Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

‘Deep dive: social sciences and humanities (SSH) in Horizon Europe’ 2026 EUA-CDE Thematic Workshop Liège

Ilaria Poggiolini
UNIPV
SSH Chair Coimbra Group

28 January, 2021

??

1) can we assume

THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL VALUE OF THE SSHA IN RESPONDING TO SOCIETAL CHALLENGES?

YES: WHEN WE OPERATE IN SYNC WITH OTHER DISCIPLINES

1) being ***truly*** multi-disciplinary means creating environments within which researchers from different fields can identify common ground and common interests

2) It is not be enough for scientists to learn basic skills in social sciences, humanities and arts, or for SSHA to learn basic skills of algorithms….

3) We need to wove together front-edge expertise from a wide range of knowledge areas ***moving towards the goal of*** cross-fertilization of ideas

Let me TALK THE TALK of AI

- And ..WALK THE WALK

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Does the AI debate matter for the SSHA?

Speaking at the BRIDGE Summit in Abu Dhabi last December, technologists and policymakers argued that rapid AI-driven decisions can be based on information that is unverified, culturally misaligned, or unevenly distributed, underscoring the need for transparent, “interrogable” systems that can be trusted. Global disparities in data access—especially in Africa and the Global South—require localized data ecosystems, while geopolitical competition could fracture AI development into U.S., Chinese, Russian blocs and influence (competing or occasionally merging) and leaving the EU behind.

Across these debates ran a shared concern that matters deeply (see resistance towards Agentic AI)

AI must be governed by human values, cultural sensitivity, and public accountability, or else those who fail to engage in its oversight will bear part of the responsibility for its inequities and dangers.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Reclaiming or joining this conversation? Davos 19-23 January 2026

The discussions will focus on practical, solutions-oriented pathways that support resilience, competitiveness and inclusive growth, including the responsible deployment of transformative technologies such as generative AI

Equally central will ***be the human dimensions of transformation***. As industries evolve and technologies reshape work, Davos will focus on the need for governments and businesses to invest in people, building resilient workforces, supporting skills transitions and improving well-being in an era of profound change.

Leaders will also examine how prosperity can be rebuilt while advancing secure energy, nature and water systems.

https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/davos-2026-annual-meeting-what-to-expect/?utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2865876_Si-public-users-am26-content-highlights&utm_term=&emailType=Strategic%20Intelligence%20Monthly&ske=MDAxVEcwMDAwMFZCOGJYWUFU

The previous World Economic forum had already shown the centrality the human dimension

The World Economic Forum's *2025 Future of Jobs Report* highlights demand for new roles, many of which call for skills unique to humans. And, for now at least, economic growth still seems to need big, human ideas.

SSHA Doctoral education in the AI era: how to re-launch the initiative

Looking at 2028-2034 EU funding and the European Commission new piece of legislation in 2026: the European Research Area Act.

Are AI Doctoral studies in Europe bringing SSHA fully into the AI interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary conversation?

Rather than concentrating on 'taking up making use' of AI, SSHA Doctoral studies should get Involved, be able to react and gain control of new algorithms

