



**ERA-LEARN Workshop Report  
28 February 2013  
Dublin**

# **Needs of the Mature ERA-NET Community**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This short report summarises the ERA-LEARN Workshop on 28 February 2013 that was organised prior to the Joint Programming Conference 2013 in Dublin.

The workshop was concerned with the needs of the **mature trans-national coordination community**. This was defined as those involved in long-standing collaborations, which may have been funded through FP6 and/or FP7 instruments or may be self-sustained. The main guiding questions for the workshop were:

1. What was the rationale for selection of the route to sustainability?
2. What were/are the primary success factors for sustained activities?
3. What were/are the main issues and obstacles encountered by this community?

The purpose was to gain a better understanding of the key sustainability factors for trans-national networks of research and innovation funding organisations and how ERA-LEARN can better support them.

There were more than 25 individual participants at the workshop; including representatives of 15 ERA-NETs and members of the ERA-LEARN and NETWATCH project teams. Some of the ERA-NETs had also participated in a pre-workshop survey.

The workshop was chaired and facilitated by the ERA-LEARN team. It included three main sessions:

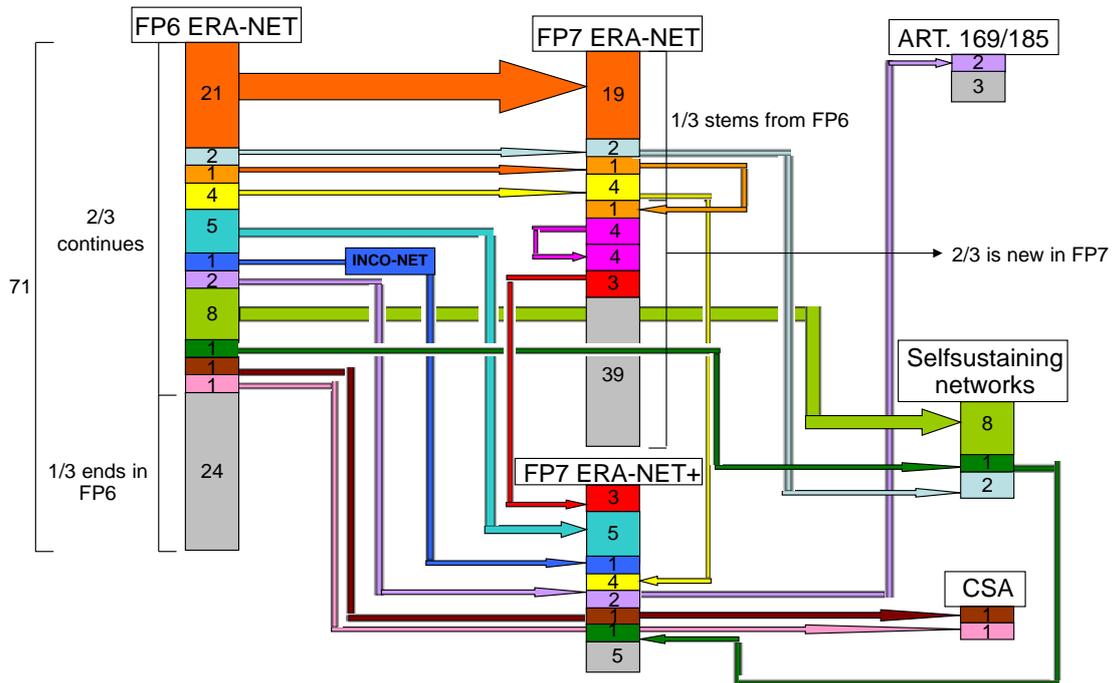
- Introductory presentations on five mature networks (including both European Commission funded and self-funded)
- Update on the NETWATCH platform and what it offers the ERA-NET community
- Interactive discussion on the main guiding questions

The report starts with a contextual overview of the ERA-NET landscape to set the scene. This is followed by some insights that were provided by 11 ERA-NETs through a pre-workshop survey and presentations on the day. Finally, some conclusions are provided with respect to the three guiding questions for the workshop.



