

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

WRITTEN INPUT FOR THE ERA FORUM FOR TRANSITION ERA POLICY AGENDA – JOINT ACTION ON ‘ROLL OUT OF ERA HUBS’

6 October 2021

ERRIN welcomes the discussion currently underway in the context of ERA Forum for Transition on the policy agenda and the collaborative approach proposed making this process more effective and the policy actions more impactful.

Building an effective European research and innovation policy depend on strong interconnected research and innovation ecosystems embedded in regions and cities. On this basis ERRIN welcomes the opportunity provided in the context of the ERA Forum for Transition to put forward a coherent strategy for involving all stakeholders in strengthening Europe's research and innovation work. However, we would like to remind that as the renewed ERA also covers the innovation dimension, a broader group of stakeholders, representing different interests, should be engaged in the design and implement the ERA and the joint policy actions.

Within the policy agenda, the proposal for rolling out the “ERA Hubs” has been of particular interest for ERRIN for the following reasons:

- The proposed ERA hubs are an excellent opportunity to bring the ecosystem perspective to the ERA.
- The proposal to map existing initiatives, structures and networks will create a better understanding of the local and regional research and innovation ecosystems (or hubs) that already exist.
- The mapping exercise also allows identifying gaps and areas where further support should be provided to ecosystems – both in terms of strengthening ecosystems as well as enabling collaboration between those ecosystems across regions and member states.
- ERA Hubs could support organisations – and people – who are able to bring together different stakeholders, join up public and private spheres and break existing silos – also when it comes to synergies and complementarities between funding programmes for example.

Within ERRIN the ERA Hubs concept has been discussed in the context of the ERRIN Policy Working Group in a dedicated meeting tackling the regional dimension of the ERA. The following issues, or principles, have been identified as important in the definition of the ERA Hubs concept.

ERA Hubs

- Should be based on the quadruple – or quintuple – helix approach;
- Address – and support – all three dimensions: research, innovation and education;
- Cover all Europe: there should be knowledge hubs across Europe and in all regions;
- Be associated with local / regional R&I priorities for example via Smart Specialisation or other relevant local / regional strategies;

- When possible, ERA Hubs should reinforce existing structures that are already embedded locally / regionally and are able to provide support and services to all the stakeholders within quadruple / quadruple helix (and go beyond business as usual). If such organisations or structures do not exist yet, the best fitted ecosystem stakeholder should be identified to take on this role.

Role of universities within such knowledge ecosystems was raised in the discussions during the ERA stakeholder meeting. The role of universities also in co-designing smart specialisation, and other key local strategies, is an interesting question that we also tackle within our work. The ERA Hubs concept could be an opportunity to further elaborate the notion of 'place-based university'. Even if it is widely recognised that innovation happens in places, universities rather emphasise the importance of international collaboration - being part of international research teams and university alliances. Such discussion is also linked to the policy action on the research assessment frameworks, as currently those frameworks are not geared to take into account active participation in local and regional ecosystem building and creating impact 'on the ground'.

In addition the work related to further defining the ERA Hub concept could benefit from creating synergies with a number of new programmes and instruments that focus on ecosystem thinking. Digital Innovation Hubs (Digital Europe Programme), European Innovation Ecosystems Action (Horizon Europe) and Interregional Innovation Investments (ERDF), are examples of such initiatives and actions already embracing the ecosystem approach.

ERRIN welcomes the proposal to develop the ERA Hubs concept and its implementation approach further together with the Commission, Member States, Committee of the Regions as well as interested ERA stakeholders. We also propose to set up a dedicated work stream or a working group to jointly define the next steps related to the ERA Hubs initiative.

Further information

[ERRIN activities related to the European Research and Innovation Area \(ERA\)](#)

The European Regions Research and Innovation Network ([ERRIN](#)) is a well-known Brussels-based platform that gathers around 120 regional organisations from more than 20 European countries. Established in 2001, ERRIN supports members to enhance their regional and local research and innovation capacities and further develop their R&I ecosystems. The network maintains a long-standing relationship with the EU institutions and other organisations to strengthen the regional and local dimension in EU Research and Innovation policy and programmes. ERRIN offers a platform for knowledge exchange and facilitates regional collaboration, supporting its members through the project development process and providing project opportunities. ERRIN members collaborate through 13 Working Groups, covering both thematic areas and overarching policy issues based on members' priorities and on current funding opportunities. Working Group meetings are at the heart of ERRIN's activities, as this is where our members meet regularly to exchange information, present regional examples, build new partnerships, develop joint projects, network and much more.