The Guild's priorities for Horizon Europe's Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society cluster

The challenges related to democratic development, societal transformations and cultural openness will have considerable impact on the well-being of citizens, social cohesion and competitiveness of Europe in the coming decades. Therefore, it is vital that the Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society cluster receives substantial funding in Horizon Europe.

This document presents priority areas for this cluster identified by the academic community of The Guild's member universities. As strategic priorities for Horizon Europe, we lay out three key challenges affecting European societies in the coming decades, and illustrate how research and innovation can respond to them whilst contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Democratic resilience

The rise of populism and political disintegration, decreasing voter turnout, short-sightedness in political agenda-setting, distrust in democratic institutions and the spread of misinformation are examples of the challenges European democracies face today. Many of them are closely connected to the rapid technological development of our time, making it hard to predict what kind of challenges European democratic systems will experience in ten years' time.

The future of democratic development in Europe has broad implications for its social cohesion, sustainability and competitiveness. This is why it's important to study how European democracies can become resilient in the face of constant technological, social, cultural and environmental change.

Under these conditions, research and innovation will be crucial in the following areas: exploring the building blocks of democracy, empowering democratic participation, creating pathways to nurture trust as a foundation of democracy, and fostering inter-generational and inter-cultural dialogues. Developing new models for knowledge-based participation and representation will improve our understanding of the dynamics of informed decision-making from the perspective of citizens and politicians alike. Restoring trust in science and expertise and promoting responsible leadership and governance should also be given priority as essential aspects of well-functioning democracies.

Expected impact

Effective and resilient democracies are the precondition for Europe's stability and well-being in the future. Ambitious investments in research and innovation in the area of democratic development would contribute to the following objectives:

- Cultural change related to the role of democratic participation in Europe, which would be demonstrated as an increase in voter turnout in national and European elections.

- Increase in grassroots movements related to democratic participation.
- Changes in national curricula with regard to skills related to active citizenship and skills for analysing societal developments critically.
- Uptake of policies related to the improvement of democratic participation and accountability.
- Increase in the optimism and trust of citizens when it comes to their future and the state of their democracies, as demonstrated by polls.

Relevant disciplines and interdisciplinary potential

Investments in this area would provide a ground for fruitful interdisciplinary collaborations between disciplines such as Sociology, Political Science, Economics, Law, Communications and Media Studies, History, Geography, Psychology and Cultural Studies. They also create opportunities for collaboration with technological fields in the process of finding new solutions that facilitate democratic participation and knowledge-based dialogue across national, cultural and social borders.

Gender, citizen engagement and international collaboration

Aspects related to gender will be an important element in understanding the dynamics of democratic participation. Citizen engagement also plays a key role in this priority area: understanding active citizenship can be approached through participative methods, and the development of solutions requires the contribution of citizens as part of research and innovation activities. The challenges related to the functioning of democracies are not limited to Europe, which is why there will be added value in engaging in international collaboration.

2. Societal needs and human resilience in times of technological change

By 2035 our societies will have been transformed through technological change. How does the digital affect the pace and nature of globalisation and financial and information flows, as well as work and social relations? How do we ensure that we understand the human consequences of the fourth Industrial Revolution, and that digitalisation serves our individual and social needs – and not the other way around?

As digital transformations shape our worlds of work, leisure, and relationships, it is essential to guard against the loss of social cohesion, the growth of inequality, and the undermining of human rights. We need to find ways to harness technological advancements to sustain humane working conditions. Amidst these changes, we need to identify what skills are needed to embrace the digital as workers, investors, consumers, and citizens. As the nature of work is reshaped, what new pedagogies are required to help us learn relevant new skills and competences?

Alongside understanding the social and economic transformations that go along with technological change, it is critical to recognise their consequences on human well-being. How can we strengthen human resilience, and maximise the joy and contentment of individuals – and societies? It is critical to understand how responsible and engaged citizenship can be strengthened as the conditions for community, participation and debate will evolve over the next fifteen years.

Expected impact

Research in this area will contribute to a greater understanding of technological change and help pre-empt its challenges. This will help policymakers, educators and communities prevent the growth of individual and social frustrations at the workplace and in social relationships, which might be expressed in anti-democratic behaviour at the polls. Europeans will become more dynamic, embracing change and shaping it in a way that supports human needs. Policymakers and scientists will understand the socially desirable outcomes of technological change and use them as a basis for development, ensuring that economic and social transformation is driven by positive strategies for inclusive growth. At a global level, Europe will be a trend-setter in ethical frameworks and legal norms for social and technological change that is desirable – and transformations that must be avoided.

