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ERA_FABRIC Business Plan and Roadmap

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Executive summary

The effectiveness of European research and innovation policy depends not solely on excellence, but on system-level coordination. The ERA_FABRIC project addresses a central governance challenge: how can the European Research Area evolve from a policy ambition into an operationally coherent system? The concept of ERA Hubs, introduced in the 2020 Communication on the new ERA, offered one potential answer: establish coordination functions embedded within regional ecosystems that align actors, policies, and investments across governance levels.

This deliverable provides a comprehensive business plan and roadmap for the institutionalisation and sustainability of ERA Hubs, grounded in extensive systems analysis, stakeholder engagement, and policy testing. Drawing from engineering and public policy principles, it reframes ERA Hubs not as discrete entities but as a functional layer in Europe's multi-level governance architecture, capable of enabling alignment, orchestration, and adaptive delivery across fragmented R&I ecosystems.

Analytical framework and core arguments

1. Persistent structural misalignment requires systemic coordination functions

The EU R&I landscape continues to exhibit misalignments between funding instruments, institutional roles, and territorial capabilities. ERA Hubs respond to this by providing a structured coordination interface that transforms distributed assets into coherent, collective outcomes.

2. Policy value emerges through institutional integration, not nomenclature

Although "ERA Hubs" were not retained as a discrete action in the 2025–2027 ERA Policy Agenda, the functions they represent, territorial coordination, policy alignment, stakeholder brokerage, remain essential. This deliverable demonstrates how such functions can be implemented without creating new structures, but rather by activating and aligning existing ones.

3. Sustainability is achieved through functional necessity

A sustainable coordination mechanism is one that the system becomes dependent on, not by design alone, but by demonstrated strategic value. ERA Hubs become sustainable when their coordination roles are embedded in policy instruments, financed through multi-level architectures, institutionally anchored, and supported by learning infrastructures.

4. A three-phase Roadmap enables scalable adoption

The deliverable proposes a phased model to support heterogeneous regional contexts:

- Phase 1 – Regional Activation: Diagnosing readiness, clarifying mandates, and embedding coordination roles in regional strategies (e.g., RIS3).
- Phase 2 – National Anchoring: Integrating hubs into national innovation governance, co-funding arrangements, and performance frameworks.
- Phase 3 – EU-Level Integration: Aligning hub functions with FP10 instruments, the ERA Monitoring Mechanism, and competitiveness policies.

Strategic policy recommendations

The next Framework Programme (FP10) presents a critical window to recalibrate governance instruments. FP10 will be judged not only by the excellence it funds but by the alignment it enables. ERA_FABRIC recommends that:

- ERA Hub functions be explicitly referenced in FP10 implementation guidance and monitoring frameworks;
- Coordination activities be made eligible for funding under Horizon and cohesion instruments;
- ERA Hubs be mobilised as interfaces for mission delivery, interregional collaboration, and competitiveness strategies (e.g., IPCEIs, Strategic Technologies);
- A voluntary ERA Hub guidance framework be developed to support Member State and regional implementation.

In systems terms, ERA Hubs are not end-goals; they are enablers of dynamic alignment. Their value lies in their ability to transform coordination from an administrative task into a strategic function embedded within the governance of the European R&I system. This deliverable provides the structural, financial, and institutional conditions under which such coordination can be realised, scaled, and sustained, positioning ERA Hubs as essential infrastructure for Europe's knowledge, resilience, and competitiveness agendas.

ERA_FABRIC is a Horizon Europe funded project. The content of this document reflects only the author's view. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

EC	European Commission
ERA	European Research Area
ERA Hub	European Research Area Hub
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
FP10	Framework Programme 10 (Future EU R&I Programme)
I3	Interregional Innovation Investments
IPCEI	Important Project of Common European Interest
JRC	Joint Research Centre
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
RIS3	Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation
R&I	Research and Innovation
S3	Smart Specialisation Strategy
WP	Work Package

Introduction

Over the course of its implementation, the ERA_FABRIC project has addressed the critical challenge initially laid out by the European Commission in its 2020 Communication "A New ERA for Research and Innovation", namely, the need to develop and test networking frameworks that can strengthen innovation ecosystems across Europe. While the specific label "ERA Hubs" has since been dropped from the ERA Policy Agenda, the structural challenges it was designed to confront persist with equal urgency: fragmentation of the European R&I landscape, inefficiencies in policy and funding alignment, and barriers to cross-border collaboration.

