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Community Research

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PATHFINDER initiative on

***“What it means
to be human”***

Shamila NAIR-BEDOUELLE

2005





Overall objectives

- This initiative aims to investigate why humans are different:
 - What features make our cognitive abilities unique?
 - What are the origins of these features?
- Why this question?:
 - Today, a more integrated understanding of the human mind/brain and its specific features should open up new scientific opportunities
 - It provides a way to bring together cognitive sciences and related disciplinary areas that can all contribute to explore the opportunities at the interface





Scientific objectives

- Projects may have different individual objectives. However, they must address “what features make human cognitive abilities unique, and what are the origins of these features?”
- focus on higher cognitive faculties, (thinking, reasoning, using language) and individual cognitive development (in the context of social and cultural factors)
- take a comparative and evolutionary perspective
- be highly interdisciplinary
- In all cases however, the research must address the key question: **why are humans different?**



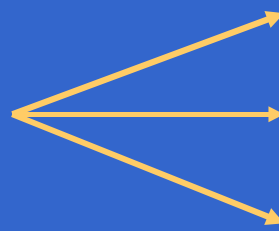


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Results

24 submissions



2 CAs

1 SSA

21 STREPs / 8 funded

~13.5 Mio. €

SSA : ineligible

2 CA's: not retained for funding

STREPS Scientific projects:

- 9 Cognitive science
- 7 Neuroscience
- 3 Anthropology
- 2 Linguistics





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Examples of projects and scientific areas involved

ABSTRACT:

The formation and use of abstract concepts by humans. Research will focus on how abstract concepts in different languages and cultures are represented in the mind/brain and how they are learnt during childhood.

ChLaSc:

What makes us smart? Focussing on structural complexity in language acquisition and other cognitive systems e.g.natural numbers.

Paul Broca II:

Neural and genetic features that distinguish Homo sapiens; human brain asymmetry : link to language and genes





Conclusions

- Successful second call, transdisciplinary integrative projects
- Already have a critical mass of projects from the previous 2 calls
- Therefore : Would like to have a CA or CAs to coordinate and bring together people in areas of ongoing research
- Next call: only CAs and SSAs



- Commission set up an Expert Group to examine new scientific opportunities and assess the potential for a concerted research program in this area (Brochures)

