Knowledge beyond frontiers

Colin Crouch argues that withdrawal from Europe's research inner circle will be a net loss

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Knowledge knows no national boundaries, but is a seamless web. For a good illustration we need look no further than the names of the scientists who made such major contributions to the development of electricity that their names have been used for various measures of it: Watt (British), Ampère (French), Ohm (German), Volta (Italian). National science communities did not produce national kinds of electricity. There are no national periodic tables in chemistry; Carl Linnaeus did not produce a classification of plant species for Swedes alone.

The same is only slightly less true of the social sciences. Although some social science research concentrates on phenomena within individual nation states, a good deal of it is comparative. But even single-country studies draw on theories and concepts developed by researchers from a diversity of national backgrounds and capable, with suitable adjustment for context, to be applied more generally.

National traditions might seem to be stronger in the humanities, where specificity of cultural contexts looms larger, and research often concentrates on those contexts in historical and literary study. But this does not mean that only scholars from a particular culture can study it effectively. This is pre-eminently the case with the study of ancient societies, but it is not limited to that. To take just one of a thousand examples, the most important biography of Gustav Mahler was by a Frenchman, Henry-Louis de la Grange, the English translation of his four-volume work by Oxford University Press having been highly successful.

Even cultural production itself is not always national, and the joining of different traditions can prove as successful as it is in the natural sciences. Look no further than *Le nozze di Figaro:* French play, set in Spain; Austro-German composer, Italian librettist.

International research, national perspectives

Despite all this, research in the natural and social sciences and in the humanities, and cultural production, depend heavily on national funding bodies or on private foundations that usually have a clear national base. Naturally, the suppliers of funds, especially public ones, want reassurance that some national objective – such as economic productivity, national cultural life, even tourism – will be aided by the fruits of academic research and cultural creativity. But if they mean this in the sense of specifically or exclusively national objectives, then they are using the same erroneous mind-set that treats the economy in general as a global race, implying a zero-sum game between national economies.

One of the main attractions of a capitalist economy is that it can be a positive sum: everyone can gain from trade, the growing prosperity of any one society being a source of opportunities for the prosperity of others. Of course, individual economies can do better or worse, and government action to support infrastructure or provide skilled workforces can help firms based in the countries concerned to thrive. If such support is lacking, or poorly designed, firms will go under. Firms compete; governments (and other non-market institutions like foundations) do not. They can be the source of assistance for inter-firm competition, but their actions are likely to enrich the general environment, from which not only national firms benefit. The situation is very different when governments help national firms through subsidies and other forms of protection. These actions are seriously zero-sum, probably in the end negative-sum. That is why international trade agreements ban protectionist measures, but wisely leave measures to improve infrastructure, including human infrastructure, alone.

Support for research and scholarship are examples of this kind of infrastructure spending, not of protectionism. Their contribution can help national firms and other institutions, but cannot be 'trapped' at the national level. And this is to everyone's eventual benefit.

I have here used arguments narrowly linked to economic outcomes, but the same ones work if you look more generally at the contributions made to less easily measurable cultural infrastructure. For example, it should not be a problem for the British government if some German and American scholars are found taking advantage of the British School at Rome. If everyone contributes to facilities of this kind, everyone gains. British scholars will be found in similar US and German institutions. There is no need to count specific national costs and benefits.

The only exception comes when the government of a particular country fails to contribute something to the general pot, while still expecting their academics to dip their spoons into the soup made by others. That justifies retaliatory action.

Barring such exceptions, there are often greater gains to be had from facilitating interaction among scholars from different national backgrounds than from intensifying it within a country. Bringing persons or things from different origins together is at the heart of innovation, as studies of entrepreneurship have long testified. California does not contain so many leading research institutes because the state's high-school system is so strong – far from it. Those institutes have worked hard to bring talent together from around the world, enabling researchers with American, European, Indian, Brazilian, Chinese and many other backgrounds to bring their different perspectives to shared puzzles.

Access to European funding post-Brexit

This is the perspective through which the impact on British researchers and scholars of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union – and therefore from its research funding system – should be viewed. There is of course a very important straightforward argument to be made about quantities of funds, and doubts whether promises by the UK government to make good any deficits could be expected to last once the furore over Brexit had died down. But at a deeper level, the issue concerns the value-added of the contacts and collaborations that are facilitated by working with researchers from other countries on EU-funded projects.