## 2 CONTEXT

The presentations included an update on NETWATCH and a preview of the forthcoming Policy Brief No 3, which has an overview on network continuity under FP6 and FP7. This shows that two thirds of the original 71 ERA-NET Coordination Actions that were supported by FP6 have achieved some level of sustainability. The trajectories are shown in the mapping diagram below<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 from NETWATCH Policy Brief No 3 (with the kind permission from JRC-IPTS)



### 3 INSIGHTS INTO SPECIFIC NETWORKS

Eleven (11) networks, including two that are currently self-funded, provided insights into their strategies for sustainability - either through the pre-workshop survey and/or presentations at the workshop. They included:

- European Commission funded networks
  - BIODIVERSA
  - CORE Organic
  - ERA IB
  - ERARE
  - ETB PRO
  - Martec
  - M-ERA.NET
  - NEURON
  - WoodWisdom
- Self-funded networks
  - ECORD
  - ERA-Chemistry

Key messages from each are summarised below.

#### BiodivERSA (Biodiversity)

This network started in 2008 and has launched three annual Calls since 2010. Another two Calls are planned before the end of the FP7 contract in 2014. It has 21 partners from 15 countries. Joint activities include a database of around 7,000 funded projects within the domain of the network and several policy briefs based on the joint call projects. The main sustainability strategy is to be an active player in pan-European integration of biodiversity research including joint calls with related JPIs (e.g. FACCE, Water, Oceans, Climate).

#### CORE Organic (Organic Agriculture)

This network started in 2004, with 11 partners and was expanded to 22 partners through 2<sup>nd</sup> phase funding in FP7 (2010-2013). Four joint calls have been launched. There was a two year gap without EU funding between COI and COII that was bridged by continuation of the networking activities between a small group of partners. After consultation with current partners, it is clear that only a few countries are capable of continuing with joint calls if there is no contribution from the European Commission for the organisational activities.

#### ECORD (Ocean Research Drilling)

This network began in 2003, with 12 countries, and was supported by FP6 until 2007. It provided a networking framework to coordinate ocean drilling research in Europe and played a leading role in the International Ocean Discovery Program (IODP), including development of the Deep Sea Frontier Initiative. It continues to be self-funded through pooling research resources for expeditions and now has 18 members including one non-European country (Canada). The next phase of development for ECORD is the new 2013-2023 International Ocean Discovery Program and the consortium hopes to exploit Horizon 2020 funding through creating synergies with other ocean research organisations and networks.

#### ERA-Chemistry (fundamental research in chemistry)

This network was established in 2004 by members of CERC3 and funded by FP6 until 2008. It had 14 partners from 12 countries as well as associates from another seven countries. It has continued as a self-funded network since 2009. Five annual Calls have been launched (starting in 2008), using the Open



Initiative approach (thematically open). The open call approach and, more importantly, three partners that have a common commitment to annual Calls, are the main sustainability factors for this self-funded network. However, the financial crisis and the trend towards interdisciplinary, challenge-orientated research funding have reduced the number of countries that are both willing and able to participate.

#### ERA IB (Industrial Biotechnology)

This network started in 2006 and is now in its 2<sup>nd</sup> phase (ERA-IB-2) with FP7 funding until 2015. It currently has 19 partners from 15 countries. Three joint calls have already been implemented and a 4<sup>th</sup> is underway in 2013 in partnership with the Eurotransbio (ETB) network. The partners believe that complete self-sustainability, without EU funding, could be possible but this would inevitably lead to a reduction in the number of participating countries. The key issue is resources for the administration effort (especially for meetings and independent referees) rather than funding of joint call projects. It is likely, therefore, that future funding under Horizon 2020 will be needed to maintain this network at its current scale and quality of activities.

#### ERARE (Rare Diseases)

This network started in 2006 and will continue to at least 2014 with FP7 funding (E-Rare 2). It involves 16 funding bodies from 12 countries. Four Joint Calls have been implemented (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012). The 5<sup>th</sup> Call is planned for 2013 with a nominal budget of 25m Euro. Future plans for ongoing sustainability include the development of a research funding agenda through dialogue with the International Rare Disease Research Consortium (IRDiRC). This will inform the research funding policy in the context of Horizon 2020.

#### ETB PRO (Biotech SMEs)

This network started in 2004 (originally known as EUROTRANSBIO) and its FP7 funding contract concludes in 2013 when it will launch the 9<sup>th</sup> ETB Joint Call. ETB PRO has 14 partners from nine countries (including Russia). It will continue as a self-funded network, based on the high level of mutual trust and optimised processes for joint calls, but the lack of European Commission funding for organisation of joint calls is feared to reduce the number of countries/regions that can participate.

#### MARTEC (Maritime Technologies)

This network started in 2006 and is currently in its 2<sup>nd</sup> phase (2011-2014) with FP7 funding. It has 30 partners from 25 countries and launched its 4<sup>th</sup> joint call in 2013. Prior to the decision to seek EU funding for the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase, the partners considered other sustainability options including self-funding and/or integration within another ERA-NET but concluded that the preferred sustainability option would involve some form of funding from the European Commission. Variable geometry is still an issue for this network but it has established a (currently) stable cycle of annual calls and one major meeting per year.