In this context, the ambition of Deliverable 6.3 is not to reassert a discarded policy label, but to distill and project the core value of the ERA Hubs concept into a forward-looking, operational Business Plan and Roadmap. This document interprets the rich empirical evidence generated by ERA_FABRIC through case studies, stakeholder surveys, pilot experiments, and typological mapping and translates it into actionable paths aligned with the evolving priorities of the European Research Area, the next Framework Programme (FP10), and the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

The strategic orientation of this deliverable is grounded in the political and programmatic signals of the new European policy landscape. These include the Danish Presidency's initiative to reframe the discussion under the concept of "European Research Hubs", the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027, and the EC's emphasis on streamlining funding rules, enhancing competitiveness, simplifying governance, and fostering cross-border innovation with real-world impact.

Rather than propose a one-size-fits-all model, the roadmap advocates for tailored, ecosystem-sensitive pathways that embed the core principles of the ERA Hub approach, governance alignment, policy coordination, innovation transfer, and territorial cooperation within the strategic priorities of the next EU programming cycle.

1. Context and strategic rationale

1.1. Origins and policy genesis

The concept of **ERA Hubs** emerged as part of the European Commission's strategic response to the need for **stronger coordination, integration, and valorisation across regional research and innovation ecosystems**. This was first officially introduced in the **2020 Communication on "A New ERA for Research and Innovation" (COM/2020/628)**. The Commission proposed a "networking framework" that would capitalize on existing capacities across regions to enable excellence, address societal challenges, and close performance gaps within the EU's R&I landscape.

The **ERA Hubs idea was catalyzed** by growing concerns over fragmented implementation of EU R&I funding, misalignment between national and EU-level strategies, and limited uptake of research outputs by the economy. As confirmed by **Staff Working Documents** and **Committee of the Regions Opinions**, it was clear that more place-based, collaborative, and systemic instruments were needed to:

- Integrate regional ecosystems into the broader European R&I Fabric;
- Foster stakeholder coordination for knowledge circulation;
- Streamline access to funding and tools for ecosystem scaling.

This strategic vision was put into motion through coordination projects like **ERA_FABRIC** and **COOPERATE**, which were not only technical pilots but also **policy testbeds**. Through these, the EC explored operational models for ecosystem coordination, typologies of research and innovation governance, and tools for monitoring impact.

Despite this momentum, **ERA Hubs were politically deprioritized** in the latest **Council Recommendation on the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 (COM/2025/62)**. The political shift, likely influenced by simplification narratives and the shift toward programmatic convergence under the proposed **Competitiveness Agenda,** has resulted in the exclusion of "ERA Hubs" as a headline action.

Yet, the foundational **policy rationale remains unchanged**, if not even more critical:

- **Fragmentation** of the R&I ecosystem persists;
- **Cross-border collaboration** is still essential for critical mass in strategic areas (e.g., AI, hydrogen);
- **Impact pathways** from science to society remain inconsistent;
- **Efficient R&I investments** and reduced bureaucracy are priority goals in the post-2027 funding cycle.

ERA Hubs were never just a label, they were a **paradigm** for ecosystem integration, institutional alignment, and place-based innovation policy. As such, the **core challenges they were meant to**

address are structurally embedded in the EU's research and innovation system and will inevitably resurface in the next cycle, under new terms or instruments (e.g., “European Research Hubs”, or “Competitiveness Platforms”).

1.2. Shifting policy landscape: new MFF, FP10 orientations and competitiveness focus

The political and financial architecture of European research and innovation is entering a pivotal phase. Preparations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and Framework Programme 10 (FP10) are underway, with a sharpened focus on strategic autonomy, technological leadership, and systemic impact. These priorities require institutional capacity that can coordinate across jurisdictions, mobilise knowledge assets, and convert research into competitiveness. The foundations laid by ERA Hubs directly support this shift. Across recent Council configurations, competitiveness has become the organising principle for Europe’s future research agenda. Research and innovation are now positioned as instruments for industrial transformation, not only for academic excellence. Critical technologies such as AI, quantum computing, clean energy, and biomanufacturing are framed as essential levers for economic resilience and geopolitical strength. The Danish Presidency’s proposal to consolidate research strengths through a European network of hubs aligns with this trajectory and elevates the relevance of ecosystem orchestration to the highest policy levels.

FP10 is expected to streamline instruments, align more explicitly with national strategies, and reward platforms that demonstrate cross-border value and impact delivery. Programmatic convergence across Horizon Europe, cohesion funds, and innovation missions will depend on actors that can operate across funding silos and institutional levels. This opens the space for a new generation of integrated coordination mechanisms. ERA_FABRIC anticipated these demands. Its outputs, including typologies, implementation pathways, and governance models, provide ready-to-use frameworks for ecosystem integration that match FP10’s likely priorities. The business plan and roadmap developed in this deliverable reflect a tested, operational logic for institutional alignment, regional empowerment, and measurable policy contribution.

