

Advanced Research Projects in the Humanities: New Trends on Literature, Languages, and Linguistics Studies

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Following the author's own experiencing in supervising Ph.D. theses in literature, languages, linguistics, and teacher education, the author will focus on new trends of advanced research projects that have been contributing to reinforce the importance of research in these areas in a time of crisis in the humanities. The organization and funding of science and scholarship in Europe has been promoting anything else but social sciences research, including educational areas. The author will follow the recent call from the Board of Trustees da Academia Europaea to redirect policies toward the organization of multidisciplinary research projects. Among these so-called "small subjects", we will find original, inspired, and valuable research projects in the humanities. It is worth mentioning that the crisis that has been diminishing this type of scholarship strangely cohabits with several policies promoted by the European Commission and the Council of Europe to develop programs for plurilingual education and linguistic diversity, new framework strategies for multilingualism, and the use of new technologies for language teaching and learning. A strong emphasis on research projects leading to interdisciplinary studies involving literature and pure sciences, plus the development of outreach research projects will be proposed.

Keywords: literature, languages, linguistics, research projects, multilingualism, bibliometrics, humanities

Introduction—The Current Situation of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Europe

The Board of Trustees of The Academia Europaea has published a formal declaration about the current situation of the humanities and social sciences in Europe. Their position,

Is aimed at drawing public attention to several potentially dangerous facts and trends relating to the organisation and funding of science and scholarship (in its broadest sense) in Europe; which may soon result in non-recoverable losses in the humanities and to some extent in the Social Sciences, especially in areas less related to the economic environment. (The Academia Europaea, 2012, p. 1)¹

European universities, science agencies, and foundations are investing mostly in money-spinning areas related to the "pure" sciences and almost everything that has a hint of business and profit, leaving aside

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research in social and human sciences². As The Academia Europaea (2012) underlined, these are, indeed: “The very basis of scholarly research, which should be the foundation on which rests the competent teaching of future generations, our citizens as well as our scholars and scientists, is relentlessly being eroded” (p. 2). If today we tend to conclude that the natural sciences are the successful core of modern research universities, that credence does not have to exclude research done in social and human sciences.

It is well known from everyone in the humanities, the argument coming from outside the social and human sciences that the type of research we do is ineffective, fruitless, and pointless³. Many of us have to prove constantly that research in education, literature, philosophy, history, or sociology is as important as anything else is. Even top American universities like Stanford have to explain publically why the humanities are important. They give simple but profound answers here: <https://humanexperience.stanford.edu/why>, from where the author would like to highlight the belief that we bringing clarity to the future:

Today, humanistic knowledge continues to provide the ideal foundation for exploring and understanding the human experience. Investigating a branch of philosophy might get you thinking about ethical questions. Learning another language might help you gain an appreciation for the similarities in different cultures. Contemplating a sculpture might make you think about how artist's life affected her creative decisions. Reading a book from another region of the world, might help you think about the meaning of democracy. Listening to history course might help you to have a better understanding of the past, while at the same time giving you a clearer picture of what the future holds. (Stanford University, n.d.)

We ask questions that no one else thinks are important to be answered until we provide new meanings, implications, and consequences that will help those disbelievers to come up with new insights in their own field of research. We are also the only ones that question our own questions. Much research in the humanities start in this exact point, which is widely known from ancient philosophers to new thinkers. We tend to think that greatest projects and discoveries in science are to be limited to astronomy, biology, chemistry, earth science, evolution, genetics, medicine, and physics. The kind of work we do in the humanities cannot be placed near these great subjects. Those who evaluate and fund our projects will place us secondly in any general budget discussion and prioritization of areas to be supported. In the end, we have to prove that what we do is science, is worth being funded, and is a contribution to knowledge development. Our small subjects are as important as the great subjects of core science are.

Literary research is certainly at the bottom of all priorities for any funding agency policy. It is frequently estimated as non-transferable knowledge, meaning that it is not immediately visible what the purpose of such

² This trend is not exclusively European. The crisis in the humanities is world disseminated. A similar report on the consequences of this crisis in advanced research can be found, for example, in this paper about the Australian situation: “Measures of quality and impact of publicly funded research in the humanities, arts and social sciences” (retrieved from <http://www.chass.org.au/papers/pdf/PAP20051101JP.pdf>). Here will we find an important clarification on the nature of our research, which the author can only subscribe: “The important questions are those that strike at the heart of who we are as individuals and as a society. The humanities ask us to account for ourselves, our history, our stories, and our human values. The social sciences draw on rigorous investigation to help us make informed choices about the sort of society we wish to live in—how we organize education, health, wealth, and security. The arts ask the same questions in different ways, providing not scientific knowledge but insight—the flashes of inspiration that illuminate, and encapsulate our place in the world. These questions by no means belong to the world of academia” (Council for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, 2005, p. 13).

