

Press Release: Transforming European Research and Innovation Ecosystems with ERA Hubs

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The European Research Area (ERA) is set to undergo a transformative shift with the introduction of ERA Hubs, a pioneering policy concept designed to connect and enhance place-based research and innovation ecosystems across Europe. This initiative aims to foster collaboration, knowledge transfer, and talent circulation among diverse regions, sectors, and disciplines within the ERA. By aligning with the EU's strategic priorities, such as the green and digital transitions, investment in skills and education, support for innovative businesses, and robust industrial policy development, ERA Hubs are poised to play a pivotal role in Europe's innovation landscape.

Strategic Alignment and Key Objectives

ERA Hubs are strategically positioned to inspire, align with, and contribute to the EU's core strategic initiatives, including the European Green Deal, the Digital Europe Programme, and the European Skills Agenda. These hubs will serve as catalysts for regional and sectoral innovation, driving progress towards sustainability and digital transformation.

In the context of the green transition, ERA Hubs will facilitate the development and deployment of green technologies by linking research institutions with industry players and policymakers. For the digital transition, these hubs will act as incubators for digital innovation, supporting startups and SMEs with the resources and expertise needed to develop and implement cutting-edge digital solutions.

Addressing Initial Challenges

As the ERA Hub concept is still in its developmental and testing phases, it faces several acknowledged limitations. Two EU-funded projects, COOPERATE and ERA_FABRIC, are actively working to address these challenges. Key areas of focus include:

1. Defining ERA Hubs: Establishing a clear definition and criteria for what constitutes an ERA Hub, differentiating it from existing initiatives and networks.
2. Diverse Stakeholder Participation: Ensuring balanced representation and participation of different R&I stakeholders to promote inclusiveness.

3. Contextual Adaptation: Developing a comprehensive definition that considers varying European contexts and the existing innovation gap among regions.
4. Avoiding Duplication: Preventing overlap of efforts and resources between ERA Hubs and other R&I policy measures, actors, and intermediaries.
5. Policy Integration: Recognizing the relationship between ERA Hubs and other EU policies regarding infrastructure, education, entrepreneurship, and industry.
6. Impact Measurement: Creating a common framework and indicators for measuring and evaluating the impact and added value of ERA Hubs.
7. Sustainability and Scalability: Addressing long-term sustainability, funding requirements, and support mechanisms.

Despite these challenges, ongoing efforts through consultation, co-creation, and experimentation are showing promising preliminary results. The ERA Hub concept is emerging as a viable means to better align policies and strategies at different levels within the ERA, fostering innovation across regions and sectors.

Enhancing Stakeholder Participation

To maximize the effectiveness of ERA Hubs, it is essential to foster diverse and inclusive stakeholder participation. Key strategies include:

- Inclusive Governance: Implementing governance models that represent a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including academia, industry, government, and civil society. Prioritizing the inclusion of underrepresented groups to ensure diverse perspectives.
- Cross-Sectoral Collaboration: Creating platforms within ERA Hubs to promote collaborations and idea exchanges across different sectors and disciplines, fostering boundary-spanning innovation.
- Targeted Outreach: Deploying outreach programs aimed at engaging underrepresented communities in research and innovation through mentorship, collaborative projects, and networking events.
- Flexible Participation: Ensuring adaptable participation methods that allow various stakeholders, especially smaller entities like startups and SMEs, to contribute meaningfully.
- Interdisciplinary Initiatives: Supporting interdisciplinary research within ERA Hubs by combining social sciences and humanities with STEM fields to tackle complex societal issues.

Key Characteristics of ERA Hubs

ERA Hubs are envisioned as mission-focused, multi-stakeholder collaborative R&I ecosystems based in specific territories. They aim to develop better governance and promote increased competitiveness to address common societal challenges more efficiently. The key characteristics of an ERA Hub include:

- Directionality: Mobilizing public and private stakeholders around shared objectives.
- Multi-Level Governance: Facilitating multi-level interventions, compositions, and memberships.
- Horizontal Integration: Creating formal bridges to other knowledge ecosystems, regardless of regional or national borders.
- Holistic Approach: Supporting co-creation and joint ownership of goals and processes, promoting systemic change in both private and public institutions.

A well-developed ERA Hub will:

- Promote high-quality research contributing to the global body of knowledge.
- Develop and educate future talent pools by providing opportunities for learning, training, and development.
- Facilitate knowledge transfer and idea exchange through networking, dissemination, and collaboration opportunities.
- Ensure the availability, visibility, and access to relevant funding options to support the growth and development of key sectors.
- Promote collaboration by bringing together researchers, innovators, industry representatives, policymakers, and other stakeholders from different regions and sectors.
- Develop effective governance systems for robust partnerships between quadruple helix stakeholders (academia, industry, government, civil society) and the fifth helix (natural environment defenders).
- Drive groundbreaking innovation and valorization of ideas, leading to new technologies, products, and services.

Pilot Programs and Methodologies

During its first year, ERA_FABRIC has analyzed 26 R&I ecosystems across Europe, focusing on Bio-Based Circular Economy, Clean Renewable Energy, and Sustainable Manufacturing. Fifteen

cases were selected for further analysis, and six were studied in-depth for their specific characteristics.

COOPERATE proposes an ERA Hub Framework to foster interregional collaboration within the ERA. This framework includes a Co-Design Task Force, a Toolbox and Playbook for guidance, and a Platform with compliance criteria to support ERA Hub development. Two piloting phases will test the model in different ecosystems, with the first phase already launched in the Czech Republic, Netherlands, and Denmark.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

To optimize the synergy between EU, national, and regional ecosystems, it is crucial to make policy frameworks more compatible and interoperable. Reinforcing network connections among ecosystem actors based on smart specialization and other strategic considerations will stimulate excellence and drive the convergence process of European territories.

Conclusion and Call to Action

The ERA Hub concept holds transformative potential for Europe's research and innovation ecosystem. By fostering unprecedented levels of collaboration, knowledge exchange, and strategic alignment, ERA Hubs are poised to play a crucial role in driving the EU's innovation agenda forward. These hubs represent more than just a new initiative; they are integral to a cohesive strategy that brings together diverse stakeholders to address Europe's most pressing challenges.

We invite all stakeholders to engage with and support the development of ERA Hubs. Together, we can build a more connected, innovative, and resilient Europe, where collaborative research and innovation are at the heart of our shared prosperity and progress.

About ERA Hub

ERA Hub is an EU initiative aimed at enhancing research and innovation ecosystems by fostering collaboration, knowledge transfer, and talent circulation across Europe. It aligns with the EU's strategic priorities and seeks to promote sustainable and inclusive growth through innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships.