

The European Research Council

THOMAS KÖNIG

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'This is so far the most thoroughly researched investigation on how the ERC came into existence and of the first seven years of its institutional life. The analysis of the different layers of what the author calls the ERC aura and its inevitable routinization – the EU formalized structures, the personalities involved, initial and current policy ambitions and the accomplishments of the ERC for science in Europe – opens a wide conceptual space to re-think the relationship between science and policy.'

Helga Nowotny, Former President of the European Research Council

'Drawing on his unique access to the ERC's inner workings, as a former adviser to its president, Thomas König has produced a definitive account of its first decade, packed with revealing insights into the political and budgetary battles that were fought along the way. Thoughtful, engaging, and rich in both data and anecdotes, it's a book that will be of interest to scientists, policymakers, funders, and anyone seeking to understand the future of global research.'

James Wilsdon, University of Sheffield

Founded in 2007 to fund basic research, the European Research Council (ERC) has become the most revered instrument in European science policy and one of the world's most important focal points for the funding of scientific research. Its grants are much sought-after by researchers and scholars and it is widely considered to have had a major impact on research communities and institutions across Europe. How did this remarkable organization, the creation of which was widely regarded as a 'miracle', come into being, what has it achieved and how is it likely to adapt in the face of current and future challenges?

This book is the first comprehensive history of the creation and development of the ERC. Drawing on first-hand knowledge, Thomas König gives a detailed account of how a group of strong-minded European scientists succeeded in creating the ERC by pushing for a single goal: more money for scientific research with fewer strings attached. But he also shows how this campaign would have failed had it not been taken up by skilful officials of the European Commission, who recognized the ERC as a way to gain more influence in shaping European science policy. Once established, the ERC developed a carefully crafted self-image that emphasized its reliance on peer review and its differences from all other EU research programmes.

In addition to analysing the creation and development of the ERC, this book critically examines its achievements and its claims. It also explores the implications of the rise of the ERC and the challenges and threats that it faces today, engaging with broader questions concerning the relationship of politics, science, and money at the beginning of the 21st century. It will be essential reading for all scholars and students of science policy, for decision-makers and administrators across Europe, and for researchers and academics looking to engage with and understand the ERC.

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 ebook available



Best Science Books of 2015, *Financial Times*

The Cunning of Uncertainty

HELGA NOWOTNY

Swiss Federal Institute of Technology

'Informed, eloquent and compelling.'

The Times Higher Education

'Nowotny deserves high praise for bringing a discussion of the uncertainty around uncertainty into the public arena. She does so with remarkable aplomb given the subject's slipperiness.'

Nature

Uncertainty is interwoven into human existence. It is a powerful incentive in the search for knowledge and an inherent component of scientific research. We have developed many ways of coping with uncertainty – we make promises, manage risks and make predictions. But the future is inherently uncertain, and the mist that shrouds our path is an inherent part of our journey. The key question for us today is whether our societies can face up to uncertainty, learn to embrace it and become more open towards a constantly evolving future.

Helga Nowotny shows how research can thrive on the cusp of uncertainty. Science continues to transform uncertainties into certainties but this certainty always remains provisional. Uncertainty is never completely static – it is constantly evolving. It encompasses geological timescales and, at the level of human experience, split-second changes as cells divide. It appears at unexpected moments, it shuns the straight line, takes the oblique route and sometimes the unexpected shortcut – such is the cunning of uncertainty. The more we acknowledge the cunning of uncertainty, the less threatened we feel by it. We accept that any scientific inquiry must produce results that are provisional and uncertain. This message is vital for politicians and policy makers: do not be tempted by small, short-term, controllable gains to the exclusion of uncertain, high-gain opportunities.

The Cunning of Uncertainty is a must-read for students and scholars in all disciplines, politicians, policy makers and anyone concerned with the fundamental role of knowledge and science in our societies today.

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