The next cycle of EU research and innovation will favour strategic alignment, policy coherence, and visible outcomes. The structures envisioned under the ERA Hub concept, especially as refined through ERA_FABRIC, are well positioned to support this transition. Ecosystems that can coordinate stakeholders, manage hybrid funding, and generate strategic value will become central nodes in the European research landscape.

2. Policy and institutional alignment

The shift from thematic programming to strategic coordination requires new institutional architectures. The ERA Hub concept, as operationalised through ERA_FABRIC, offers a foundation for aligning research and innovation ecosystems with both national strategies and EU-wide priorities. This alignment is no longer a technical preference but a structural necessity. The European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025–2027 identifies efficiency, excellence, and impact as core principles for the next cycle of research policy. ERA Hubs respond directly to these imperatives by structuring collaboration across governance levels, sectors, and territorial boundaries. Their function is not

simply to host projects, but to translate fragmented activities into coherent value chains. The alignment they provide enhances absorption capacity for EU funds, strengthens knowledge circulation, and improves the institutional conditions for impact generation.

This institutional logic is also reflected in the early signals from FP10. Strategic documents and high-level consultations indicate a preference for platforms that combine operational capability with policy embeddedness. Coordination projects that remain detached from national and regional authorities will face declining relevance. The future belongs to ecosystems that can operate across jurisdictions, engage with multiple policy layers, and deliver on competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience objectives simultaneously. The current momentum under the Danish Presidency reinforces this direction. By framing research hubs as enablers of critical technology scale-up, the political discourse is shifting from research output to system performance. This creates a window of opportunity for ERA_FABRIC to position its results not as a legacy exercise, but as a contribution to the institutional design of the next policy cycle.

ERA Hubs contribute three essential functions to the evolving R&I governance landscape:

- **Policy translation**: aligning regional strategies with EU missions, partnerships, and funding instruments.
- **Operational brokerage**: coordinating actors, resources, and capacities to implement shared agendas.
- **Strategic feedback**: generating intelligence on system performance, gaps, and learning loops that inform future policy cycles.

These functions position ERA Hubs as institutional intermediaries between R&I policy objectives and delivery mechanisms. In a system that values efficiency, coherence, and strategic return on investment, these intermediaries will play a pivotal role.

The proposals contained in this deliverable align with the ERA agenda, support the goals of FP10, and offer actionable models for the emerging competitiveness logic. The question is no longer whether such coordination is needed, but how it will be implemented, by whom, and with what support. ERA_FABRIC provides answers to all three.

Danish Presidency momentum: research hubs as a political opportunity

The Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union has introduced a pivotal inflection point for the future architecture of European research and innovation. By convening ministers around the topics of critical technologies and the next MFF, it has reframed the debate on research governance. The proposal to consolidate national research strengths into European hubs reflects a strategic turn: research policy is now seen as an instrument for industrial capability, technological scale-up, and geopolitical leverage.

This political momentum creates an opening to institutionalise the kind of ecosystem logic piloted by ERA_FABRIC. The policy window aligns with broader EU strategic objectives, including the new ERA Policy Agenda, the anticipated FP10 design, and the drive to streamline funding under the Competitiveness Fund. The timing is ideal for embedding research hubs into the formal toolbox of European research governance.

Several factors reinforce this opportunity:

1. Convergence around critical technologies. Europe's pursuit of technological sovereignty in AI, semiconductors, biomanufacturing, and quantum systems depends on the ability to scale research outputs into production and societal deployment. Isolated excellence is insufficient. Research hubs provide the institutional coordination to bridge national capabilities with EU-wide missions.

2. Cross-border collaboration as a policy priority. The Informal Ministerial discussions in Copenhagen reaffirm the value of transnational ecosystem logic. ERA_FABRIC has already identified operational models for hub deployment that integrate cross-border smart specialisation, shared governance, and strategic alignment. These models can directly inform the Council's recommendations and FP10 preparatory work.

3. Interest in new governance architectures. The Presidency has highlighted the need to simplify coordination, empower public-private partnerships, and reduce fragmentation. ERA Hubs, as conceptualised through ERA_FABRIC, are designed precisely to fulfil these aims. Their hybrid governance structures, performance metrics, and financial adaptability make them suitable candidates for institutional scaling.

4. FP10 as a structuring opportunity. With FP10 under design, the Council configurations are entering a formative phase. The presidency's influence can catalyse the adoption of hub-based coordination mechanisms into FP10's thematic clusters, partnerships, or horizontal instruments. ERA_FABRIC's roadmap offers a detailed sequence for regional validation, national anchoring, and EU integration that fits this timeline.

3. ERA_Hub implementation blueprint

The implementation of ERA Hubs, as developed through ERA_FABRIC, follows a systems-oriented logic that connects typologies, governance models, operational tools, and ecosystem classification into an integrated architecture. This blueprint synthesises evidence from work packages 4, 5, and 6, offering a pragmatic pathway for institutionalisation across diverse regional contexts.