³ Hohendahl (2005) related this negative turn in the future of the humanities to the theoretical debates of the 1970s and 1980s that did not reach the general public; as a result, the humanities lost its own track in the growing competitive world of funding: “If disciplines are measured by the university administration in terms of outside funding, the humanities will receive low marks. In addition, we can observe the increasing incompatibility of the theoretical endeavors in the humanities, which were critical, and the positive self-understanding of the sciences as they legitimized themselves in the research university. While the sciences could use pragmatic arguments, the humanities found it more difficult to demonstrate their social usefulness” (p. 5).

research is or how it can apply to practical needs to society, since the old prejudice that lumps together literature with lifestyle, entertainment, or leisure is far from being old. On trying to find new roads, the author has proposed to his university the foundation of a seminar across many disciplines called Ethics and Literature, specially directed to those in the academy community who are not related to literary studies. It is something that has been done for the past three decades, with huge success, at Harvard Business School (with Robert Coles (2005), Joseph Badaracco (2006), and Sandra Sucher (2007)), for example. This directed a new team of researchers in Portugal to a new project on “Pragmatic and Formative Approaches to Literature: Developing a Didactic Matrix for Applied Literary Studies”⁴. Projects like this one also follow The Academia Europaea’s (2012) insistence in small subjects research:

Especially important in this regard, is the preservation of research and teaching in the so-called “small subjects”—not limited to, yet primarily in the humanities and Social Sciences—which because of the economic and institutional pressures outlined above risk disappearing unnoticed state-by-state. Europe has a proud history and research culture in the humanities and Social Sciences, but that position is under threat from the increasing investments in major sustained programmes in other parts of the world—not only in the USA, but also in South and East Asia. Many, if not all the smaller subjects mentioned, will simply cease to be studied if in Europe we abandon their pursuit. (p. 3)

These small subjects are part of our identity as well and cannot be misplaced in our work, even if endangered by a sense of being second to everything else to many funding agencies. As stressed by Fludernik (2005): “The humanities enrich our experience through cross-cultural comparison and informed criticism of current dogma or received opinion, and by employing multiple perspectives on events and situations, especially in the domain of ethics” (p. 59). It is in this domain that we have been trying to explore different possibilities for linking literature not only to the liberal arts in general, but also to pure sciences that tend to deny any sort of learning from literary texts.

Trying to determine the value of research in the humanities today cannot be reduced to simply rhetoric defense. In his important introduction to *The Public Value of the Humanities*, Bate (2011) explained what is principally at stake when we talk about the subject:

What do we mean by “value”, by “research” and by “the humanities”? These are questions that can only be answered by means of the tools of the disciplines of the humanities. They are questions of semantics and interpretation. And they require philosophical and historical understanding. Language, history, philosophy: the humanities. (p. 3)

The humanities can answer all these key questions and accomplish a new endeavor known as “knowledge transfer”. It is perhaps the first time in history that the humanities have to fight for its cultural, political, and academic survival so intensively and succumbed to an economic discourse where knowledge is always

⁴ This was a joint project (submitted to public funding for 2013-2014) by New University of Lisbon, University of Oporto, and University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro. Its main goal was presented as follows: “The research project we propose seeks to identify new and alternative approaches to literary texts, which can be employed by populations outside the traditional scope of the humanities. This project takes as its foundation the impressive evidence of such applications of literary studies already institutionalized in higher education programs from abroad. From this starting point, this project analyzes the formative advantages and potentialities of such literary uses for a wide range of publics, critically reflecting on the ontological dimension of the literary phenomenon within the present and wide social sphere, and its economic and cultural systems, studying the possible didactic and theoretical matrixes that may shape it. This work proceeds within an atmosphere of experimentation in literary studies, which resists rigidity in relation to theoretical and critical positions on literary phenomena. Instead, the project works to develop the theoretical and didactic-pedagogical possibilities of a new literary approach, pedagogically useful and institutionally interesting within contemporary society” (authored by the research team; report unpublished). The Foundation for Science and Technology (Portugal) did not approve this project for funding.