Of course, British scholars work with American, French, Japanese, Indian and many other partners through a mass of networks and funding systems that are nothing to do with the EU. However, the EU's arrangements form a particularly dense network, where funding rules give us very strong incentives to extend those ranges of contacts beyond our usual comfort zones. Some years ago I took over the task of preparing a proposal to the EU's Framework Programme 7 (FP7) on behalf of a cross-national group of researchers. The group was almost entirely north-west European. I moved east and south, finding appropriate colleagues in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Spain. This not only helped secure the funding, it gave us all new insights, perspectives and colleagues.

The usual riposte is made to this by the advocates of the UK's reduction of its relationships with people in the rest of Europe (which is what Brexit means): 'You can now find colleagues throughout the whole world, instead of being limited to Europe!' But these opportunities have always been there. EU membership has not inhibited them, and withdrawal from it will produce no increase in them, unless the government has serious plans to realise its dreams of an 'Anglosphere' by funding creation of a research community of specifically Anglophone countries. Research collaborations are no more zero-sum than economic innovation. Working with European colleagues would only crowd out opportunities for working with colleagues around the rest of the world if the supply of international research funding resources outstripped demand for them. This is not the case.

The withdrawal of British scholars from the inner circle of European research networks and funding opportunities simply removes a particularly rich source of collaboration opportunities without replacing them with anything else. This is a net loss.

As I noted above: science is global, while its funding is often national. This discontinuity does not destroy the cross-national collaboration that enriches research and scholarship, but it does not help it. In that context, the unique world-regional institutions that comprise the EU represent a major step to bridging the gap. The FP7 research group that I led also included a team from Canada. The EU's research funding does not try to seal Europeans off from the rest of the world; rather, it encourages external partnerships of this kind as part of its contribution to the construction of a truly global research community. But such external partners – who will soon include the British – are in an outside track, unable to bid for funds or take the lead in projects themselves. The citizens of EU member states represent an internal community, tied to each other through many bonds. These enable their joint activities to be particularly strong, but able and willing to reach out with thinner bonds to others.

In her speech to the 2016 Conservative Party conference, the prime minister, Theresa May, famously attacked those who aspired to be 'citizens of the world'. They were, she said, citizens of nowhere. Criticism of her remarks concentrated on their resemblance to Stalin's notorious 'rootless cosmopolitans', a term used mainly to stigmatise Jews. But the prime minister's comments deserved closer attention. It was odd that, in a speech devoted to attacking supporters of the UK's membership of the EU, it was aspiring 'global' citizens she criticised, not European ones. This was especially odd given that she was launching the concept of 'Global Britain' to replace the idea of the UK as an EU member. Perhaps the reason was that the EU *does* constitute, albeit weakly, a form of

citizenship for the citizens of its member states. As such, Europeans have rights and obligations in relationship to each other that are not shared by the residents of third countries. They contribute to common funds, accept the movement of persons, goods and services from each other, accept regulations jointly made with each other. In return they receive help with infrastructure projects, can live and work in each other's countries easily, and enjoy various opportunities for jointly funded cultural and scientific activities. It is a unique cross-national community, providing a rich structure of networks that help bridge that gap between the nations from which we come and the global humanity to which we aspire to contribute. For researchers and scholars the richness and unique quality are particularly clear. Once Brexit comes, we in Britain will be outside it. Nothing will replace it.

Interdisciplinary collaborative research in British universities post-Brexit

Simon Goldhill argues that the links with European research institutions and funding must be maintained

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When I speak in America and elsewhere about the benefits of interdisciplinary collaborative work in the humanities and social sciences, it gives me a certain frisson when I declare that Europe is currently at least 20 years ahead in research in this area. The reason for this has been, simply enough, the funding models put in place over recent decades.

The first example I give is from personal experience, a project that I have been running for the last five years, which is called 'The Bible and Antiquity in Nineteenth-Century Culture'. My team has been investigating the two most important paradigms of the past for Victorian society and how they interrelate in 19th-century thinking: namely the past of classical antiquity, and the past of the biblical tradition. One icon of such thinking is Matthew Arnold's celebrated and hugely influential opposition of Hebraism and Hellenism as ways of understanding contemporary culture. But the interconnections of Greece and Rome and the Bible go deeply into almost all aspects of Victorian cultural analysis and self-understanding. And it is a regrettable irony of modern disciplinary formation that these two areas of scholarly understanding are the fields where most modern scholars of Victorian culture are least well trained, both in familiarity with Greek, Latin or the literature and history of antiquity, and in familiarity with biblical narratives and, as importantly, the theological arguments that underpin their understanding.

The project has five professors working on it, but has also been able to hire six postdoctoral fellows each for five years. The team includes art historians, classical scholars, historians, theologians, literary scholars, philologists. The work is integrally interdisciplinary, and