefine how a problem is understood, how it can be effectively addressed, and encourage different approaches that challenge prevailing expectations.
2. **Higher Education: support processes of change to enable meaningful inter- and transdisciplinary research and education.** Higher education structures and funding are deeply rooted in disciplinary cultures and must be incentivised to develop interdisciplinary (ID) and transdisciplinary (TD) educational programmes and reward ID/TD research and education activities.
3. **Research networks and infrastructures: ensure sustainable funding to foster relationship-building and resource sharing.** Knowledge about IDR/TDR processes is fragmented and more sustainable networks, resources, and communities of practice, as well as funding support for stakeholder relationship building, are needed to build capacity in Europe.

These reiterate and deepen recommendations made in SHAPE-ID's first policy brief to improve funding support for IDR/TDR involving AHSS, enable capacity building within higher education, and support resource sharing, albeit with a stronger focus here on societal impact and the involvement of societal stakeholders.²

The factors informing our "political nature" are manifold, as a recent report from the Joint Research Council (JRC) emphasises.³ Factors the report flag include misperception and disinformation; collective intelligence; emotions; values and identity; framing, metaphor and narratives; and trust and openness, all influencing what evidence-informed policy should really look like.⁴ The integration of AHSS in IDR and TDR has the potential to successfully deal with these factors and, by contextualising and fully incorporating human dimensions in IDR/TDR, increase the research's relevance, legitimacy and uptake by external stakeholders. This also necessitates wide adoption of a more inclusive model of science advice to policy.⁵

Our findings are further reinforced by the OECD's recent assessment of transdisciplinary research for addressing societal challenges, which similarly foregrounds a need for multi-stakeholder and AHSS involvement, noting that "[in] drawing on the breadth of science and non-scientific knowledge domains such as local and traditional knowledge, and cultural norms and values, [transdisciplinary research] aims to supplement and transform scientific insights for the good of society" and the need to scale up such efforts to address the urgent challenges we currently face.⁶

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

1

Research Funding: commit to missions driven by socio-cultural challenges and embed questions that foreground the human dimensions of challenges

The design of funding calls

In a series of forward-looking co-design activities at the first SHAPE-ID workshop (Dublin), participants (AHSS and Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) researchers, policymakers, funders, artists and industry representatives) imagined what "missions" might look like if designed or led from the perspective of the AHSS. Our workshop outcomes emphasised that the focus these disciplines bring to human experience has the potential to **redefine how a problem is understood and therefore how it can be more effectively addressed**.

By placing an engagement with human values at the heart of a challenge, it might be approached in such a way as to enable rebuilding trust in our fractured societies. AHSS disciplines consider historical and contextual factors that underpin current crises, and how language, narrative, discourse and emotions influence our beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour. In recognising cultural and historical differences, they also have the potential to step outside prevailing narratives and suggest alternative approaches, particularly through storytelling and the Arts, which connect profoundly to emotion as a factor in how we respond to the world. An understanding of context can better inform policy implementation and contribute to foresight.

Examples discussed in the workshops suggested valuable AHSS contributions both to research and innovation missions in traditional AHSS stronghold areas (such as democracy) but also how they can bring novel perspectives to designing research problems for areas where STEMM disciplines might normally drive the agenda (such as ageing and technology development).

Case Study: AHSS-led mission on the crises of democracy

Participants at our first workshop (Dublin) explored the possibility of a portfolio of projects addressing the crises of democracy, in the context of a mission-oriented R&I framework. The prototype focused on **renewing and safeguarding democracy in times of rapid technological, economic, social and geopolitical change**. The aim was to restore confidence in representative democracy and a range of projects and initiatives were proposed, including the historical comparison of instruments of democracy; revisiting democratic fundamentals (freedom of speech, rule of law, etc.); studying individual experience of inequality, identity and information overload; analysing information channels and their impact on communication, thought and trust. The most important recommendations raised were to **increase participatory and creative public engagement and develop more open and inclusive structures to engage society**. Fundamental research into the formation of collective identities through the lens of narrative, language, culture, history, etc. is needed, and the AHSS have an important role to play in the understanding and regulation of digital technologies.

