

Press Release: ERA_FABRIC Highlights Policy Innovation at RSA Annual Conference 2025

Porto, May 2025

The ERA_FABRIC project, funded under Horizon Europe, made a strong contribution to the 2025 RSA Annual Conference in Porto with a dedicated session focused on ERA Hubs as next-generation innovation infrastructures. Three presentations from project partners highlighted the conceptual, diagnostic, and operational progress of the initiative, positioning ERA Hubs as adaptable governance frameworks for place-based research and innovation (R&I) ecosystems across Europe.

This session marked a mid-project milestone, showcasing how ERA_FABRIC is translating theoretical frameworks into actionable policy instruments and validating the ERA Hub model through stakeholder engagement, system diagnostics, and case-based learning.

From Theory to Practice: Mapping Policy Impact through Collective Intelligence

Francesco Molinari (Policy Design Lab) introduced the session with a theoretical lens on policy learning and evaluation. By applying Theory of Change (ToC) and Contribution Analysis, ERA_FABRIC is using collective intelligence to test and refine the logic behind ERA Hubs.

“It’s not about designing the perfect model. It’s about co-creating adaptive frameworks based on what works — and for whom,” said Molinari.

This method is embedded into project workshops and surveys, allowing stakeholders to question assumptions and co-develop impact pathways.

Diagnostic Tools: Assessing Readiness for ERA Hubs

Krzysztof Mieszkowski (Warsaw University of Technology) presented a newly developed composite diagnostic index for assessing how regional ecosystems align with the “ideal-type” ERA Hub. Using Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the team produced an evidence-based framework to identify gaps in:

- Multi-level governance
- Access to R&I infrastructure
- Co-creation capacity
- Environmental sustainability integration

Regions such as Emilia-Romagna and Lower Austria scored highly on coordination and governance, while Jadranska Hrvatska and Nord-Vest showed potential but needed stronger infrastructure and horizontal integration.

This tool not only ranks regional performance but provides a roadmap for transformation through targeted policy support and institutional strengthening.

Territorial Evidence: ERA Hubs in Action

Lorenzo Dorato (ART-ER) concluded the session with an analysis of 15 territorial innovation ecosystems across Europe. These were assessed on their alignment with ERA Hub characteristics such as mission-orientation, cross-sectoral engagement, and place-based co-creation.

Case studies included:

- ForestWISE (Norte, PT) – An innovation cluster on forest resilience and risk management.
- ECOSISTER (Emilia-Romagna, IT) – A public-private initiative advancing the circular economy through systemic R&I.
- S3 Network in Lower Austria – A platform integrating SMEs, academia, and government on regional smart specialisation priorities.

Findings show that while no single model fits all, the ERA Hub logic can be adapted across institutional, geographic, and thematic settings.

From Conference to Policy Arena

The RSA conference served as a live testing ground for ERA_FABRIC's tools and concepts. With the ERA policy reform process advancing in Brussels, the project's contribution is timely.

ERA_FABRIC is actively demonstrating that effective innovation governance requires not only funding and strategy, but the right enabling structures: trust, access, inclusiveness, and shared purpose.

The feedback and engagement in Porto reinforce that ERA Hubs are more than a model — they are a co-owned process, evolving with regional realities and European ambitions.



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Key Messages and Policy Implications

- ERA Hubs offer a scalable solution for integrating fragmented innovation ecosystems.
- Evidence-based diagnostics and stakeholder co-creation are crucial for regional transformation.
- Adaptability and contextualisation must guide future ERA policy reforms.
- Continued peer-learning and pilot validation are needed to transition from concept to system-level change.

About ERA FABRIC

ERA_FABRIC is a Horizon Europe-funded project focused on developing and piloting the ERA Hub model — a flexible framework to support territorial innovation ecosystems. The project supports capacity-building, governance transformation, and stakeholder co-creation across 9 European regions.

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