

Research Policy & Independent Risk Research

Draft demands by civil society organisations for German parliamentary elections in 2013.

Occupy Innovation – for a change in research policy!

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Introduction

Current European and German research policy is criticised by many civil society organisations. Drastic problems such as climate change, decreasing resources and global food supply are fueling the discussion. Uneasiness about a research policy that is mostly driven by economic interests is increasing.

It's time for a change: In 2011 about 100 civil society organisations published a call for a substantial change of the common strategic framework for the funding of European research and innovation programmes. In its 2001 annual report, the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) called for a “*social contract for sustainability*“. Most recently, in February 2012, the German organisation, Friends of the Earth (FOE / BUND) published a report titled “*Sustainable Science*“, which summarises several aspects of the current discussions on this subject.

One of the most important demands of organisations such as FOE (Germany) or the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) is a multimillion sustainability programme, the so called “*Nachhaltigkeitsmilliarde*“, a yearly fund to drive the necessary transformation of science to secure a real change of policy in the fields of energy, agriculture, mobility and sustainable urban development. Furthermore, calls are being made for new structural instruments to enable more participation, transparency and democratic control by society and thereby put an end to the current fixation on technology, competitiveness and economic growth.

Similar demands are raised in a letter to EU Commissioner, Barroso, which was signed by about 100 civil society organisations in 2011:

- *Research that will make Europe (and the world) an environmentally sustainable, healthy and peaceful place to live must now be prioritised over and above research that delivers marketable technologies. We, the undersigned civil society and scientific organisations, think that another research and innovation policy is not only possible but urgently necessary in order to respond to the challenges our societies are facing. We call on the EU Institutions to take steps to.*
- *Overcome the myth that only highly complex and cost intensive technologies can create sustainability, employment and well-being, and focus on tangible solutions to environmental, economic and societal challenges instead;*
- *Ensure that the concept of innovation includes locally adapted and social forms of innovation as well as technological development, and facilitate cooperation and knowledge exchange between civil society organisations and academia in order to realise the innovative potential of the non-profit sector;*
- *Establish a democratic, participatory and accountable decision-making process for research funding allocation, free from conflicts of interest and industry dominance, and enable civil society to play a*

full part in both setting the EU research agenda and participating in all EU research programmes;

- *Ensure that all experts advising EU research policy-makers are appointed in a transparent manner to provide impartial and independent expertise, free from conflicts of interests; replace industry-dominated advisory groups and technology platforms with bodies that provide a balanced representation of views and stakeholders;*
- *Ensure that publicly funded research benefits wider society by systematically requiring equitable access licensing and encouraging open source access policies in the next Common Strategic Framework.”*

The aim of the signatories of this letter is the initiation of a much more sustainable research policy in Germany and the European Union, beginning with the German parliamentary elections in 2013. To foster public debate, we support these “electoral benchmarks”, directed at all the participating parties of the 2013 German parliamentary elections.

In addition to the demands presented above, we also see the need to build up more expertise in the fields of new, risky and high tech technologies, which is independent from the interests of industry. Similarly, as was the case prior to the recent financial crisis, only a few experts are investigating the long-term implications in great detail that may be associated with new developments in the fields of nanotechnology and biotechnology as well as areas such as energy, mobility and IT technologies. Many of the relevant experts have close ties with industry (for example via funding of their research projects) or are working for government authorities, which in many cases are more interested in enhancing economic growth and competitiveness than fostering a broader public debate. The establishment of a broad and well-founded counter expertise in the field of risky technologies, which is also represented on an institutional level is essential.

General political goals:

We are aiming for:

- “Public money for public goods”, the priority for publicly funded research policy should be the benefit of general society;
- More participation by civil society organisations in planning and implementing research policy;
- Much more transparent research policy frameworks should be developed, which are not predominantly driven by economical interests;
- Enhancing independent counter expertise, especially in technological areas associated with higher risks for the environment and health;
- More scope for new, unconventional and controversial debates and views within the scientific community;
- Innovations in the fields of social and cultural sciences should be regarded as being equally important as technological innovations.

Specific “electoral benchmarks”

1. Participatory Research Policy & Independent Research Council

We call for the establishment of an *Independent Research Council* with representatives from civil society (such as environmental and consumer organisations) and the scientific community. This council shall have a say and decide on research funding in areas such as nutrition, agriculture, energy, mobility and public health (the “multimillion sustainability programme”). Further this council shall consult the government regarding the development of the general strategic framework in terms of research and innovation funding

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2. Multimillion Sustainability Programme

In order to warrant sufficient funding for a transformation of science and innovation and a real change of policy in the fields of energy, agriculture, mobility and sustainable urban development, we are calling for a yearly multimillion sustainability fund. The *Independent Research Council* shall decide about the distribution of this budget.

3. Establishment of independent risk research and counter expertise

A broad range of independent counter expertise in specific technological areas that have a high risk potential or are subject to controversial discussions (such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, mobility, energy, IT technologies) shall be established. New research programmes and new structures are needed and should be interconnected with already existing institutions. Companies which invest in risky technologies shall contribute to a *Fund for Risk Research*. The *Independent Research Council* shall decide how to use funds to establish and develop an independent risk research and counter expertise.

4. Fostering transparency / Clearinghouse mechanisms

For questions from the interested public, a so called *Clearinghouse* shall be established, which can provide relevant information independently and comprehensively, without bureaucracy, about public funding for research and innovation. This shall enable interested members of the public to interfere at the early stages of decision-making processes with sufficient knowledge and education of the relevant subjects.

This text was elaborated at a workshop of civil society in Berlin on 22 of March 2012

(<http://www.nabu.de/themen/umweltpolitik/nachhaltigeentwicklung/14749.html>)

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