

EUROPEAN FUTURES

The Politics and Practice of Research Policies in the European Union

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decades, research policies have gained an increasing importance in the overall strategy of the European Union. Early programmes date back to the late 1970s, but in recent years the promotion and funding of scientific research have become a central field of European governance within the wider policy drive towards the making of a 'knowledge-economy' in Europe. These developments are not only relevant to better understanding the process of European integration, but they also constitute an important chapter in the history of modern science. Today, EU framework programmes, the main instrument for research support at the European level, are arguably the biggest research funding scheme in the world. Moreover, European policies have introduced innovative practices of scientific collaboration and a new culture of research, which has contributed to key changes in the social and organisational dimension of science.

This sociological work examines these issues at two interrelated levels of analysis. First, it explores the emergence and development of Community research policies, in the changing political, cultural and economic context from the 1970s to the present, with a focus on the main narratives that have sustained and legitimised policy choices. Particular attention is paid to the life sciences and biotechnology as a research area where important issues of European governance and political culture emerged and were negotiated. Second, it aims to gain an understanding of the ways in which policy strategies have worked out in the actual practice of scientific cooperation. To do so, the second part of the thesis discusses the results of a micro-sociological study of two transnational networks in stem cell research, funded by the European Union under the Sixth Framework Programme (2002-2006).

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