The International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences and the UNESCO/Management of Social Transformations programme convened a meeting in Mação, Portugal, with coordinators of several international Humanities programmes, to discuss which should be the priorities of the Humanities in face of the current global challenges, and which specific contributions/concerns of the Humanities should be taken into particular consideration by UNESCO programmes.

The following declaration was adopted by the participants as the outcome of their discussions. These recommendations reflect the suggestions and priorities of the participants in the CIPSH-UNESCO meeting convened at the Museum of Prehistoric Art of Mação, Portugal, on March 7, 2019.

Declaration of Mação, Portugal – 7.03.2019

Assessing societal priorities addressed by the Humanities:
What it means to be human and what humans mean

Following the World Humanities Conference and within the framework agreement of co-operation between UNESCO and CIPSH, several projects have been initiated, including the establishment of several UNESCO and CIPSH academic chairs and the preparation of a World Humanities report and of a Global History of Humanity.

Taking into consideration the outcome document of the World Humanities Conference and the various projects that emerged from it, concerning priorities and strategies for new possible programmes focused on the Humanities, to establish in a changing and globalizing world, we call upon UNESCO, CIPSH, our organisations and other higher education, governmental and non-governmental entities, to consider the following:

1. The Humanities and Social Sciences make scientific inquiries into the human condition in the present and in the past by addressing humans as social, decision making, contemplative, self-reflecting and meaning seeking agents. To study the human condition, historically as in the present, means to inquire into the circumstances conditioning and conditioned by uniquely decision making, meaning seeking and culture building agents.

2. This is the defining mission of the Humanities, although done often in collaboration with other disciplines, such as medical research, environmental engineering, computer science, architecture, etc.

3. The diverse knowledge of vital import to all, gained and articulated by the Humanities, transcending both disciplinary and cultural borders, is possible only through the application of research and educational methods elaborated in the human sciences.

4. Such knowledge has or should have implications for human action; the Humanities provide the platform, lever and advocacy necessary for the knowledge and understanding elicited by the Humanities to be translated into programs for the benefit and improvement of the human condition, as with the International Year of Global Understanding.

5. Research in the Humanities is far from complete and indeed the agenda is ever expanding in dynamic response to world-historical change, technological advancement, and alterations in our natural environment. Perennial and enduring questions, such as what it means to be human, illuminate the serious challenges facing us, threatening the survival of human civilization, in our time and continuing into the future. The grand challenges include climate change, the implications of global, digital interconnectivity, advanced AI and robotics, unprecedented human migration and displacement, and the economics of the so called fourth industrial revolution on the character of work and human vocation.

6. These grand challenges cannot be solved without new knowledge based on deep cooperation between traditional and new approaches of the Humanities, and without the effective deployment of the insights elicited by the investigation of scholars in the Humanities. Coming to terms with those challenges, as identified in the World Humanities Conference, is impossible without integrated knowledge and understanding. Some specific examples of necessary research include: mechanisms behind norm change; investigations into what fosters self-restraint and postponement of the fulfilment of desires in a time of affluence; the phenomena of knowledge resistance and behavioural inertia.

7. In order for this multi-faceted work to effectively contribute in a valuable way, a viable approach is to implement a large number of focused projects, through CIPSH and UNESCO networks. CIPSH should inspire and oversee, through its community of constituent organizations, the inauguration of this network of innovative and collaborative humanities knowledge builders.

8. Within this structure the role of the university and the humanities departments within cannot be overlooked. Indeed, universities through these initiatives would be encouraged to refocus their educational programs in the humanities to strengthen their importance within universities often driven by narrowly focused STEM priorities.
    a. Rethink the role of the university in a world that is increasingly driven both by knowledge, information, ideas, and technology, and by an expanding resistance to knowledge.
    b. To reconsider the place of the Humanities in the processes of delivering knowledge, information, ideas and value judgments.

     c. A specific implication of the digital age is that the new knowledge economy is becoming increasingly global. Consequently, the networks of teaching and research must be so as well. This adjustment will include the expectation that all students should study certain generic subjects irrespective of their primary interests to understand the world and its changing drivers (Philosophy), the imaginative and realistic representation of human experiences, training students to understand, analyze and differentiate (Literature), the rational sense of time and space (History), the aesthetic judgment, including ethical judgment (Art), the understanding of cross-cultural human characteristics from the remote past (Archaeology), the close reading and textual analysis, the use of quantitative methods and the Ethics in an age of scientific and technological innovation.

9. The development and expansion of a communicative discourse with citizens and policymakers through organized dialogues across disciplines with scholars, professionals and policy makers is a priority. This dialogue is meant to advance knowledge and to restore trust in real knowledge and respect for the need of intellectual training.

10. Rather than undertaking a singular program, which would risk atrophy and be unable to include the breadth of vital concerns, we recommend the encouragement of a multiplicity of inter-related and networked projects within the framework of CIPSH, that can each retain their individual character while sharing diverse strengths to the common goal of reinvigorating the humanities in the midst of the grand challenges of the 21st century, also reinforcing the Humanities scope within existing UNESCO programmes.

11. There is much work to be done within the context of the university, namely considering the need for the integration of Humanities and Sciences transversal components in curricula at all degrees of Education, but we wish to engage the involvement of other types of institutions as well, especially those with different modes of access to public discourse capable of encouraging a larger and more inclusive appreciation for fundamental work in the humanities.

12. Addressing societal challenges, we also recommend fostering the networking of ongoing experiences of Humanities implication into transformative and sustainable processes, to be recognised within the framework of UNESCO and in the context of territories with Humanistic shared approaches, which engage different actors in society, expressed through adherence and good practices on a number of issues (health, migrations, literary narratives, environmental protection, sustainable development goals, education, etc.).