Case study: AHSS-led mission on ageing well

Participants also explored the possibility of a portfolio of projects addressing ageing, choosing to focus on **what it means to be “well” in older life**. While the biomedical view can achieve a great deal, it misses an understanding of the experience of ageing, and can be enriched by Arts and Humanities perspectives contributing to interventions involving non-medical aspects of ageing, such as loneliness and isolation, as well as issues of inequality and inclusion in ageing research and policies. Biomedical solutions may exacerbate social inequality if access is limited to the already privileged. Social and ethical perspectives are essential to understanding inequalities in treatments and interactions. Approaches proposed involved re-evaluating the importance and meaning of **quality of life in older age; engaging with the importance of the arts and of culture in ageing well; and investigating strategies for wellness from multiple perspectives including philosophical, historical, intercultural**. The fundamental question is what it means to live a fulfilling life as we age, and such an approach can capture positive aspects of ageing through cultural works and values such as **wisdom, dignity and aesthetic experience**. Proposed projects included combatting stigma around ageing through understanding the language used; looking at ageing through the lens of the Global South; collaborations between historians and artists to explore ageing over time and the role of creativity in later life; and understanding ageing as a way of living, not simply an end to life. Once more, the active involvement of societal partners was highlighted as critical, with calls for seed funding to encourage new multi-sectoral partnerships, new fora for developing multi-partner proposals, including citizens, and citizen involvement in proposal evaluation.

Case study: AHSS role in technology development

Outcomes from the final workshop (Bilbao) illustrate the value of AHSS participation in the context of technology development. **Ensuring that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is deployed for social good** requires a participatory process that involves societal stakeholders and integrates perspectives from AHSS disciplines. While AI applications can support decision-making, **transparency is needed in how decisions are made**, a process that must remain in the hands or at least within the comprehension of humans. Furthermore, **cultural and linguistic differences can affect the likelihood of technology solutions being accepted** in each society. It is not just a question of acceptability, though. **Questions of whether and why, not just how, to develop AI solutions must be brought to the fore in technology development**. This requires both stakeholder involvement and the perspectives AHSS can bring, which should not be confused. For example, buy-in from patients and clinicians is necessary for AI applications in clinical treatment areas. When framing such problems, AHSS disciplines can foreground **questions around quality of life, human dignity, autonomy, personal experience and self-expression**. They can also play a role in communicating difficult concepts effectively, raising awareness and building confidence by acknowledging legitimate concerns to technology uptake, making interests and biases transparent and conveying benefits.

The language of funding calls

In our second workshop (Edinburgh), participants from the Environmental Humanities, along with funders and policymakers, explored the language and framing used in selected Horizon 2020 funding calls on climate and biodiversity, and made recommendations for how such calls could encourage greater AHSS participation.

The sample calls reviewed were perceived as highly prescriptive, and it was recommended that **call language should focus more on opening up a topic in a way that invites different approaches to the challenge**, rather than specifying the expected outcome. The language was noted to be more inviting of economics perspectives, with little effort to solicit the kinds of contributions Arts and Humanities disciplines might make. Participants noted an implicit assumption that economic growth and increased investment were desirable outcomes, and language reflecting a narrowly economic perspective on value. Arts and Humanities perspectives can open up more challenging approaches to values and assumptions, such as interrogating how impacts are defined and whether they are desirable.

Calls led by AHSS perspectives were recommended as a counterbalance to these criticisms. It was also recommended that **call titles and call language be more inclusive, accessible and jargon-free and that strategic keywords could help highlight areas where AHSS involvement is welcome**. Explicitly welcoming language might encourage projects that challenge prevailing expectations and diverse methodological approaches should also be explicitly welcomed.

