Enhancing Climate Resilience through Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts: A Strategic Framework for Action

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POLICY BRIEF

THE INITIATIVE

This policy brief is an initiative by the COST Action SHiFT (Social Sciences and Humanities for Transformation and Climate Resilience). The writing process was led by Diogo Guedes Vidal (Centre for Functional Ecology—Science for People & the Planet, University of Coimbra; Department of Social Sciences and Management, Universidade Aberta) and Fátima Alves (Centre for Functional Ecology—Science for People & the Planet, University of Coimbra; Department of Social Sciences and Management, Universidade Aberta).

PURPOSE WRITING OF THE POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief "Enhancing Climate Resilience through Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts: A Strategic Framework for Action" is informed by a survey to understand the perceptions of climate-engaged researchers - dedicated to addressing climate change and sustainable development - from various disciplines within the social sciences, humanities, and arts (SSH&A) and highlights critical perceptions, barriers, and opportunities that can inform future climate action strategies within the European Commission's framework.

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1. Introduction

Climate change poses a profound and multifaceted threat to humans and non-humans. While the scientific understanding of anthropogenic climate change has advanced significantly over the past decades, society continues to grapple with the challenge of creating the necessary conditions for sustainable coexistence between humanity and nature. Despite the considerable efforts of politicians and scientists to address these issues, the articulation of diverse perspectives, particularly from the social sciences, humanities, and arts (SSH&A), remains little explored.

These fields play a crucial role in shaping public understanding, fostering emotional resilience, and developing innovative approaches to climate action. However, we are still far from reversing or halting the trajectory towards catastrophic global warming and biodiversity loss. The findings from the SHiFT survey emphasise that overcoming the barriers to effective climate action requires scientific and technological advancements and a deeper engagement with the social and cultural dimensions of this global crisis. By harnessing the insights from SSH&A, we can create more holistic and transformative strategies to address the urgent challenges of climate change.

2. Scope of the Policy Brief

This policy brief highlights the critical insights that social sciences, humanities, and arts (SSH&A) can offer to understand the complex dynamics of climate change, thereby informing more effective policy interventions. We underscore the significance of SSH&A's contributions by presenting key findings on the barriers to transformative change, which are essential for complementing current policies primarily focused on scientific and technological solutions.

SSH&A disciplines provide crucial perspectives on human behaviour, social attitudes, cultural norms, economic structures, and political processes—insights urgently needed to enhance and expand existing climate policies. This policy brief is intended for policymakers and research funding agencies, aiming to support them in making bold and informed decisions by integrating these often-overlooked perspectives into their strategies.

This policy brief comprises:

- Examining the complexity of climate change perceptions highlights how varied understandings and priorities across regions impact the effectiveness of climate communication strategies. It emphasises the consensus on the critical role of SSH&A in addressing these complexities;
- An analysis of the barriers to climate action, identifying key obstacles such as the perceived primary responsibility of industries and governments, financial constraints, and low integration of climate change into formal education. This section discusses the need for enhanced sustainability education and the removal of systemic limitations that hinder effective climate action;
- A set of actionable domains and critical recommendations focusing on strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration, improving climate communication strategies, addressing systemic barriers, promoting sustainability education, leveraging the emotional dimensions of climate resilience, and empowering the role of arts in climate action. These recommendations guide future policy and foster transformative change in climate resilience.

3. Critical Insights on Climate Perceptions and Barriers to Action

Although most scholars agree that climate change is a primary worldwide concern, their perspectives on it and how important they think it is differ significantly by geographical area and sociocultural background. This variance highlights the complex social perceptions of climate change and how socioeconomic, cultural, and local settings shape them. The SSH&A, via examining how various cultures view and respond to climate change, are essential in helping to unravel these complexities. Research has demonstrated that cultural narratives and local experiences significantly impact how people perceive climate hazards and react to policies related to climate change [1], [2].

This survey also shows that opinions about how profound climate change is vary significantly locally and globally. Customised communication strategies that can successfully close the gap between local reality and the consensus of global science are required in light of this difference. Customised communication promotes increased community involvement and support for climate action and improves public awareness [3]. Effective policy-making and the successful execution of climate efforts depend on recognising and addressing these disparate perspectives through focused communication.

Survey participants expressed great concern about the perceived insufficiency of efforts by governments and corporations to address climate change despite high levels of personal engagement with the subject. This worry highlights a significant obstacle to taking action on climate change: the pervasive notion that large-scale actors have primary responsibility instead of people or communities. Financial limitations, doubts about the influence of individual acts, and structural restrictions within the current political and economic systems all contribute to this impression [4].

The results also reveal a worrying lack of integration between formal education institutions and climate change. Improved sustainability education that incorporates actual, hands-on engagement with climate challenges and theoretical knowledge is highlighted by the participants in the survey. Educational institutions largely shape the future generation of leaders and people, and a strong and long-lasting commitment to sustainability is fostered by including climate change in curricula [5], [6]. In order to overcome these obstacles, systemic adjustments must be made that empower communities and individuals while holding governments and businesses responsible.

