

## Cluster 3: Achieving alignment via institutional cooperation between research and innovation performing organisations

### Understanding institutional coordination

National research priorities are usually implemented via national research programmes administered by national research funding agencies and/or national research performing organisation. The approach to achieve **alignment via institutional cooperation between research performing organisations on all stages of the research programming cycle is called 'institutional alignment'**.

Institutional cooperation and alignment can become operational in **research alliances** (cf. *Novel Approaches to Alignment, Case study no. 1 - European Energy Research Alliance (EERA)*). EERA coordinates research activities in the field of energy and brings together over 175 research organisations from 28 countries. EERA demonstrates how a network of research organisations can turn in a professional and ambitious network over time, launching activities and reaching alignment on all levels of the research programming cycle (research strategy, research funding, research implementation, mobility of researchers, dissemination).

Another mean for institutional cooperation to really ensure joint projects is the use of **ERA-NET Cofund in-kind** (cf. *Novel Approaches to Alignment, Case study no. 2 – ERA-Planet and Case study no. 3 ERA4CS*). The main activity within ERA-Planet and ERA4CS is the implementation of an EC co-funded joint call for proposals that leads to the funding of trans-national research and/or innovation projects. The unique character of ERA-Planet and ERA4CS is that national programmes and funding stems from research performing organisations (in-kind funding). Another case (cf. *Current Approaches to Alignment, Draft Network of Centres of Excellence in Neurodegeneration (CoEN)*) shows how to organise a series of joint calls for collaborative projects without ERA-NET Cofunds. These cases show how alignment on the level of research funding and implementation can be reached in research performing organisations and what pre-conditions are necessary for this.

This summary pertains to 4 case studies of the ERALEARN2020 project: (1) **European Energy Research Alliance (EERA)**; (2) **ERA-NET Cofund The European network for observing our changing planet (ERA-PLANET)**; (3) **ERA-NET Cofund European Research Area for Climate Services (ERA4CS)** and (4) the **Network of Centres of Excellence in Neurodegeneration (CoEN)** (draft version).

### Overall Strengths

- Building critical mass of researchers and research performing organisations in Europe in dedicated topics
- Potential to align activities along the entire research and innovation cycle (strategy, funding, research activities)
  - Alignment of parts of the research strategy of research performers and binding commitment of funding joint projects
  - Alignment of research funding and joint research implementation
  - Implementation of high quality research thanks to a common peer review process
  - Allocation of large in-kind budgets possible (e.g. ERA4CS, ERA-Planet)
- Engagement of Member States with limited competitive research funding (i.e. in-cash) in transnational research
- Sustainable financial alignment thanks to a country-driven and entirely or in large parts nationally funded transnational research initiative
- Embeddedness in and impact on European Policies as a reference network of research performers
- Potential to establish and cooperate with research alliances on national level in the dedicated topic that even mobilise more researchers and research organisations
- Development of strategic partnerships as European reference network with related European initiatives and beyond Europe

## Overall Challenges

- Influence on research agendas of research performing organisations is limited to parts of the research agendas
- Moving from EXCHANGING knowledge to USING knowledge from other organisations to come to a real integration needs willingness and long-term collaboration of research performing organisations
- Institutional alignment is easier to motivate and perform in research performing organisations with strong national basic funding and focus on fundamental research and it needs dedicated means to motivate research organisations with focus on applied research and innovation with limited basic funding
- Funding opportunities for joint research mainly depend on organisations' own resources that differ between organisations and countries
- Limits of the virtual common pot if it comes to project funding, more flexible measure would benefit a research alliance
- ERA-NET Cofund in-kind is only one instrument to be used for institutional alignment focussing on alignment of research funding and implementation and does not support long-term cooperation, but it needs to be complemented by other means
- It is challenging to outreach towards excellent research performers that are not members of the research alliance and non-research performers, e.g. industry, cities, civil society to follow a transnational research approach
- Networks of research performing organisations mainly follow a bottom-up approach if it comes to membership, but this causes geographical imbalance and divergence of competences
- High dependency on leadership and passion of coordinator(s) for this research alliance

## Key factors of success

### **1) At strategic level:**

- Find the right strategic arguments to convince research performing organisations to join the research alliance and manage to gain commitment of organisations in the start-up phase
- Generate commitment by Scientific Directors of the research performing organisations, not only researchers
- Develop an ambitious, but realistic common research strategy and implementation plan for a multiple year period
- Strategic Steering on the basis of Consensus
- Build a streamlined governance model that gives the network flexibility and efficiency in strategic and operational/financial decision-making.
- Find the "right moment" for change management to become more professional (i.e. not only informal networking at researchers' level)

### **2) At financial level:**

- Develop a flexible mechanism for the funding of joint projects

### **3) At operational level:**

- Building a strong coordination team and manage to gain cash and in-kind funding for coordination activities
- Balancing openness to partners across Europe but also ensuring the selection of reliable partners and added-value of new partners: carefully manage the network's membership
- Actively disseminate scientific outcomes

### **Pre-conditions:**

It is supportive if institutional cooperation on transnational level to achieve alignment is highlighted as one element in the national research and innovation strategy or respective sub-documents.