computable (*How many articles have you published? How many times have you been cited? How many conferences have you attended? How many papers have you presented?...*). For those who have to decide how much money a research project should be given there is a variable that does never count: *time*—and this is just what describes best the tradition of true “knowledge transfer” in the humanities since the first Greek philosophers. As Bate (2011) noticeably explained:

There is something especially inappropriate about the attempt to *quantify* the “value” and “impact” of work in the humanities in economic terms, since the very nature of the humanities is to address the messy, debatable and unquantifiable but essentially human dimensions of life, such as history, beauty, imagination, faith, truth, goodness, justice and freedom. The only test of a philosophical argument, an historical hypothesis or an aesthetic judgment is time—a long period of time, not the duration of a government spending review. (p. 6)

Time to reflect on the production of knowledge is associated to debate and revision. In science in general, no theory, idea, or argument is set up as an eternal truth. “Knowledge transfer” should be viewed as a consequence of knowledge debated, contested, and challenged. Along with time, there is also a human factor that changes everything in “knowledge transfer”.

The Human Factor in Research in the Humanities

The human factor in research in the humanities relies not only in its traditional conviction that one’s own individual life will improve from the reading of great books and authors of world literary heritage, for example, but also from something new that many funding agencies tend to neglect when evaluating research projects of literature and language: The human in the humanities is what assures our relationship with every field of knowledge. As Bleich (2002) put it, revising the human factor and the place of literary studies: “Literature today, with its greater variety and urgency, with its connections to popular culture and music, has become more important to students and society than it was to those who read it only to become more refined” (p. 330)⁵. Other sciences operate not necessarily on a human scale but rather with impersonal data that can easily be measured, filed, diagnosed, classified, or lab-tested. Humanists operate with the uncertainties of thinking, the multiple nature of meaning, the limitations of knowledge, the fragility of rational findings, and, in the end, with what we cannot measure, file, diagnose, classify, or test. The fascinating world of the humanities is also explained by the fact that we can even work with what is left behind by non-humanist scientists. Harpham (2005) summed up this special trend:

The larger point is that scholarship in the humanities is defined by its concern with the subject of humanity. Humanists operate on a human scale; they treat their subjects not as organisms, cells, or atoms, nor as specks of animate matter in the vast universe—nor, for that matter, as clients, patients, customers, or cases—but as self-aware individuals conscious of their existence. Humanistic knowledge is centered in texts (in the broadest sense of the term) produced by human beings engaged in the process of reflecting on their lives. At the core of the humanities is the distinctively human capacity to imagine, to interpret, and to represent the human experience. (p. 27)

⁵ If you are looking for a rather historical view of the place of the human factor in human sciences scholarship, Samuel Weber (1985) had clearly demonstrated that that factor has been misreading for too long: “In the French ‘human sciences’, therefore, the epistemological accent had to be placed on the sciences, not on the human. And although the situation was somewhat less clear-cut in Germany, inasmuch as the so-called ‘Humanwissenschaften’ never succeeded in articulating themselves as extensively as in France, the tendency there was no doubt similar. The prestige enjoyed by the term *wissenschaftlichkeit*—‘scientificity’—in academic discourse is indicative of a cognitive ideal that equates ‘scientific’—*wissenschaftlich*—with rigorous, coherent inquiry and knowledge, no matter what the domain” (p. 11).

The imagination, the interpretation, and the representation of the human experience are the tools we use to study most of our small subjects. They are as important scientific tools as any others used in hard sciences. They provide us with new ideologies, theories, treatises, histories, philosophies, values, systems, etc.. Every small subject has its own higher level of discussion, where that unearthing of knowledge is born and named.

