

## THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

# USING PLACE-BASED INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS TO ACHIEVE A MORE EFFICIENT AND IMPACTFUL EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

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Established in 2001, ERRIN promotes the regional and local dimension in European research and innovation policies and programmes. The network gathers over 120 members who primarily collaborate through 13 Working Groups, covering both thematic areas and overarching policy issues. ERRIN supports project development and knowledge exchange between members to enhance regional and local research and innovation capacities, with the aim to foster sustainable and inclusive growth in all regions.

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## INTRODUCTION

ERRIN welcomes the renewal of the vision and priorities of the European Research Area (ERA), where, multi-level governance and a systemic approach are key components in creating research, innovation, and knowledge that will provide solutions for the environmental, social, and economic transformations needed to tackle our societal challenges. To do so, the innovation dimension needs to be further embedded in the ERA. The [ERAC Opinion on the Future of the ERA](#) provides a good starting point to ensure an ambitious ERA that delivers visible benefits to society. As the new ERA needs strong political commitment and a high level of buy-in from all R&I stakeholders, ERRIN, with its members representing regional and local stakeholders across Europe, stays strongly committed to discuss, exchange on, and promote the ERA.

**ERRIN proposes that the communication on the future of the ERA, which is currently being developed, considers the following recommendations:**

### **Embrace the ecosystem approach to increase the relevance and impact of the ERA**

An ecosystem approach to research and innovation, involving a wide range of stakeholders – academia, industry, different levels of the public sector, and civil society – should be reflected in the new narrative of the ERA. Bringing together stakeholders from different sectors and with different skills will improve the sourcing of new knowledge, allow for the development of more relevant and impactful products, services, and solutions with a wide public acceptance, and integrate research and innovation into sectoral policymaking. In addition, effective quadruple helix cooperation will boost demand-driven research and innovation, and as a result it will also support further scale-up and a wider uptake and impact of the solutions developed.

The ERA should go beyond national R&I ecosystems to create a wider and more sustainable impact, while further bringing in the innovation perspective and underlining the iterative process between knowledge, research, and innovation. Research and innovation happen in places and depend on small but dense interactions between higher education institutions, research institutes, businesses and public authorities. There are specific local conditions which make such ecosystems flourish (as demonstrated for example by research carried out via [ESPON](#)). It is therefore important to support innovative environments at local and regional levels, considering and acknowledging context specific conditions and paths. Using this bottom-up approach would also ensure the relevance of national and EU R&I policies at the regional and local level, while at the same time capitalising on the diversity of Europe's innovation ecosystems.

**In Horizon Europe, the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) action is an ideal place for this kind of support.** Based on quadruple helix collaboration, the EIE action would strengthen ecosystems and support strategic ecosystem to ecosystem collaboration, which would decrease fragmentation. Currently, such strategic and long-term collaboration is not directly supported elsewhere at the EU level. **Similarly, embedding the ecosystem approach in collaborative projects in Pillar II of Horizon Europe would further ensure the relevance and impact of the solutions developed.**

## Actively work towards creating a more coherent R&I system

Research and innovation activities are supported on various governance levels through programmes with different policy aims. ERA actions need to ensure that R&I policies and agendas are coherent. This does not mean that programmes should fund the same actions but that they should work towards a common set of goals. Attention should be given to develop a framework for how this could work in practice. This framework should cover all government levels from European, national, regional to local. The national level could be addressed for example through European Semester. The renewed narrative should also further explore the links between the Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3), the ERA priorities, and their overall implementation. The balance between excellence, and the need to bridge the gap in research and innovation performance at EU level must be addressed.

One way to achieve better coherence between research and innovation agendas at regional, national, and European level, as well as between the public and private sector, is to define a new governance model for the European Partnerships that are currently being developed as part of Horizon Europe. Regional and local authorities should be invited to take part and have a clear role in defining the partnership priorities, in designing the calls for proposals, and in influencing other activities carried out in the framework of the partnerships. Today, priorities of the European Partnerships are often far from the concerns experienced by local and regional actors that are addressing the issues on the ground. In fact, some of the candidate partnerships are merely looking at one key enabling technology without clear links to a concrete application field. Stronger synergies could also be created with the Horizon Europe Partnerships and the already existing regional public-private partnerships such as the Smart Specialisation Partnerships especially where partnerships tackling the same thematic areas exist (e.g. hydrogen, batteries, ...).

**ERRIN suggests that the European Commission uses its role in the European Partnerships to further encourage a more open governance model. Furthermore, the European Commission is strategically placed through collaboration between the DG R&I and JRC to foster better synergies, increased collaboration, and coordination between the Smart Specialisation Partnerships and European Partnerships.**

## Support broad engagement of stakeholders and ecosystem building

The ERA should also further strengthen open science and open innovation practices. In the context of pressing planetary and socio-economic challenges, catalysing sustainable and innovative solutions require efficient, transparent, and vibrant scientific efforts and the rapid exchange of results, not only stemming from the scientific community but from the whole of society.