3.1 Typologies of ERA Hubs

The ERA_FABRIC classification (D6.1) identifies four dominant governance logics that structure how ecosystems operate:

- Civic-driven hubs are anchored in civil society and prioritise co-creation, inclusion, and public value.
- Cluster-driven hubs are led by industry or business consortia, oriented toward competitiveness and market-driven innovation.
- Research-driven hubs are centred around universities or RTOs, focused on knowledge generation and transfer.
- Policy-driven hubs are orchestrated by public authorities and integrated with strategic regional planning instruments (e.g. RIS3, IPCEI governance).

This typology allows policy actors to match support instruments, governance incentives, and funding mechanisms to the prevailing logic of a given ecosystem. Most real-world hubs operate as hybrids, combining elements across categories.

3.2 Tools for operationalisation

Deliverable D4.1 provides a structured catalogue of 33 tools used by regional ecosystems to coordinate actors, align with strategic goals, and support innovation outcomes. These tools fall into functional categories:

- Alignment platforms for cross-sector strategy development
- Stakeholder panels for governance participation
- Innovation brokerage services for knowledge transfer
- Monitoring frameworks for impact assessment
- Digital dashboards to visualise R&I activity and gaps

These instruments enable hub managers to design modular and adaptive architectures that can be scaled and replicated across territories. The combination of typology and tools forms the core operational DNA of an ERA Hub.

3.3 Classification of ecosystems

ERA_FABRIC's stakeholder mapping and case studies reveal varying levels of institutional maturity, strategic integration, and territorial ambition. These differences shape how ERA Hubs should be designed and scaled. A robust implementation strategy must distinguish between:

- Emerging ecosystems, which require capacity-building, governance scaffolding, and entry-level integration tools.
- Consolidated hubs, which need incentives for cross-border collaboration, long-term sustainability models, and performance-based scaling.
- Institutional pioneers, which act as testbeds for horizontal integration and policy feedback loops.

Tailoring support to these ecosystem classes enhances impact, optimises resource allocation, and aligns implementation with policy objectives at national and EU levels.

3.4 Enablers for deployment

The translation of the ERA Hub concept into operational reality depends on a coherent set of institutional, financial, and strategic enablers. ERA_FABRIC has identified five interlocking pillars that support effective deployment, scalability, and policy alignment. Each enabler addresses a critical friction point in Europe's current research and innovation governance landscape.

a).Institutional mandates and governance roles

A successful ERA Hub begins with clearly defined mandates for the lead institution or coordinating body. This entity must hold formal responsibility for cross-ecosystem alignment, stakeholder orchestration, and policy integration. Effective governance structures include:

- Multi-actor steering committees representing regional authorities, universities, industry, and civil society
- Operational coordination units that manage delivery mechanisms, data platforms, and administrative functions
- Legal mandates or formal integration within existing regional or national innovation governance frameworks (such as Smart Specialisation Platforms or IPCEI coordination structures)

Governance must evolve from project-level cooperation toward embedded institutional authority with sustained operational capacity.

b) Strategic alignment with policy frameworks

ERA Hubs must be synchronised with territorial strategies such as RIS3, national R&I agendas, and sectoral transition plans. This ensures relevance, legitimacy, and continuity. Strategic alignment mechanisms include:

- Embedded alignment platforms that connect regional priorities with EU missions, partnerships, and policy objectives
- Formalised feedback loops into national planning cycles, enabling ERA Hubs to influence strategic funding allocation
- Coherence with European strategic priorities including technological sovereignty, critical technology scale-up, and territorial cohesion

This strategic embedding ensures that ERA Hubs serve as instruments of institutional alignment and not as parallel policy layers.

c) Flexible and multi-source financing architectures

Operational sustainability requires financing models that combine predictability with adaptability. ERA Hubs function best when supported by blended funding strategies, including:

- Structural Funds (ERDF, ESF+) for long-term institutionalisation and capacity-building
- Horizon Europe and successor FP instruments for excellence-driven collaboration and cross-border scaling
- National innovation programmes and mission-oriented funding for strategic co-financing
- In-kind contributions and service-based revenue models to diversify income and enhance commitment from private actors

ERA_FABRIC tested scenarios for combining these sources in both high-capacity and moderate-capacity regions. Flexible architectures reduce dependency on single programmes and increase resilience.

d)Performance metrics and monitoring logic

Coordination outcomes must be made visible and measurable. ERA Hubs must demonstrate contribution to systemic goals beyond project delivery. ERA_FABRIC proposes a set of performance dimensions:

- Alignment performance: effectiveness in translating EU and national priorities into actionable strategies
- Stakeholder integration: quality and breadth of quadruple helix engagement
- Cross-border added value: evidence of knowledge circulation, joint investments, or policy convergence
- Institutional learning: capacity to adapt governance and refine strategies based on monitoring results

These metrics enable a transition from compliance-based reporting to outcome-oriented governance.

e)Replicability, scalability, and toolkits

To accelerate adoption across regions, ERA Hubs require a structured support infrastructure built on modular design, shared standards, and practical guidance. ERA_FABRIC has already contributed to this goal by developing a Self-Assessment and Guidance Tool (D2.5), which enables ecosystems to evaluate their alignment capacity, governance maturity, and coordination readiness. This tool provides a starting point for tailoring hub development pathways based on typology and territorial context.