The Evaluation of Science Projects, Rankings, Scientometrics, and Their Discontents

Another important aspect of this discussion is the quality of evaluation of science projects. People who are accustomed to do this kind of evaluation tend to applaud the quantity of the work produced and indexed in the best journals and rarely do they use criteria that can highlight excellence⁶. Five indexed papers will impress more than an excellent book published alone. This works against the tradition of the humanities, which, for centuries, has been made on the timelessness of excellent books and not of tons of indexed papers, which only leads to “intellectual embalming”, as putted by David A. Bell, professor of History at Princeton University, after revising two important recent books on contemporary utilitarianism in the humanities in the USA:

Judging scholars in the humanities rigidly on the basis of “productivity” and “citations,” as if their insights were precisely quantifiable, can quickly destroy the very qualities that “peer review” is supposed to foster. And subjecting the most exhilarating adventures of the human mind to endless, microscopic analysis in minor publication after minor publication, as demanded by systems of promotion and tenure, easily degenerates into intellectual embalming. (Bell, 2010, p. 69)⁷

In a recent workshop held at the author’s University, the focus was on a new project U-Multirank⁸ that could cope with other forms of contemporary evaluation of Higher Education scientific and pedagogical achievements. The conclusions of the analysis of the scientific production of NOVA (New University of Lisbon, Portugal) highlighted the fact that “the normalized impact of publications of NOVA, indexed to Web of Science, has improved consistently since 2000 and reached a value similar to the international average” (Rectorate Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, 2012, p. 4). This is the kind of appraisal that any university today is seeking almost desperately, but the most important fact is the shortening of the scope of that production to such areas as Biological Sciences—Animals and Plants, Chemistry, Geosciences, Applied Physics and Chemistry, Clinical Medicine, Biological Sciences—Humans and Engineering. It seems from here that the productivity of the author’s own Faculty of Social and Human Sciences is helplessly inexistent. This is just an example of the

⁶ We can only agree with Bauerlein (2012) when criticizing the replenishment of the New Criticism Dictum: “Publish or perish”, which “has long been the formula of academic labor at research universities, but for many humanities professors that imperative has decayed into a simple rule of production. The publish-or-perish model assumed a peer-review process that maintained quality, but more and more it is the bare volume of printed words that counts. When humanities departments and committees and chairpersons examine a professor’s record, all too often they measure the output, not the excellence. And the other duties of mentoring and service slip into secondary requirements. Middling teaching does not much hurt, and great teaching does not help. Administrative work pleases colleagues, but it does not lead to promotions from within or offers from without. Research is all, or rather, research mass eclipses everything else. We have witnessed a steady slide into quantification, evaluation by lines of the vitae containing words in italics” (retrieved from <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2008/SO/Feat/baue.htm>).

⁷ It is David A. Bell’s review of *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (by Louis Menand, 2010) and *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (by Martha C. Nussbaum, 2010).

⁸ At the website <http://www.u-multirank.eu>, there a summary of the objectives of the project: “U-Multirank is a new international transparency tool which is multi-dimensional, multi-level and user-driven. Because of these characteristics it differs substantially from all existing higher education rankings and addresses the needs of various stakeholders in higher education. The U-Multirank project was initiated and funded by the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) and has been carried out by a consortium of research organisations under the name CHERPA Network (consortium for higher education and research performance assessment) in the period of Summer 2009-Summer 2011” (retrieved from <https://www.unl.pt/nova-2011-2012/rankings-and-bibliometrics>).

current global fallacy of the evaluation of scientific productivity as related to one's capacity to be able to discover how to break the Web of Science code, which has been guarded by Thomson Reuters (the world's largest international multimedia news agency) as the great code of contemporary science.

It is known by all of us working in the humanities meadow that we do not belong to the Thomson Reuters outer space and whenever we are asked to report on how many references we have in WoS (Web of Science) we can only feel ashamed, many times, for not being mentioned there at all, even if we have published many good books and articles elsewhere. The current autocracy of WoS publication has been denounced by many institutions everywhere (for example, by the European Science Foundation or by HERA—Humanities in the European Research Area (<http://www.heranet.info>))⁹.

Many individual books and chapters of edited books published outside the range of Thomson Reuters universe, with blind peer-reviewing, have been left out of important rankings and bibliometrics used by funding agencies, describing entire nations and traditions in the humanities as irrelevant for what matters. There are many bizarre situations: you will not find in the WoS titles indexed in the *MLA International Bibliography* (<http://www.mla.org/bibliography>), for example, today a compilation of 66,000 books and articles within the fields of modern languages, literatures, folklore, and linguistics; or most of the publications at the ERIH (European Reference Index for the Humanities) (ERIH, <http://www.esf.org>), “the only reference index created and developed by European researchers both for their own purposes and in order to present their ongoing research achievements systematically to the rest of the world”¹⁰; you will not find in the WoS titles published in other languages other than English; and WoS will ignore rivals as Scopus (<http://www.scopus.com>), “the largest abstract and citation database of research literature and quality web sources covering nearly 18,000 titles from more than 5,000 publishers”¹¹. The main problem is not the existence of Thomson Reuters and the WoS, of course, but the policies followed by many national agencies and universities for evaluating our humanistic production with a single measure, the one that has little or none affiliation to our field work.