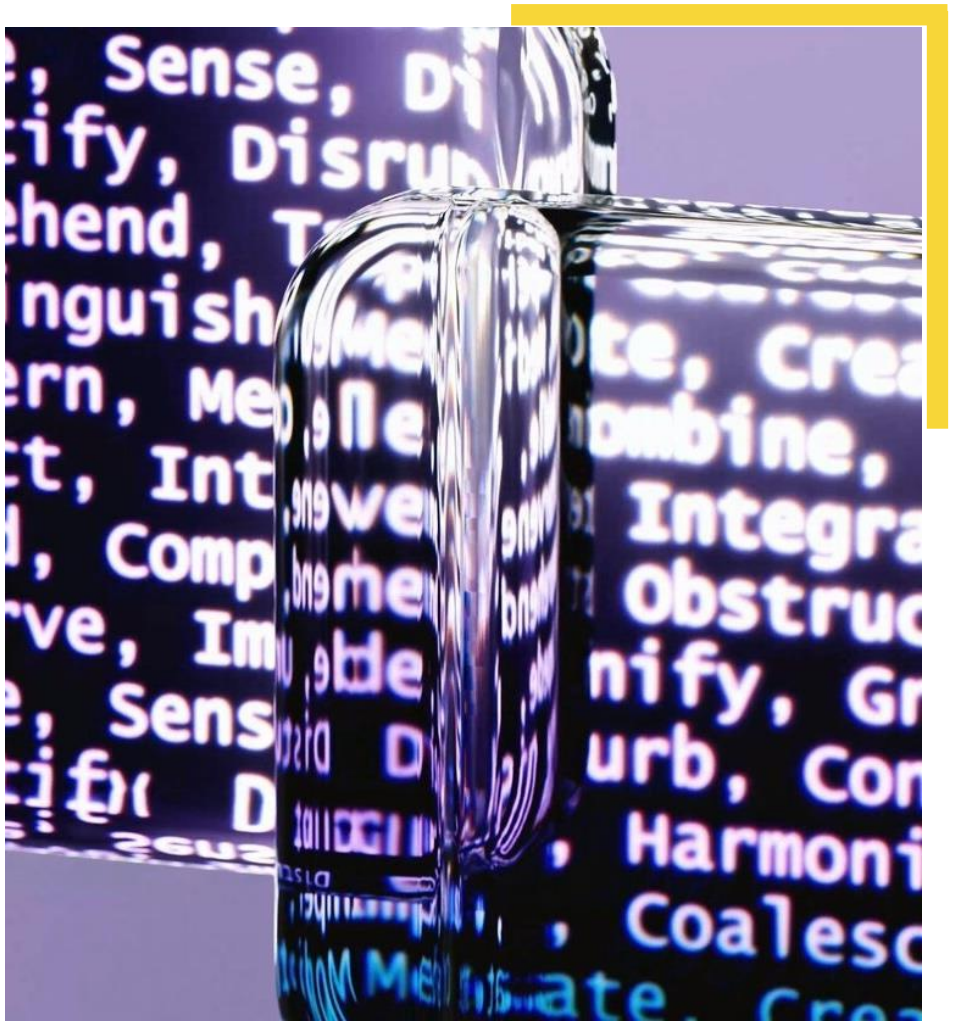
TO MAKE NEW ALGORITHMS FOR NEXT-GENERATION AI TECHNOLOGIES MEANS INCORPORATING MORE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE REAL-WORLD AND HUMAN CULTURE INTO THE AI AGENTS THEMSELVES TO PROVIDE US WITH MORE TRANSPARENCY AND UNDERSTANDING.

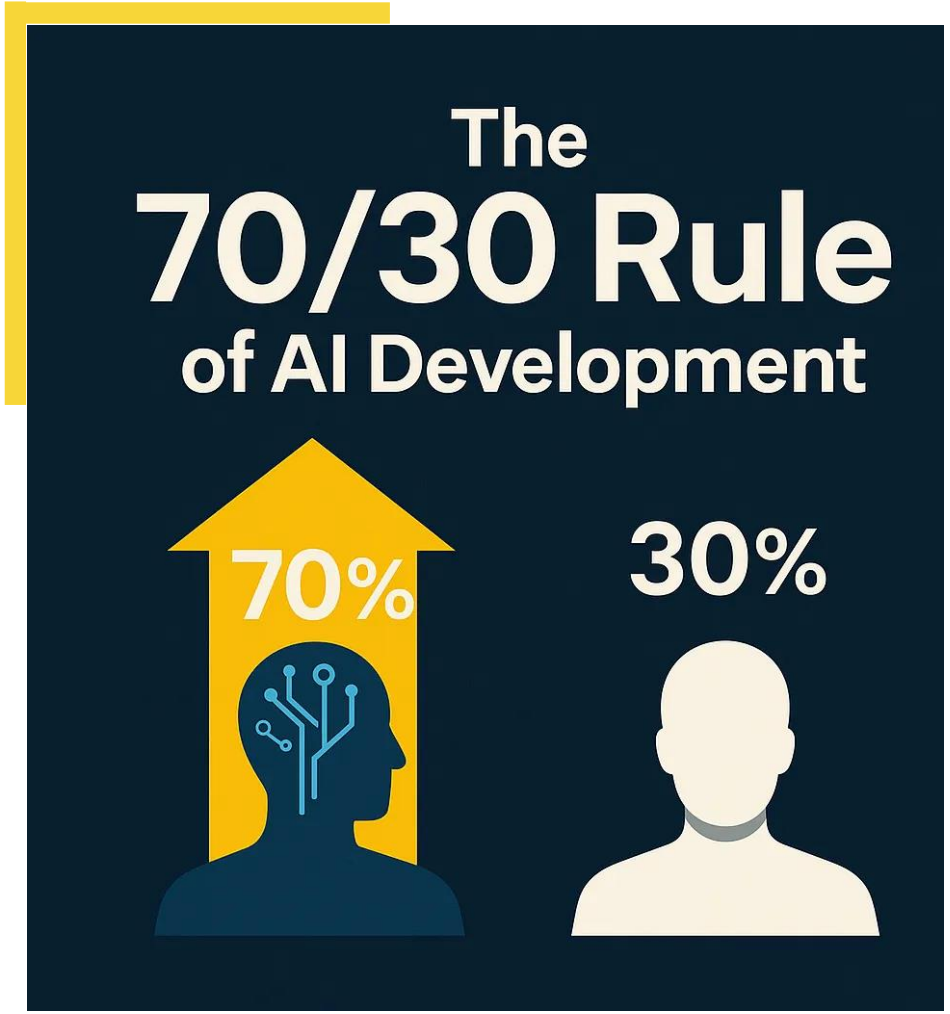
ONE CASE: AT UCL (LONDON) ***THE CENTRE FOR DOCTORAL TRAINING IN FOUNDATIONAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE*** IS SUPPORTED BY A LARGE BODY OF INDUSTRY PARTNERS TO HELP TO LAUNCH THE STUDENTS' CAREERS BOTH AS SCIENTISTS OR AI ENTREPRENEURS.