Building on this foundation, the following orientations are proposed for future support structures:

- Implementation toolkits matched to the four ERA Hub typologies, offering guidance on operational roles, stakeholder configurations, and integration pathways

- Replication blueprints that describe adaptable legal models, co-governance templates, and alignment instruments for use across member states
- Digital utilities for mapping stakeholders, visualising ecosystem gaps, and monitoring alignment with EU-level priorities

These instruments would support coherent scaling, structured peer learning, and performance-based funding logic.

4. Business Plan components

The business plan for ERA Hubs, as developed through ERA_FABRIC, is not a proposal for creating new institutions. It is a strategy for unlocking the potential of existing ecosystems by aligning their functions, sharpening their coordination capacity, and embedding them more effectively in the evolving architecture of European research and innovation policy. This section articulates the business logic across four components: value proposition, operational model, financial planning, and performance logic.

4.1 Value proposition

ERA Hubs offer a renewed strategic focus for actors already embedded in territorial innovation landscapes. Their core function is to consolidate and steer existing institutional capacities, universities, RTOs, clusters, and innovation agencies toward shared missions and systemic outcomes. This approach enables ecosystems to a) Translate policy priorities into implementable roadmaps; b) Coordinate stakeholders around joint investment and innovation goals; c) Strengthen the link between R&I and regional development; d) Provide structured feedback to policymakers on system performance. Rather than creating parallel governance, ERA Hubs focus the energy of existing platforms into coordinated, outcome-driven collaboration.

4.2 Operational model

The operational model proposed by ERA_FABRIC is intentionally modular and non-prescriptive. It is designed to build upon pre-existing governance structures, institutional configurations, and regional innovation ecosystems. This model minimises administrative overhead while maximising the strategic effectiveness of what is already in place.

Key components include:

- A lead institution with recognised convening power and legitimacy (often already designated under S3 or national coordination schemes)
- A steering group or board that formalises inter-institutional coordination among actors already engaged in regional development or innovation delivery
- Task-specific working units or services, many of which may already exist, redirected toward brokerage, alignment, and shared impact generation

- Integration with existing monitoring tools, digital platforms, and RIS3 administrative processes

4.3 Financial planning

ERA Hub functionality does not depend on stand-alone funding envelopes but on smart configuration of existing instruments. ERA_FABRIC's financial approach builds on the observation that many regions already allocate resources to coordination, innovation promotion, and capacity-building—but often without strategic integration. Financial sustainability depends less on new resources than on purposeful reallocation, alignment, and predictable strategic direction.

The business plan proposes:

- Consolidation of existing support streams under a coordinated strategic function (e.g. RIS3, ERDF, national innovation agencies)
- Use of Horizon Europe instruments to reinforce excellence-based and cross-border components of existing platforms
- Development of light, value-added services that could generate cost-sharing or in-kind support from industry or municipalities
- Flexible scenarios for institutional maturity: foundational support for emerging ecosystems, performance-based models for advanced ones

4.4 Performance metrics

Performance assessment focuses on added value generated through coordination and strategic alignment, not on the existence of a formal structure. These metrics help guide funding decisions, justify integration efforts, and signal which platforms are delivering public value.

ERA_FABRIC proposes five performance dimensions:

I. Strategic coherence: evidence that existing institutions are jointly delivering on EU, national, and regional objectives
II. Ecosystem connectivity: improved linkages among actors who already coexist within a region but may not collaborate effectively
III. Cross-border complementarity: emergence of shared agendas, infrastructure sharing, or joint projects between neighbouring or thematically aligned regions
IV. Mission contribution: tangible support to EU missions, partnerships, or strategic technology agendas from aligned local actors
V. Learning and adaptation: ability of institutions to self-assess, adjust governance practices, and respond to changing policy signals

The goal of this business plan is not to create something new. It is to bring focus, direction, and shared language to what already exists. It offers a mission-oriented coordination logic that recognises diversity across European territories while providing a common scaffold for alignment, scaling, and impact.