Beyond the need to correct those funding and bibliometrics policies, we need a new shift in the humanities toward public outreach projects. As David A. Bell concluded:

It seems to me that if humanists are serious about developing this constituency, they need to do more than write books like Nussbaum's and Menand's, which, however elegant and instructive, will be read almost entirely by other academics. They need to develop more effective forms of public outreach. Currently, far too much is being left to individual intellectual entrepreneurs, or to the amateurs of Wikipedia. Universities could do far more, for instance, to develop accessible, entertaining Web sites that guide serious, interested amateurs into key areas of humanities scholarship. On any given topic, introductory pages could feature mostly multimedia presentations and short capsules of information. These in turn could lead to cogent introductory essays, which could in turn link to primary sources and open-access scholarship. (as cited in Harpham, 2005, p. 27)

⁹ There are also many articles reacting against this trend in the Humanities, for example: Archambault, Vignola-Gagné, Côté, Larivière, and Gingras's “Benchmarking Scientific Output in the Social Sciences and Humanities: The Limits of Existing Databases” (2006); HUANG and CHANG's “Characteristics of Research Output Insocial Sciences and Humanities: From a Research Evaluation Perspective” (2008); White, Boell, Yu, Davis, Wilson, and F. T. H. Cole's “Libcitations: A Measure for Comparative Assessment of Bookpublications in the Humanities and Social Sciences” (2009); Nederhof's “Bibliometric Monitoring of Research Performance in the Social Sciences and the Humanities: A Review” (2006); Larivière, Macaluso, Archambault, and Gingras's “Which Scientific Elites? On the Concentration of Research Funds, Publications and Citations” (2010). The later article shows also that “Thomson's databases have two shortcomings when it comes to compiling statistics on individual authors”: They do not include the first names of authors of papers, but only their initials, creating many homographs, and there is no information on the relationship between authors' names and their institutional addresses.

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://www.esf.org/index.php?id=4813>.

¹¹ Scopus Database, retrieved from <http://www.elsevier.com/online-tools/scopus>.

These outreach projects are key complementary activities that we should not neglect. They do not affect our self-confidence in the exclusiveness of our intellectual work, if we accept that we have to expand it to other publics and not keeping our best deeds to our peers and ourselves. It was in this spirit that the author conceived the only contemporary dictionary of literary terms in Portuguese language, accessible to the general public for free, a project with more than 180 scholars from Brazil and Portugal¹², and today with more than 10 million visits. We need to devise more outreach projects if the humanities want to be regarded as something useful to society and not only for people doing strange things that no one understands in the outside world.

Non-Anglophone scholars and researchers may be accepted in any international conference but that is not true if they want to be accepted as published authors in the journals that really count for funding to be approved. This is also influencing, most recently, the external evaluation of Higher Education institutions, with a strong emphasis on indexed papers overall output published in English. The Academia Europaea (2012) recommended, appropriately, that all funding agencies and foundations should:

Re-consider the issue of the evaluation of research in the humanities and Social Sciences, discussing the use and abuse of bibliometrics, impact factors and peer-review criteria, for it is apparent that papers written by non-Anglophone scholars from institutions outside of the Anglophone world have significantly less chance of being accepted in international journals that the main metrics databases utilise...

And then, as a consequence, we should be able “to organize multidisciplinary research projects founded by the European Research Council, to ensure that through such European cooperation the critical but endangered small subjects can continue to be nurtured and studied in Europe” (The Academia Europaea, 2012, p. 4).

In practice, today we have two possibilities to promote the nurturing of small subjects: at university level or at non-university level. The former will find this task much more difficult since every funding agency will look at the practicability of research projects before anything else, and then they will see whether they fit or not in the mainstream subjects; the later will find an easy way to keep the tradition of the humanities, because they are not worried about the same criteria of the national and international funding agencies. A good example of this off-university way of keeping the small subjects alive in the humanities is the German Academies of Sciences who declare, openly, they wish to:

Continue to maintain the humanistic tradition of education. While at universities, for example, there are ever stronger pressures to economise, and ever more importance is given to the so-called “mainstream subjects” designed for large numbers of students and for their practical applicability, the Academies are committed to preserving and maintaining the *universitas litterarum* in their selection of members, their publications and in their funding of research. That means that they take care to maintain the full range of disciplines, they support smaller subjects and promote a lively relationship between different disciplines.¹³