Participants agreed that rather than try to slot AHSS concerns into calls already defined by scientific and technology problems, **AHSS need to be involved in setting the research agenda in a process of co-creation that would bring multiple disciplines together to identify appropriate priorities and questions**. This involves centralising “human questions” around how technologies are adopted, used and diffused within societal contexts, rather than assuming that technology itself can solve the problems. It was acknowledged that this may take some time, as the Humanities community in particular often have less experience in co-creation and collaborative research due to a tradition of lone scholarship. The need for capacity building to improve their readiness to participate in and lead such research is discussed further under our subsequent recommendations.

2 Higher Education: support processes of change to enable meaningful inter- and transdisciplinary research and education

Reinforcing the findings of SHAPE-ID’s literature review and survey, a common outcome of the workshops was the recognition of the **significant obstacles to building a culture of innovative inter- and transdisciplinary research and education**, due to higher education structures and funding supports deeply rooted in disciplinary cultures. AHSS researchers also start from a position of disadvantage, with less funding available, accordingly less prestige within universities and lack of opportunity or experience of collaborative research due to a culture of lone scholarship and publishing. Those who do engage in IDR/TDR or work to develop ID/TD educational programmes often find themselves committing significant resources with little guarantee of recognition or reward by their institution.

This applies to a range of activities, such as the hidden work involved in IDR/TDR, the time required to develop and implement ID/TD courses, the relative difficulty of publishing IDR/TDR results in high-impact journals still valued by promotion committees, and dedication to activities essential for developing IDR/TDR but not sufficiently valued, such as building networks and partnerships with external partners and creating or curating data.

Policymakers can support and incentivise change towards a culture appreciative of IDR and TDR within higher education systems to ensure students, researchers and stakeholders in industry and society acquire the capacity and experience to work together to address the “wicked” problems we confront.

Case Study: linking the educational process and sustainable urban development

In our third workshop (Turin) participants co-designed “missions” addressing education for urban sustainability. These highlighted the need to **develop the university’s civic mission and partnerships with stakeholders in the community, through student projects and tailored educational programmes.**

Focused on what students can do with their knowledge, Education for Urban Sustainability is a value-oriented holistic approach, centered on social changes, based on real issues, experimental and transformative actions, and an active and critical learning enabled by forms of cooperative engagement. Education for Sustainability is undertaken through system-wide change theory and practice, working partnership, system thinking, mindful participation, reflective and visioning activities. One mission proposes a focus on empowering a community of change to reorient higher education institutes towards sustainability and identified the need to define new curricula; teach methods and activate training for collaborative processes; explore new ways of understanding “sustainability”; reward “TD champions” and re-frame the expectations of students and faculty.

Participants spoke from experience of the difficulty of engaging in such processes of change and the need for institutional support to implement them in a lasting way. A combination of factors, including specific competencies in IDR/TDR integration, personal motivations, structural incentives, the need for real world problems for analysis and implementation, and best practices for dissemination, are needed to support sustainable urban transformations. Problem-based learning and integrating “non-expert” knowledge was considered essential to this process.

Case Study: building capacity for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage collaboration

In our fifth workshop (Warsaw), these challenges were discussed in the context of Digital Humanities researchers collaborating with Cultural Heritage Institutions. Digital Humanities researchers already work in an interdisciplinary space, and many also rely on building strong partnerships with the custodians of cultural heritage artefacts and data. A number of specific recommendations were made for fostering better relationships and rewarding non-traditional IDR/TDR activities:

- **Embed collaboration throughout the education and research life cycle:** the importance of long-term commitment to building relationships and trust with external partners was emphasised. Higher education institutions were encouraged to embed collaborations with Cultural Heritage Institutions at multiple levels, from undergraduate and postgraduate internships and projects to joint research and faculty positions enabling hybrid scholarly careers
- **Adapt academic reward systems to recognise digital scholarly activities:** participants highlighted that digital scholarship activities, outputs and data creation are essential enablers of IDR/TDR but are not often adequately recognised. Higher education institutes must be incentivised to value such work in their evaluation of scholarly careers.