5. Roadmap for scaling and sustainability

Coordination is a function that must be activated, anchored, and adapted over time. The long-term contribution of ERA Hubs will not be measured by how many are declared, but by how deeply they become embedded in the way Europe organises its research and innovation system. Their success depends on strategic integration, not administrative replication.

ERA_FABRIC proposes a roadmap that reflects this system's logic. It is structured around three progressive phases: regional activation, national anchoring, and European integration. Each phase builds on what exists. Each deepens institutional alignment, increases policy relevance, and extends the ability of ecosystems to collaborate, learn, and deliver.

This roadmap is a strategic sequence that enables different regions and Member States to engage with the ERA Hub model in ways that match their institutional maturity, political ambition, and ecosystem potential. It recognises that some territories are already performing ERA Hub functions under different names. Others may need to build those capabilities gradually. What matters is not the label, but the learning curve and the public value generated.

At its core, the roadmap transforms ERA Hubs from a conceptual proposal into a policy-relevant, deployable governance function. It moves from opportunity to architecture. From pilot to platform. From experiment to system. The three phases that follow outline how Europe can mobilise its existing innovation assets to create a truly aligned, efficient, and mission-oriented ERA:

a) Validation and activation
b) Anchoring and integration
c) Scaling and system transformation

5.1 Phase 1: Regional validation and strategic activation

The first step in scaling ERA Hubs is not to build something new but to recognise the value of what is already in motion. Most European regions possess institutional platforms—clusters, alliances, innovation councils, development agencies—that operate in partial coordination but lack strategic convergence. Phase 1 focuses on activating the potential within these structures by introducing purpose, shared logic, and mission-oriented alignment.

This phase is about political mobilisation, strategic clarification, and technical framing. It sets the conditions for regions to recognise themselves as functional hubs, provided they commit to alignment, coordination, and impact. By the end of this phase, regions should have a clear coordination node, a shared strategic mission, and visible alignment with EU priorities.

Key actions include:

- Using the ERA_FABRIC Self-Assessment Tool to diagnose ecosystem maturity, alignment potential, and coordination gaps

- Mobilising stakeholders through existing platforms such as S3 boards or innovation councils
- Assigning clear mandates to a lead institution or consortium, aligned with RIS3 and regional strategies
- Embedding ERA Hub functions into planning instruments and prototyping services like brokerage or strategic project design

5.2 Phase 2: National anchoring and funding integration

Once regional coordination is in motion, it must be formally embedded in national policy systems to scale. This phase institutionalises ERA Hubs within national innovation frameworks, aligns them with funding streams, and enables performance-based resource mobilisation. By anchoring regionally validated structures in national policy, Member States transform ERA Hubs into strategic governance partners and delivery interfaces for mission-driven innovation.

Key actions include:

- Recognising ERA Hubs in national innovation strategies, recovery plans, or smart specialisation policies
- Aligning funding from national programmes, ERDF, and Horizon Europe through co-investment mechanisms
- Involving ERA Hubs in national foresight, evaluation, or innovation policy dialogues
- Supporting national communities of practice and monitoring frameworks

5.3 Phase 3: EU-Level Integration and Horizontal Scaling

In the final phase, ERA Hubs operate as embedded components of the European R&I governance architecture. They contribute to the delivery of missions, shape future policy design, and collaborate across borders through thematic, digital, and institutional networks. Hubs that reach this phase are no longer pilot structures. They are strategic assets of the European Research Area, contributing to system evolution and policy feedback.

Key actions include:

- Recognising ERA Hub roles within the ERA Policy Agenda, FP10 instruments, and cohesion policy frameworks
- Supporting cross-border hub networks around thematic priorities or strategic technologies
- Connecting hubs to EU-level monitoring, foresight, and strategic intelligence systems
- Developing interoperable digital platforms for collaboration, stakeholder mapping, and impact visualisation

5.4 Sustainability pathways

Sustainability is not defined by permanence, but by the ability to adapt, contribute, and remain strategically necessary. Sustainability, in public systems, is not defined by the continuity of structures

but by the persistence of function. A coordination mechanism is sustainable when it continues to generate systemic value under evolving policy, institutional, and financial conditions. ERA Hubs will retain relevance insofar as they perform a function that becomes structurally indispensable: enabling alignment across actors, sectors, and levels of governance in support of shared research and innovation goals.

ERA_FABRIC proposes a layered model of sustainability rooted in systems thinking. The model identifies four interdependent capacities, policy integration, financial coherence, institutional anchoring, and adaptive learning, which function as mutually reinforcing feedback loops. Each layer corresponds to a distinct but connected subsystem within the European R&I governance architecture. When calibrated intentionally, these subsystems can sustain coordination as a strategic function over time.

Policy integration: embedding coordination in governance logic

The durability of any institutional function depends on its integration into the decision rules and normative logics of the system it serves. Coordination becomes sustainable when it is no longer treated as an auxiliary service but embedded in how policy is designed, implemented, and evaluated.