2025

Erasmus University Rotterdam trains first Generative AI model for the Social Science and Humanities

João Gonçalves (ESHCC), Sonia de Jager (ESPhil) and Nick Jelicic (Future Library Lab) have received an Academic Grant of 20 000 GPU hours from tech company NVIDIA to train the first generative large language model for the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). The team expects that this specialised model will lead to breakthroughs in the social sciences and humanities and allow us to better understand to what extent AI can mimic human reasoning on fields like philosophy, communication and psychology, among others.





***For the moment* AI thrives in patterns, humans thrive in exceptions**
Our role for the future is to be better in transfering what makes us human and work with AI as an enhancer not a competitor of humans

McKinsey's 2025 report - "A New Future of Work: The Race to Deploy AI and Raise Skills in Europe and Beyond" - found a similar pattern: AI took over 65–70% of structured, repetitive tasks across industries, but strategic and exception-based work remained 70% human-led.

Artificial Intelligence is now part of our everyday life and research practice. For (Humanities) ***AI-as-tool*** supports part of the research process.

More relevant for Humanities research and potentially more transformative from a research perspective is the use of ***AI-as-method***, meaning "the direct integration of AI technology into the analytical framework" (Oberbichler & Petz, 2025).

It can shape both the questions we ask and the answers we (might) obtain.

TOOL or METHOD or BOTH?

AI AT THE DOCTORAL LEVEL

*G GONCALVES DEC 2023

Making AI: LESS ARTIFICIAL*

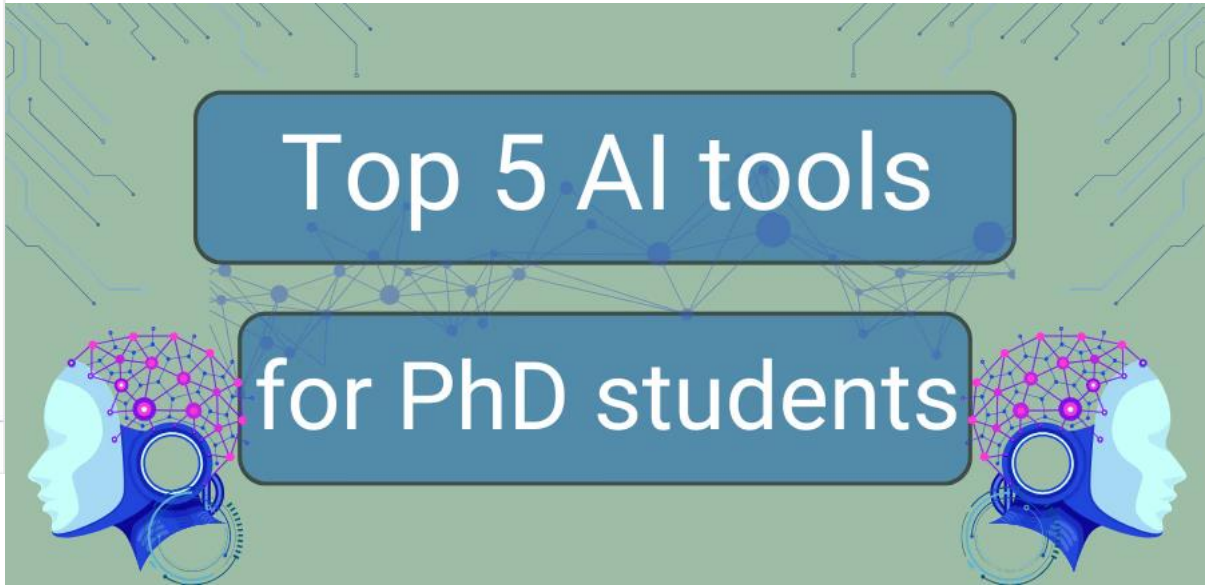
Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

AIED

what will education (including higher education) look like once AI has become fully integrated?