3

Research networks and infrastructures: ensure sustainable funding to foster relationship-building and resource sharing

Inter- and transdisciplinary research often requires considerable time to establish trust and mutual understanding, as researchers need to navigate disciplinary differences to align goals and approaches. Building strong collaborative networks and relationships and implementing the most effective methods for such research at each phase of a project is an ongoing challenge, requiring specific expertise in integration itself, as well as disciplinary expertise and stakeholder knowledge. To leverage the benefits of project results and experiences longer term, **funding commitments for sustainable digital research infrastructures are needed for IDR/TDR communities and practitioners to share and continuously develop tools, methods and experiences. Funding programmes are also needed to support multi-stakeholder networking and relationship-building around challenge-based research questions.** Stakeholder involvement increases potential for real societal impact from research projects and relatively small amounts of seed funding can be very valuable in facilitating interaction. Face-to-face meetings are well known to be valuable in building trust and initiating long-lasting collaborations, but the success of the SHAPE-ID online workshops demonstrates that, when carefully designed and moderated, online fora can also be effective. Funding programmes should enable remote activities, such as meetings and workshops, and allow costs to cover licensing technology platforms and personnel time for the design and facilitation of such activities.

During a co-design exercise at SHAPE-ID's fourth workshop (Zurich), participants focused on tools and methods for integration, exploring existing tools, including artist-led tools, and co-designing recommendations for the SHAPE-ID toolkit. The need for a pan-European centralised repository of resources with clear pathways for users was emphasised, but also the value of an international active network, or community of practice, able to update resources and guide newcomers in accessing or making use of resources. Access to a diversity of tools supports the development of integration processes. **Tacit knowledge, case studies and narratives on user experiences are a significant gap, pointing to the need for sustainable networks of practitioners, not merely static resource banks.** Discussion highlighted the value of sharing experiences, co-evaluating tools and experimenting with new methods.

The need for practical examples and best practices for use in educational programmes was highlighted in our third workshop (Turin), while the need for mechanisms to foster IDR/TDR collaboration to increase the sustainability of project data beyond the funding cycle, by re-using existing data to maximise value of funded projects was raised in our fifth workshop (Warsaw). In the latter case, the importance of policies to support data re-use was also noted.

Case study: seed funding as an enabler of IDR/TDR

The value of seed funding in kick-starting collaborations and the need for seed funding to create new fora for multi-stakeholder engagement were highlighted at several workshops (Dublin, Edinburgh, Zurich). National funders have a significant role in building capacity, often through small awards that can enable collaborations that then go on to secure larger grants.

In the UK, for example, smaller **British Academy** awards often lead to future awards in the AHRC-funded humanities space. Similarly, the **AHRC Connected Communities** programme provided small grants that kept building on each other, particularly supporting early career researchers. These smaller grants mean that funders can afford to take more risks in the projects they fund.

The **Irish Research Council** has similarly developed smaller funding programmes for IDR/TDR capacity building through workshops – the **Creative Connections** programme – as well as a collaborative programme – **COALESCE** – where projects must be led by an AHSS PI with a STEM co-PI, to build leadership capacity in the AHSS in addressing societal challenges. These pipelines enable researchers to gain experience and partners and position them to apply for European Union funding.

Case study: the SHAPE-ID virtual workshop experience

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SHAPE-ID unexpectedly had to reorganise three of our six learning case workshops to take place remotely. While there are many intangible benefits to in-person workshops where participants can network in the 'social time' between programmed activities, our evaluation of the workshops found high levels of satisfaction across both formats. We found that certain features were critical to ensuring the success of digital workshops:

- **A good balance of participants** to bring diverse disciplinary perspectives and stakeholder knowledge, which in fact can be easier without the need to travel;
- **Effective co-design and communication**, including involving participants in preparation of the agenda and sharing clear expectations and background material for discussion well in advance;
- **Careful timing and structure of activities** to ensure variation and adequate time for discussion while avoiding fatigue;
- **Strong facilitation** was also a key enabling factor to ensure balanced engagement, particularly in a remote setting where it can be more difficult to keep high levels of participation and contribution.