ERA Hubs must be integrated into:

- Smart Specialisation (S3) governance frameworks and national R&I coordination instruments;
- EU-level strategic planning mechanisms, such as the ERA Policy Agenda, future Framework Programme structures, and Mission-oriented delivery frameworks;
- Operational interfaces that translate policy objectives into implementation architectures—e.g., regional investment roadmaps, IP valorisation strategies, or mission scaling plans.

This integration repositions ERA Hubs not as project-based constructs, but as nodes in the EU's evolving multi-level governance model.

Financial alignment: designing incentive-compatible resource flows

Public finance is not simply a mechanism for resource distribution; it is a design tool for shaping behaviour, aligning priorities, and incentivising systemic outcomes. Coordination functions are often underfunded, not due to lack of relevance, but because they fall between programmatic categories or lack performance-based legitimacy.

A sustainable financial model for ERA Hubs must enable hybrid resourcing across ERDF, Horizon Europe (and FP10), national innovation programmes, and private-sector partnerships. It also has to define eligibility criteria for coordination functions based on system-level outcomes, not transactional inputs and support baseline operational capacity (e.g., convening, brokerage, alignment services), while linking additional resources to strategic performance indicators. Finally, it must encourage regions to adopt dynamic portfolio approaches, bundling complementary funding sources in support

of mission-oriented coordination. Strategic finance requires not only adequate funding volumes but clear alignment between mission goals, coordination mechanisms, and performance incentives.

Institutional anchoring: securing governance legitimacy and capacity

Effective coordination depends on institutional ownership. Sustainability improves when roles and responsibilities are clearly assigned to legitimate actors within the innovation ecosystem, who possess both the strategic intent and the operational capacity to deliver.

This implies:

- Formal designation of lead institutions with recognised regional legitimacy and proven convening capacity;
- Stable multi-year mandates, situated within relevant governance councils, inter-ministerial bodies, or innovation strategy boards;
- Institutional incentives that reward coordination outcomes, such as cross-sector collaboration or alignment with EU strategic priorities;
- Mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and stakeholder co-creation.

Anchoring transforms ERA Hubs from experimental platforms into embedded institutional actors within the R&I governance ecosystem.

Learning infrastructure: enabling adaptive capacity and strategic intelligence

In dynamic policy environments, sustainability is a function of adaptability. ERA Hubs must be designed as learning organisations, entities capable of sensing change, generating system-level feedback, and adjusting their coordination models accordingly.

This entails:

- Access to real-time monitoring tools and self-assessment frameworks (e.g., as developed in D2.5) that support reflection, benchmarking, and strategic reorientation;
- Interoperable digital infrastructures for ecosystem mapping, stakeholder analysis, and alignment diagnostics;
- Participation in EU-level communities of practice, foresight networks, and policy design platforms;
- Institutional mechanisms that convert experiential learning into strategy refinement and policy input.

In systems language, learning functions operate as both stabilisers and amplifiers: they ensure short-term responsiveness while enhancing long-term policy alignment and institutional resilience.

Sustainability in complex governance systems is not a static equilibrium but a dynamic configuration of mutually reinforcing capacities. ERA Hubs will endure and evolve not because they are formally

institutionalised, but because they become functionally indispensable to the strategic alignment, operational delivery, and systemic learning of European research and innovation policy.

By embedding coordination into governance, aligning resources with mission objectives, anchoring roles within institutional ecosystems, and investing in adaptive capacity, ERA Hubs can become both durable and transformative.

6. Strategic recommendations for the next MFF and FP10

The transition to the next Framework Programme (FP10) presents a critical opportunity to rethink the governance architectures that enable alignment, translation, and impact across the European R&I ecosystem. The structural challenges ERA Hubs were designed to address, fragmentation, uneven ecosystem maturity, and limited policy interoperability, remain unresolved. Their relevance extends beyond Horizon Europe; they are directly linked to the EU's capacity to govern complex transitions, scale mission delivery, and ensure strategic autonomy.

ERA_FABRIC offers the following strategic recommendations to embed ERA Hub logic into the design, instrumentation, and governance of FP10 and related competitiveness frameworks.