The Universitas Litterarum

The idea of the *universitas litterarum* rejuvenated by Wilhelm von Humboldt in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century restores the epitome of universal knowledge on humanistic grounds that we must see in the foundation of every discipline of research. “Top” or “world-class” universities of today are defined first in terms of research, and if we do not find a way to relocate humanistic research in that path, we will find it harder to escape “the non-recoverable losses in the humanities and to some extent in the Social Sciences, especially in

¹² Retrieved from <http://www.edtl.com.pt>.

¹³ Retrieved from http://www.akademienunion.de/_files/Broschueren/Wissensspeicher_fuer_die_Zukunft_e_2012.pdf.

areas less related to the economic environment” (The Academia Europaea, 2012, p. 1), as already foreseen by The Academia Europaea. There is a way to retrieve that *universitas litterarum* that the author has been witnessing in a couple of times when hard fields like medicine or law found out that they would gain something from interdisciplinary talks with literature, for example. We have had the opportunity, in the past 10 years or so, to see many international conferences on the intersections of literature, language, and law, the interdisciplinary dialogue between literature, science and medicine in history, explorations of the relation between human beings and the natural world discussed in international meetings and journals on literature and environment, etc.. You will find today many imaginative scientific gatherings of literature and other non-humanistic subjects, like *Literature and Chemistry—Elective affinities* (an interdisciplinary conference organized by the research group Literature and Science, Universitetet i Bergen, Institutt for fremmedspråk, Norway, Bergen, October 27-28, 2011), who introduced that old relationship as follows:

Designated the UNESCO International Year of Chemistry, 2011 also commemorates the 100th anniversary of Marie Curie’s Nobel Prize in Chemistry, awarded for her ground-breaking studies in radium and polonium. The relationship between literature and chemistry has a long history, reaching back to the time before the existence of chemistry as a scientific discipline, to alchemy and natural philosophy, and to philosophers and poets like Epicurus and Lucretius. Goethe’s novel *Elective Affinities* (1809) represents one of the most notable metaphoric explorations of chemistry; with its suggestion of human connections as originating at a biochemical level. The chemist Humphry Davy had a direct influence on Wordsworth and Coleridge...¹⁴

And the author’s own research center hosted an interdisciplinary conference on Literature, Science, and the Arts announced as just another example of promoting the *universitas litterarum*:

This conference aims to respond to the intense interest that interdisciplinary and intermedial designs have obtained in many of the areas of study pertaining not only to literature and the arts but also to the sciences. It will lay a significant emphasis on the ways in which the discourses of literature, film, painting, music and other such cultural practices become interwoven with the discourses of science; and, conversely, on the ways in which the practices and theories of science reach beyond their more conventional boundaries and into the fields of artistic creativity and the humanities. (Relational Forms, 2012)

The Eulogy of Small Subjects

There are still many other ways to reestablish the humanities fashion. Apart from the research funding related matters of university life, many institutions are now advertising their teaching courses highlighting both mainstream and small subjects, as you can still have at Freie Universität:

As a full-range university with more than 160 subjects Freie Universität offers a wide variety of study programs. Here you can devote yourself to the culture of Latin America or study the structure of individual cells, Law or Economics, or choose between Psychology and Journalism. One unique feature is the large number of so-called “small subjects” such as Byzantine Studies and Jewish Studies. (Freie Universität, n.d.)¹⁵

The eulogy of small subjects is not for keep asserting the humanities value against anything else. That proves nothing today. Instead, we should keep showing what we can do differently counts as well to change the way we view and understand our time.

In the author’s experience as a senior supervisor and researcher working in the humanities and, specifically, in small subjects as FLT (foreign language teaching), teaching education, and literature teaching,

¹⁴ See the archive of the website conference at http://www.uib.no/fg/litt_vit/nyheter/2011/04/literature-and-chemistry.