We found that for online workshops, the most successful format was two 3-hour sessions on subsequent afternoons, with a half-hour rest break during which participants could stay and chat informally. Activities were built on one another to allow several 'rounds' of discussion that moved gradually deeper into a topic in smaller groups, with plenaries to link up the larger group discussion. Such workshops have the advantage of greatly reduced costs for travel and subsistence, but funding is still needed to enable technology platforms and personnel time for workshop design, development, support, facilitation, and follow-up.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Funding: commit to missions driven by socio-cultural challenges and embed questions that foreground the human dimensions of challenges

"EU missions are commitments to solve some of the greatest challenges facing our world like fighting cancer, adapting to climate change, protecting our oceans, living in greener cities and ensuring soil health and food."⁷ While these are all undeniably worth pursuing, there is a marked focus on areas where science and technology might contribute to progress and find "solutions". At the same time, our world is under threat from rising inequality, an epidemic of disinformation and a corrosion of trust in democratic institutions. In the 2017 paper *Living Together: Missions for Shaping the Future*,⁸ a group led by ALLEA proposed four missions addressing sustainable democracies, the consequences of innovation, living and ageing well, and rebuilding trust in governance. These kinds of questions need to be given equal priority or we risk losing our ability to collectively address overarching challenges like the climate crisis.

Within the context of broader global challenges and missions like climate change, health, energy, security, food and digital innovation already included Horizon Europe, **funding programmes and calls need to ask questions that put human flourishing at their centre and invite responses that seek to understand and address this in a more nuanced and contextual manner.** These questions should take the form of distinct calls and be embedded within any call where there are significant societal implications to the development of new interventions or technologies. The language used to ask these questions is important in welcoming AHSS perspectives and proposals for such calls should be evaluated appropriately such that these aspects of the call are not side-lined or ignored in favour of technological solutions.

Higher Education: support processes of change to enable meaningful inter- and transdisciplinary research and education

To build a culture of innovative inter- and transdisciplinary research in Europe, long-term commitment to culture change and capacity building within the higher education system is needed. Universities are often resistant to this and must be incentivised to begin the processes of change necessary to meet societal needs

in the 21st century. Policymakers can support and incentivise higher education institutions by ensuring appropriate funding for initiatives to **encourage higher education institutions to develop inter- and transdisciplinary educational programmes and modules at undergraduate and postgraduate level and to develop incentives and structures that centralise partnerships in civil society and with industry**. In particular, such measures should increase student exposure to methods across AHSS and STEMM disciplines and to the perspectives of partners in enterprise and civil society.

Research networks and infrastructures: ensure sustainable funding to foster relationship-building and resource sharing

Research infrastructures and communities of practice to share resources, methods, data and experiences in IDR/TDR and education are needed, both for ID/TD in general and for the many specific configurations that emerge between different disciplines and actors addressing particular topics. While resources do exist to support relationship-building and implementation, it can be difficult to find them, particularly as they are often the outputs of short-term projects that have since ended. **Financial support is needed to incentivise and ensure sustainability and enable the re-use of project data, develop tools, methods and expertise and ensure value for money from funded projects**. Furthermore, an active network able to update resources and guide newcomers in accessing or making use of resources, is critical.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

SHAPE-ID addresses the challenge of improving IDR/TDR between AHSS and other scientific disciplines. The current brief is based on results from Work Package 3, which organised a series of six learning case workshops across Europe between December 2019 and October 2020. The first three workshops were held in person and the remaining three online due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. The objectives of the workshop series were to consult experts in IDR/TDR from across AHSS and STEMM disciplines, as well as policymakers, funders, representatives of Research Performing Organisations and from industry, civil society and the cultural sector, to co-produce recommendations on improving pathways to AHSS integration.