6.1 Position ERA Hubs as governance interfaces, NOT programmatic additions

Rather than propose ERA Hubs as a new action line, FP10 should recognise them as an implementation interface, mechanisms through which regional actors can co-deliver strategic goals, missions, and transformative agendas. This implies:

- Referring to ERA Hub functions (e.g., coordination, alignment, cross-sector brokerage) in FP10's operational templates, guidance notes, and mission governance structures
- Allowing consortia or regions with validated ERA Hub capacity to assume coordination responsibilities for thematic partnerships, challenge-driven platforms, or systemic transitions (e.g. digital, green, health)
- Avoiding top-down prescription while enabling bottom-up activation through clear eligibility and performance criteria

6.2 Align FP10 instruments with multi-level coordination logics

ERA Hub functions should be eligible across multiple FP10 instruments, with incentives aligned to systemic outcomes. For example:

- Pillar II clusters and Missions could integrate ERA Hub-based coordination layers for cross-border scalability, stakeholder orchestration, and alignment with regional innovation pathways
- Widening actions could include support for Hub development in less-connected regions as part of capacity-building or peer-to-peer learning platforms

- Synergy measures could reward integrated deployment of ESIF, Horizon, and national funds around ERA Hub functions, particularly in delivering strategic technologies or resilience priorities

Coordination should not be treated as an overhead; it is an enabler of mission effectiveness.

6.3 Integrate ERA Hubs into the European Competitiveness Agenda

The evolving European Competitiveness Agenda calls for enhanced R&I governance capacity across Member States. ERA Hubs can serve as functional nodes in this emerging policy space by:

- Supporting IPCEIs, industrial alliances, and critical technology roadmaps with regional coordination, skills alignment, and institutional brokerage
- Contributing to knowledge sovereignty by anchoring strategic capabilities in place-based ecosystems with pan-European visibility
- Acting as territorial "testbeds" for innovation governance reforms, particularly around simplification, interoperability, and performance-based funding

ERA Hubs offer a tangible way to connect cohesion policy, strategic autonomy, and innovation capacity-building under a single governance logic.

6.4 Provide a common framework without standardisation

To ensure coherence without uniformity, the Commission should develop a voluntary ERA Hub Guidance Framework, building on ERA_FABRIC and COOPERATE outputs. This could include:

- Typology-based implementation models
- Institutional role matrices
- Impact assessment indicators and alignment metrics
- Replication templates for legal and governance design

Such a framework would not impose a definition but provide a reference architecture, enabling Member States and regions to operationalise hub functions without fragmentation.

6.5 Use ERA Hubs to enhance the ERA Monitoring and strategic intelligence system

Finally, ERA Hubs should be formally integrated into the next-generation ERA Monitoring Mechanism, not as data providers alone, but as interpretive actors that contextualise and translate system signals into policy-relevant insights.

This could include:

- Participating in foresight cycles and thematic observatories (e.g. green transition, deep tech, dual-use R&I)

- Feeding real-time data on ecosystem alignment, institutional coordination, and mission delivery into EU dashboards
- Supporting ex post evaluation and adaptive programming of FP10 and related instruments

ERA Hubs can serve as a distributed strategic intelligence layer within the ERA ecosystem.

FP10 will be judged not only by the excellence it funds but by the alignment it enables. ERA Hubs provide the missing governance function that translates distributed capabilities into shared outcomes. They do not require new structures, only new intentionality. These recommendations aim to embed that intentionality into the architecture of FP10 and the broader European R&I governance model.

ANNEX 1 - Policy Integration Matrix

Policy Domain / Instrument	Integration Opportunity	ERA Hub Function Activated	Strategic Benefit
FP10 – Pillar II (Clusters & Missions)	Include ERA Hub coordination layers for regional scaling, stakeholder mobilisation, and mission co-delivery	Stakeholder orchestration; cross-border alignment	Enhanced mission effectiveness; reduced fragmentation
Widening Participation & ERA	Support development of ERA Hub capacity in less-connected ecosystems	Capacity-building; peer learning; institutional brokerage	Territorial cohesion; ecosystem convergence
Cohesion Policy & S3 (2027+)	Embed ERA Hub mandates in RIS3 governance and ERDF project design	Place-based coordination; policy alignment	Smart investment; regional innovation efficiency
Competitiveness & Resilience Agenda	Use ERA Hubs to support IPCEIs, strategic tech platforms, and cross-border industrial collaboration	Institutional anchoring; skills matching; tech scaling	Knowledge sovereignty; value chain integration
ERA Policy Agenda (2025–2027 onward)	Reference ERA Hubs as delivery vehicles for select ERA actions	Policy interface; monitoring and feedback loops	ERA coherence; governance reform
National R&I Strategies	Assign coordination roles to lead institutions within national innovation ecosystems	Multi-level integration; system orchestration	Policy convergence; reduced administrative overlap
Digital Europe & Data Spaces	Link ERA Hubs to regional nodes of data infrastructure and digital skills initiatives	Digital monitoring; interoperability; foresight participation	Digital cohesion; innovation readiness
FP10 Monitoring & Evaluation System	Involve ERA Hubs as interpreters and contributors to strategic intelligence platforms	Data contextualisation; ecosystem feedback	Policy learning; adaptive programming