The value of multidisciplinary approaches in building climate resilience, especially when integrating SSH&A, is highlighted. Developing comprehensive and long-lasting climate solutions requires understanding human behaviour, societal structures, cultural values, and ethical issues, all provided by these disciplines. For example, the humanities offer moral and philosophical viewpoints that question established paradigms and motivate revolutionary change. On the other hand, the social sciences offer critical study of the political and economic institutions that contribute to climate change [7].

However, the arts continue to struggle to be seen as crucial as other domains, even though they are acknowledged for their ability to express climate issues compellingly and emotionally. This view emphasises the need to explain the arts' contribution to climate action thoroughly. Art can viscerally engage people, promoting empathy and inspiring group action [8]. Policymakers can take advantage of innovative ways that connect with various audiences and encourage more engagement in climate action by thoroughly

including the arts in climate resilience measures.

The emotional dimensions of climate resilience are a significant finding from the SHiFT survey, with researchers reporting feelings of worry, anger, motivation, and overwhelm. These emotions affect how researchers view and interact with climate change; they are not merely personal experiences. If emotions are poorly controlled, they can either motivate behaviour or, on the other hand, cause paralysis and inaction [9]. Comprehending these affective aspects is essential to formulating strategies and policies that promote adaptability and ongoing involvement in climate initiatives.

In particular, positive emotions are essential for promoting creativity, teamwork, and a revolutionary vision for climate resilience. Empathy and hope, for example, have been found to promote adaptive behaviours and innovative problem-solving, which in turn can strengthen resilience [10]. Thus, the efficacy of climate resilience methods can be markedly increased by policies and activities that tackle the emotional components of climate change. A more comprehensive strategy that considers not just the scientific and technical components of climate change but also its human and non-human experiences is made possible by engaging with the emotional terrain of climate action.

4. Key recommendations

In order to effectively address climate change, research and policy initiatives must actively incorporate the SSH&A into all phases of their development, going beyond conventional scientific and technological methods. In order to address the complex social presumptions and obstacles that influence climate action, this integration is crucial. Programs can provide a deeper understanding of human behaviour, cultural norms, and social structures essential for successful climate policies by incorporating SSH&A disciplines. Specifically, this means:

- **Strengthening Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** SSH&A specialists should be involved in programs from the beginning to investigate and recognise the societal presumptions that influence climate action. This cooperative approach will aid the development of comprehensive solutions that address the scientific and sociocultural aspects of climate change;
- **Enhancing Climate Communication Strategies:** Programs must collaborate with SSH&A experts to develop communication plans that consider the various perspectives on climate change in various contexts and sizes. These strategies can effectively engage and inspire a broad spectrum of stakeholders, dispelling doubt and inspiring group action by creating positive, solution-focused narratives;
- **Addressing Systemic Barriers to Climate Action:** Programs should recognise and address the systemic obstacles preventing effective action from fostering an environment conducive to climate resilience. This entails promoting laws that make businesses and governments responsible while enabling people and communities via financial incentives, transparency, and education;
- **Promoting Sustainability Education:** Programs may raise awareness and drive a generation of people by incorporating climate change into official educational institutions. Experts in SSH&A may assist in creating educational programs that involve students in real-world, hands-on projects, strengthening their commitment to sustainability and equipping them to address future climate issues;
- **Leveraging the Emotional Dimensions of Climate Action:** Programs should be aware of and responsive to the affective factors influencing climate engagement. Policymakers can increase the efficacy of climate resilience initiatives by fostering supportive settings that help transform negative emotions like concern, rage, and optimism into positive action;
- **Empowering the Role of Arts in Climate Resilience:** Programs should encourage and promote creative projects that convey complicated climate issues in culturally relevant ways to fully realise the potential of the arts in climate action. By increasing the arts' prominence and significance, these endeavours can enhance public conversation and encourage more involvement in environmental causes.

5. Summary

The SHiFT survey's results highlight the critical role that SSH&A plays in tackling the complexities of climate change by implementing an interdisciplinary approach that unifies these domains with technology and the natural sciences. This policy brief urges the European Commission and member states to act swiftly and integrate SSH&A knowledge into the foundation of climate research and policy. Europe can develop creative and adaptable solutions that not only tackle the environmental aspects of climate change but also interact with the social and cultural elements that motivate and maintain public support for climate action by encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration between SSH&A, technology, and the natural sciences.

The policy brief also emphasises removing obstacles that prevent SSH&A from being included in climate initiatives. Some challenges include financial limitations, structural impediments in policy frameworks, and the devaluation of the humanities and arts in climate discourse. In order to overcome these obstacles, a concentrated effort must be made to increase SSH&A's prominence and significance and ensure that their contributions are acknowledged and used in creating all-encompassing climate solutions.

The European Union can harness the creative and emotional aspects of climate action to promote a sense of collective responsibility and empowerment among its member states by prioritising the integration of SSH&A. This comprehensive strategy will increase public participation and boost the efficacy of climate measures, ultimately leading to a more resilient and sustainable future for Europe.

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