The significant challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic is a clear example of this where policy- and decisionmakers rely on scientific information to make evidence-based decisions. The research data sharing platform that is part of the ERAvsCorona Action Plan is an excellent response that should be expanded further to include new ideas to truly foster the circulation of knowledge. Removing excessive paywalls, implementing fair and transparent models to reward excellent and responsible research, supporting digital solutions that underpin cooperative models that overcome geographies and accelerate interchange of data, and ensuring that mechanism such as the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) operate efficiently are some examples of this.

Drawing on the Science with and for Society community, the ERA should contribute to a positive perception of research and innovation. Effective quadruple helix cooperation will increase the involvement of citizens in research and innovation, and the regional and local levels being closest to the citizens are ideally placed for this engagement. As outlined in the ERAC opinion, interaction with society is important to ensure support from policymakers for necessary research and innovation investments and from ERRIN's point of view also to develop demand-driven and sustainable solutions. Co-creating ideas and projects requires dialogue between partners as well as mutual respect and patience to learn how to work together across different perspectives. As such, improving existing and developing new methodologies for how to involve citizens and civil society should be a priority.

ERRIN welcomes the European Commission's mission-oriented approach to R&I policy and its objective to improve citizens' understanding of the importance of R&I. As such, the involvement of and connection to citizens are key reasons behind the mission-oriented approach. Therefore, the proposed mission – *100 European cities in their systemic transformation towards climate-neutrality by 2030 – by and for the citizens* – should be among the first missions to be implemented. This mission is ideally placed to engage European citizens and stakeholders in a pressing global challenge – climate change – that is affecting their daily lives. In addition, the Mission Board proposes to implement the mission via Climate City Contracts, which requires the involvement of all governance levels as well as the entire local ecosystem.

**ERRIN, with our Smart Cities working group in the lead, has through the development process provided concrete [recommendations](#) on the mission's ambition, focus, implementation. This mission would also be an excellent candidate for the suggested ERA lighthouses in the ERAC opinion.**

### **Integrate education and skills in the ERA to build the knowledge base for the future**

To successfully implement ERA actions and deliver on its priorities, Europe needs a skilled workforce. With the transformative changes needed to tackle societal challenges these needs will change and thus lifelong learning will only grow more important in the future. At the same time, education and skills are becoming a more frequent element of RIS3, and we see clear opportunities for creating further synergies with initiatives such as Centres of Vocational Excellence and European Universities since this would allow even more coaction between research, innovation, and education. In the new narrative of the ERA, special emphasis should thus be put on the coordination between R&I and education policies including concrete links with the European Higher Education Area and the role of regions in creating strong learning environments close to the citizens. **ERRIN with our understanding of regional R&I agendas and RIS3, offers to discuss and provide recommendations for how this integration could be implemented.**

### **Create a European policy forum for regional and local innovation ecosystems**

Building on the Week of Innovative Regions in Europe (WIRE) conference, ERRIN sees an opportunity to create in-depth dialogue on R&I practices and challenges throughout European regions in the framework of the future ERA. This WIRE 2.0 would be a European policy forum where policy makers, public authorities, academia, and business would meet, exchange, and further develop and strengthen regional innovation ecosystems, cross-border collaboration and address the coherence of the R&I system. **ERRIN and its members commit to support and promote this forum and would be a key**

**strategic stakeholder in the debates defining the most pressing challenges and the key priorities while ensuring policy complementarities between the various levels of the R&I system.**

R&I-related investments in the ERDF have continuously increased throughout programming periods, amounting to over €100 billion for 2014-2020. The update of the ERA is an excellent opportunity to forge workable synergies between EU funds, support the implementation and deployment of innovation while contributing to wider European policy objectives.

The Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP) was launched in 2016 as a strategic cooperation between the European Committee of the Regions and DG R&I. The KEP would complement the above proposed WIRE 2.0 and offer a strategic platform to showcase and build collaboration between the research-based knowledge sector and policymakers at the regional and local level. This collaboration would advance evidence-based decision-making, foster understanding of how place-based innovation ecosystems can contribute to the transformative change required to meet Europe's wider policy objectives, and the SDGs, while building a strong political commitment and operational support for research and innovation at all levels. Synergies with other similar initiatives such as the Science meets Regions facilitated by the JRC should also be explored. **With our wide membership and the member driven approach to tackle wide range of research and innovation topics, ERRIN would be strategically placed to provide input on and facilitate the implementation of the Knowledge Exchange Platform and the instruments developed through it.**

ERRIN, with its members remains strongly committed to discuss and exchange on the renewed European Research Area (ERA).