The workshop series was developed at a Co-Design Workshop in Rome in June 2019, where partners defined a common approach and agreed the themes and schedule for each workshop. The challenge-oriented focus of each workshop was agreed in consultation with all partners and with input from emerging findings from the literature review. In particular, efforts were made to address the significant underrepresentation of the Arts and Humanities in IDR/TDR to better understand the challenges of AHSS integration. Each workshop was designed as a learning journey, commencing with presentations of case studies, vignettes or examples of successful (and unsuccessful) projects, followed by group discussions around key challenges and questions related to the workshop topic, and concluding with a forward-looking session in which participants engaged in activities to co-design missions and recommendations. This approach was intended to bring participants on a journey that deepened their understanding of other perspectives and from there enabled them to collaboratively explore pathways to change. Within this common framework partners organising workshops developed individual programmes, selecting the most appropriate methods for each activity.

Workshops were organised by SHAPE-ID partners Trinity College Dublin, the University of Edinburgh, ISINNOVA (in collaboration with the TrUST network in Politecnico di Torino and the University of Deusto in Bilbao), ETH Zurich (in collaboration with the Swiss Network for Transdisciplinary Research, td-net), and the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Warsaw). In total, 166 participants and 17 local co-organisers from 22 countries, as well as members of the SHAPE-ID team, contributed to the workshops. A full overview and detailed report on all six workshops is available in the project deliverable D3.2 Report on Learning Case Workshops and an analysis of the measures for maximising societal impact emerging from the workshop series is available in project deliverable D3.3 Measures for Maximising IDR Impact on Society (see Further Reading below).

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Shaping Interdisciplinary Practices in Europe (SHAPE-ID)
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FUNDING SCHEME	Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), Societal Challenge 6 – Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", call GOVERNANCE-2018, topic " GOVERNANCE-15-2018 - Taking lessons from the practices of interdisciplinarity in Europe ".
DURATION	February 2019 – July 2021 (30 months)
BUDGET	EU contribution: € 1 499 887,59
WEBSITE	https://www.shapeid.eu/
FOR MORE INFORMATION	SHAPE-ID Project Manager: Dr Doireann Wallace (TCD) wallacdo@tcd.ie
FURTHER READING	Galvini, G., Sessa, C., Wallace, D., Taylor Wesselink, K., Ohlmeyer, J., Lyall, C., Fletcher, I., Vienni-Baptista, B., Pohl, C., Maryl, M., Buchner, A., Wciślik, P., Błaszczynska, M. & Caro González, A. 2020. Report of workshops and analysis of IDR/AHSS integration learning cases. Project deliverable D3.2. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4439665 Sessa, C. & Galvini, G. 2019. Matrix for integration of learning cases and framework of analysis. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4118413 Sessa, C. & Galvini, G. 2021 Recommendations and Measures to Maximise IDR Impact on Society. Project deliverable D3.3. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4439671 Vienni Baptista, B., Lyall, C., Ohlmeyer, J., Spaapen, J., Wallace, D. & Pohl, C. 2020. Improving pathways to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences: first lessons from the SHAPE-ID project – Policy Brief. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3824953

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- ³ The Joint Research Centre is the European Commission's science and knowledge service.
- ⁴ See Mair D., Smillie L., La Placa G., Schwendinger F., Raykovska M., Pasztor Z., van Bavel R., 2019. Understanding our political nature: How to put knowledge and reason at the heart of political decision-making, EUR 29783 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Doi:10.2760/374191, JRC117161. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/understanding-our-political-nature-how-put-knowledge-and-reason-heart-political-decision>.
- ⁵ This is further elaborated in the SHAPE-ID companion deliverable D3.3. Sessa, C. & Galvini, G. 2021. Recommendations and Measures to Maximise IDR Impact on Society. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4439671>
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