#### M-ERA.NET (Materials science and engineering)

This is a new network (2012-2016) and involves 37 partners from 25 countries. It launched its 1<sup>st</sup> joint call in 2012 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> is planned for mid 2013. It builds on the MNT-ERA network, which started in 2004 and was supported by both FP6 and FP7. This included six joint calls in the domain of micro and nano-technologies. M-ERA.NET was the result of a merger between the MNT-ERA and MATERA networks to cover the whole spectrum of research in materials science & engineering, minimise duplication for partners and thus create a more sustainable network that would continue to attract EU co-funding. The MATERA network brought complementary experience of an ERA-NET Plus project as well as joint calls.

#### NEURON (Disease-related Neuroscience)

This network started in 2007 (NEURON I) following a preparatory action under FP6. It has 21 partners from 18 countries including Israel and Canada. Six annual joint calls have been launched, on different thematic topics, since 2008. NEURON II commenced at the beginning of 2012 and so short term sustainability is assured. Nonetheless, longer term sustainability is the subject of a specific work package



within NEURON II and partners have been consulted through a survey and workshop. This indicates that the sustainability of the network would be at risk without any EU funding for the network management activities either for NEURON or for the related JPI on Neurodegenerative Diseases (JPND).

#### WoodWisdom (Forest-Based Industry)

This network started in 2004 and has launched a follow on action under FP7 (WoodWisdom-Net2) and an FP7 ERA-NET Plus (2012-2017). It originated from a prior collaboration between three Finish funding agencies and now involves 19 partners from 12 countries. However, a core group does most of the work. Four Joint Calls, including the ERA-NET Plus, have been launched since 2009 and an evaluation report of the 1<sup>st</sup> Call has been published. Five public seminars of the WoodWisdom-Net Research Programme have been organised since 2008. The lessons learned from the evaluation have been used to improve the procedures for subsequent Calls. Also, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Call was on the bio-energy theme and in collaboration with ERA-NET Bioenergy. It is assumed that sustainability will continue to be maintained through the ERA-NET instrument of Horizon 2020, but other funding instruments (e.g. COST, STSM, PEOPLE, LEONARDO) are also being explored.

Further insights were gained from the interactive discussions. The overall conclusions are summarised in Section 4 below.



## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The feedback both during and prior to the workshop can be summarised as follows with respect to the three guiding questions.

### Rationale for selection of the route to sustainability

It seems that there are two main factors that influence the route to sustainability for networks that have been established through FP6 and/or FP7 ERA-NET Coordination Action contracts. These are:

- Availability of EU co-funding
- Desire to avoid Commission bureaucracy

Unlike FP6, which had open calls for ERA-NETs in any domain, the availability of ERA-NET funding in FP7 has been subject to pre-selection of topics by the thematic units in the Commission. This applied to both ERA-NET Coordination Actions and the complementary ERA-NET Plus instrument. Clearly, this favoured continued funding of those networks that had a good fit with the thematic policy objectives of FP7.

The feedback suggests that various networks have considered the self-funding option but the general wisdom has been that the benefits of EU funding are greater than the burden of Commission imposed bureaucracy, at least for Coordination Actions (CSA). This is less so for the FP7 ERA-NET Plus instrument, which is regarded by most as a less practical instrument to support the sustainability of trans-national networks of research funding organisations. It seems that EU funding for network/call management activities is more valued than EU co-funding of joint call projects.

### Success factors for sustained activities

The contextual overview in Section 2 above indicates that around one third of the original FP6 ERA-NETs have achieved some level of sustainability during FP7. New FP7 ERA-NETs have also been established. The feedback highlights at least five key success factors for sustainability including:

- Being in the right domain (particularly for EU co-funding)
- Committed group of core partners
- Mutual trust and optimised processes
- Collaboration with related frameworks, networks or platforms
- Providing evidence of value added and impact

The most important factor seems to be the network domain. Whilst variable geometry of national programmes continues to be an issue, there are certain domains that are more sustainable than others across national programmes. Also, sustainability of Commission co-funding has become more dependent on complementarities with EU research (and innovation) policy fit since FP7 and this will continue to be the case in Horizon 2020.