OR SHOULD WE ASK WHAT IS AI GOING TO LOOK LIKE ONCE ITS PURPOSE, POTENTIAL AND CAPABILITY BECOME MAINSTREAM SUBJECTS OF STUDY AND PRACTICE IN A BROAD SPECTRUM OF DISCIPLINES INCLUDING SSHA?

Akbar, M. N. (2025). Use of artificial intelligence tools by doctoral students: a mixed-methods explanatory-sequential investigation. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *49*(7), 995–1013. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2025.2515135



Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

On 9 April 2025, the Commission published the **AI Continent Action Plan**

To expand the EU's pool of AI specialists, the Action Plan outlines several initiatives. *These aim to:*

Train the next generation of AI experts based in the EU by increasing the overall offer of European bachelor's and master's degrees, and PhDs in AI but also by launching the AI Skills Academy. The Academy will offer education and training programmes on AI and in particular generative AI. It will upskill and reskill students and professionals in key sectors and develop a pilot generative AI-focused degree. This will enable top-level experts in generative AI to educate and train the AI Skills Academy's students, while advancing their own research in the field. The Academy will also pilot an AI apprenticeship programme and ***develop 'scholarship' and 'returnship'*** *schemes to attract more women to the field of AI. Incentivise European talent to stay and return to the EU by supporting the development of AI fellowship schemes. These schemes will enable highly skilled EU and non-EU PhD candidates as well as young professionals living outside the EU to work in EU-based entities.*

Attract and retain skilled AI talent from non-EU countries (including researchers) through the Talent Pool initiative, the Multipurpose Legal Gateway Offices, the Talent Partnerships and the ***Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action 'MSCA Choose Europe'. The latter action will co-fund recruitment programmes to attract excellent international AI researchers, enabling universities and research organisations to link their MSCA grants to long-term prospects within the institution including, for example, competitions for permanent positions.***

1 2 9 0 UNIVERSIDADE D COIMBRA · UNIVERSITATEA „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA" din IAȘI · FRIEDRICH-SCHILLER-UNIVERSITÄT JENA · UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA · Université de Poitiers · VNiVERSiDAD D SALAMANCA · TURUN YLIOPISTO

EU AI in Science strategy Oct 2025

A new strategy to advance the responsible and strategic integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies into the European research and innovation landscape:

→ support the uptake of AI

across all disciplines

→ address major societal

challenges

→ accelerate discoveries

and breakthroughs

→ boost innovation, jobs

and growth

Building on Europe's strengths in collaborative research and scientific excellence,

the strategy will reinforce Europe's technological leadership and competitiveness.

KEY ACTIONS: + ***MORE SSHA IN THESE ACTIONS!!***

RAISE - Resource for AI Science in Europe
A virtual European institute to pool and coordinate AI resources, support scientists
and attract top talent from Europe and beyond.
EU Approach to Safe & Trustworthy
AI in Science
Excellence
& Talent
Compute
RAISE
Research
Funding Data
Collaboration & Coordination

Mustafa Suleyman

Dec 2025

Co-founder of DeepMind: FEAR IS HEALTHY (BUT SO IS ACTION)

Humanistic approach to AI:

THE NEXT LEVEL: THE PURSUIT OF human interests & control

STAKEHOLDERS AS WELL AS EDUCATORS from all over the world have a central role to play in setting global standards and norms for the governance of AI

WE STILL HAVE AN OPEN INTERNET TODAY BUT OPEN-AI DID NOT STAY OPEN

The early internet embodied the kind of democratic ethos we can look to today for guidance.

Deliberation between companies such as Netscape, the U.S. government, and technologists such as Tim Berners-Lee gave rise to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), which developed open web standards grounded in freedom of expression, multi-stakeholder engagement, and access to information.

Scholars like Brian Aldiss believe the earliest sci-fi novel was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)Guillermo del Toro has argued recently that 'monsters are reassuring in their inability to be no other than .. monsters!

IN CONCLUSION:

UTOPIA OR DYSTOPIA

VISIONS VERSUS CONCERNS?