Relevant disciplines and interdisciplinary potential

This challenge incorporates all disciplines in the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities (SSAH), including Education, Law, Philosophy, Literary and Historical Studies, Political Sciences, and Sociology. There is a great need for scholars working at the interfaces between SSAH and STEM (e.g., Medical Humanities, Humanities and Science).

It will also be critical to engage with scholars who are at the forefront of technological change to ensure that questions of technological transformation are connected to research on human resilience and societal needs. Conversely, it is also critical for the questions and concerns of SSAH to feed into approaches in science and technology.

Gender, citizen engagement and international collaboration

There are critical dimensions of gender equality and equity in any exploration of social and economic transformations, as questions of how technological and social transformations affect communities and individuals pertain not only questions of class, but also of gender. For instance, will new ways of working empower or undermine gender equality? Will the emergence of new sectors of employment increase or reduce gender equality?

This strategic priority requires citizen engagement in fundamental ways, as questions of how individuals and communities are affected by change, and how human resilience can be strengthened (i.e., through new forms of pedagogies) essentially require research involving citizens.

Even though the fundamental challenges citizens will face over the next fifteen years are global in nature, it is critical to find responses to these that are relevant for Europe. International collaboration will add great value to many research projects that explore that tension and interplay between global dynamics and European change, transformation and human adaptation.

3. Democratising language and culture

By 2035, access to culture and languages will be transformed. The access and consumption of culture will be far more democratic, diverse, and contested. Far more cultural content will be curated and consumed not only physically but also virtually. This has fundamental implications for who defines what culture is, and how hegemonies of culture – including languages – are established, challenged, and re-constructed.

As migration enriches as well as complicates belonging and identity, it is critical to establish new forms of cultural dialogue, to mitigate the threats of conflict, marginalisation and dislocation. Moreover, the need for greater multilingualism created by globalisation, migration and the Single Market, creates new opportunities for intra-European communication, but it also creates extensive social and cultural challenges. This raises a number of research questions: How can we ensure better access to, and participation in, languages and culture through new technologies? What are the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on cultures of translation and meaning?

We need to support innovative content and pedagogies with new forms of cultural artefacts, encouraging not just passive consumption, but active co-creation and co-curation across generations – from youth cultures to an ageing population.

It will be critical to examine, moreover, how cultural capital can be used to develop cultural dynamics to sustain new forms of democracy. This entails developing more dynamic applications of technology to preserve and give new contours to minority cultures, as a way of ensuring that the identities framed by minority languages, dialects and cultures be energised in new, productive ways. We also need to understand what pedagogies we can develop to help us navigate, master and make sense of our multilingual environments, at all levels of education.

Expected impact

By 2035, the EU will be identified with enabling individuals and communities to navigate cultural change, and new forms of cultural communication and dialogue will be appreciated as a central pillar of European democracy.

Whilst the EU will not be able to fully control the effects globalisation will have on language communities and dialects, it will connect to citizens' identities by protecting languages and dialects, and by providing teaching and archiving support. Culture and languages will have a new salience for the wellbeing of citizens of all ages and at all states of physical ability as we develop new tools for inclusion and the strengthening of identity.

Relevant disciplines and interdisciplinary potential

Addressing the challenges included in this strategic priority will require the contribution and collaboration of several disciplines. These concerns require research collaborations across all the Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts. They also reach out to the Natural Sciences and Medicine, at the intersections of language, cognition and artificial intelligence, the digitisation of culture, and the interrelationship between culture and healthy ageing and wellbeing.

Gender, citizen engagement and international collaboration

Concerns about marginalisation and exclusion are core to strengthening cultural participation, democratising culture and establishing new forms of cultural and linguistic dialogue. The concerns of this strategic priority centre on new ways of overcoming exclusion based on gender, alongside other characteristics such as race, religion and sexual orientation.

The main objective is to develop new levels of citizens' engagement with culture and language, in ways that link them to Europe. Consequently, citizen engagement – in planning research projects, and in developing methodologies, pedagogies and tools – is critical.

The concerns about how languages and cultures change in light of conflict, how cultural forms and conflict are affected by globalisation, and how languages and culture are affected by demographic change are universal, and they gain immeasurably by incorporating global perspectives.