¹⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/promovieren/warum.html>.

he has been trying to encourage multidisciplinary projects that can have an impact both at national and international levels. The list of current topics can be summed up as follows:

(1) Teaching/Learning Non-romance FLs (foreign languages): How to learn a new alphabet system in a FL? What kind of problems can we identify in the process of familiarization with a foreign alphabet or writing system? What are the best methods for a Romance language speaker to learn a new Cyrillic-based language?;

(2) FLT Through Textbooks: How to define effective criteria to produce textbooks for Portuguese as a FL intended to specific students (adults)?;

(3) FLT to Gifted Students: What are teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards gifted students?;

(4) Literacy Issues in FLT and in Language Education in General: (a) What is the impact of policies for the promotion of information literacy in basic education?; and (b) Which writing skills can we identify at university levels in students of literature? How do they produce literary criticism? What are the traces of the literary literacy emerging from our teaching practices on working with the literary text?;

And (5) Cultural, Philosophical, and Psychological Issues in FLT: (a) What is the ethics of the FL teacher? What is the ethics constructed by the FL teacher in the context of a multicultural community? Does ethics change according to the age level of the FL student? Are we the same teacher when we teach FL to young and to adult students? What changes in our professional awareness?; and (b) What are the interactions between, amongst learners, and between learners and teachers in language learning classrooms? Why is it that some groups develop into bonded, cohesive groups in classroom and others do not?.

These small subjects of projects in FLT illustrate a turning point in current advanced research in FLs: researchers are no longer narrowing their inquiries on linguistic questions or student-centered actions. They are moving to teacher-centered actions, beliefs, and policies, to issues on particular aspects of FLT as literacy education or methods for teaching gifted students, for example. Many research projects in literature, languages, linguistics, and teacher education have been following this same path, no matter the lack of scientific funding at all levels, and new trends have been trailed everywhere: comparative literature, literary theory, literary history, cyber literature, didactic transposition, literacies, electronic production of course books, intercultural learning, corpora in FLT, new information and communication technologies in FLT, interlingual inferencing, national standards for FL education, FLT for specific purposes, digital narratives in education, CLIL (Content and language integrated learning), language learning behavior, etc.. These small subjects and many others prove that advanced research in literature, languages, linguistics, and teacher education can also be very useful to help the growing tendency toward further internationalization in other sciences (beyond human and social areas) traditionally linked to politics, business, and industry (computing, chemistry, biology, medicine, etc.), something that can only be attained with a strong attention to multilingualism, multiliteracy, and further education.

Conclusions

It is easy to argue in favor of FLs learning today in a globalized world where every professional is seeking for new contacts and ways of improving business and political relationships, for example. But we must accept that there is no FLs learning without research, as there is no formal learning without critical thinking about how learning operates, how can be improved, and how can be attained. As Kelly (2011) concluded for the UK but easily applicable to the any modern country: "Research on the many languages and cultures that contribute to the multicultural landscape of the UK plays an important part in developing a clearer understanding of

differences and fostering a more open society” (p. 264). We need to inquiry why and how so many people from different professional backgrounds are now seeking a new knowledge beyond their formal education: Following some recent examples from the author’s own Language Institute, a Portuguese dentist learning Finnish to be able to work in Finland; a Portuguese engineer learning Dutch to be able to work in Holland; employees from a Portuguese business firm learning Mandarin to be able to start business with China; and a Portuguese doctor who wants to do medical research in Russia and needs to learn the language. In a recent past, when someone in Portugal decided to emigrate, all he/she needed to know was a little English, Spanish, or French. But there is a new awareness today and those who decide to emigrate or simply start a new business elsewhere abroad know that the starting point of that decision is to learn the official language of the country where one wishes go. This trend on learning FLs for specific purposes is somehow new to our contemporary society and a sign that English is no longer the compulsory and unique language to master to get a new job abroad. A new trend in FL learning needs research so that we can understand the new multicultural voyages and relationships of the world.

This market-driven university philosophy that is dominating Higher Education today, putting aside other forms of social, ethical, or cultural practices that ruled in the past, has to move to different territories where we should be find a way to reconnect to “public service and the uses of knowledge for the betterment of society” (Koritz, 2007, p. 246), as so emphatically Koritz argued for the “Futures for the Humanities” (2007)¹⁶. Researching small subjects along with increasing interdisciplinary dialogue with hard sciences and a more appropriate attention to outreach activities are practical solutions, that can lead us to the rebuilding of an old fashion when the humanities used to nurture us with seeds of intellectual pride and self-confidence.

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¹⁶ In this article, Koritz reacted to three recent books again on the problems of American Higher Education and the misplacement of the humanities, one of which is rather important for our debate: *Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money*, by James Engell and Anthony Dangerfield (2005).

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