The second most important factor appears to be the presence of a committed group of core partners that have the motivation and resources to manage and coordinate the established network processes. This appears to be especially important for self-funded networks (e.g. ERA-Chemistry). Substantial Commission co-funding for broad networking and joint activities (ERA-NET Step 1 and 2) is only really practical now for 1<sup>st</sup> generation networks. What is more apparent is that a committed core group can maintain a critical mass of participants for annual joint calls by minimising the administrative burden for the others. Even so, it seems that certain countries will be unable to participate in self-funded networks as they simply cannot justify the associated investment in preparation/management activities for joint calls or take advantage of related capacity building opportunities. Some mature ERA-NETs (e.g. Woodwisdom) are looking at other EU funding opportunities to support collaborative activities that are impractical through



the ERA-NET instruments. One of these may be to explore the potential for synergies between Horizon 2020 and the parallel European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) that is being encouraged by the respective Commission DG's.

An important factor for sustainability, both for EU funded and self-funded networks, is the development of mutual trust and optimised processes through regular joint calls and monitoring of the subsequent co-funded projects. The relationships that are developed can often also have mutual benefits beyond the ERA-NET and, of course, the optimisation of processes enables regular joint calls to be implemented in the most efficient manner with more remote decision making.

The integration of networks and collaboration with related initiatives is becoming an important sustainability factor for ERA-NETs as the European Research Area landscape becomes more crowded. This is apparent to some extent in most of the mature ERA-NETs. Strategies range from cross-network joint calls (with JPIs and/or other ERA-NETs) to mergers such as M-ERA.NET (MNT-ERA with MATERA).

Last, but not least, is the need to demonstrate value added and impact of both the network and the associated co-funded projects from joint calls. Some countries are defaulting back to national research activities as they cannot justify the additional investment in transnational R&D activities (without EU funding). Formal evaluation reports of Joint Calls have been published by some networks (e.g. Woodwisdom). The prolonged life cycle of ERA-NET Plus contracts encourages more systematic monitoring of funded projects. However, there is still insufficient evidence of the real impacts some 10 years after the dawn of the ERA-NET Scheme in 2003.

#### Issues and obstacles encountered by this community

The workshop has highlighted a number of issues and obstacles to the sustainability of networks. For example, it is clear that the economic situation in Europe is affecting both national budgets for research and also the ability to participate in transnational activities. Justification of the associated management resources seems to be a bigger issue than funding joint calls. This is clearly a more fundamental barrier for a self-funded network, and especially those where there is a high level of variable geometry.

However, the main issue that dominated the interactive discussions was the general perception that there would be no opportunity in Horizon 2020 to support the sustainability of networks that wish to implement an ongoing series of regular joint calls. The FP7 ERA-NET Plus instrument (and by association the proposed Horizon 2020 ERA-NET instrument) is not regarded as a practical substitute because of both its inflexibility and need for adherence to FP7 proposal evaluation rules. There is a perception that there will not be any funding support for the networking activities that are essential to ensure joint call sustainability. This appears to be based on a lack of awareness of the differences between the FP7 and proposed Horizon 2020 ERA-NET instruments.

The most obvious ERA-LEARN action is therefore to provide updates on the emerging Commission strategy for the Horizon 2020 ERA-NET instrument and how it might be used to support network sustainability. Another is to provide guidance, based on input from Commission Services and case examples, on how networks can make best use of other synergetic funding instruments (including the ESIF). There are a number of ways that this guidance on future opportunities could be delivered including FAQ's (list of questions and answers), tabular comparisons and signposting to emerging Commission guidance publications. An example of the first two is provided in Appendix A.



## Appendix A: Overview of the proposed ERA-NET instrument for Horizon 2020

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

**1. *Is the future (Horizon 2020) ERA-NET instrument just a new name for the FP7 ERA-NET Plus?***

No. Whilst one of the options is a stand-alone call with top-up funding, the Horizon 2020 ERA-NET instrument will have the flexibility for two other options:

- Call with top-up funding and optional additional activities
- Multiple joint calls with individual grant agreements

It can therefore be regarded as a merger of the FP7 ERA-NET and ERA-NET Plus instruments and will be implemented through a new action under Horizon 2020 to be known as 'programme co-fund actions'.

**2. *What are 'programme co-fund' actions?***

This is a new action under Horizon 2020 to supplement individual calls or programmes funded by entities that manage research and innovation programmes. It will be mandatory that these will include at least one substantial call with top-up funding from the EU. It will no longer be possible to secure ERA-NET funding for networking alone.

**3. *Will it be possible to secure funding for a future ERA-NET in any domain?***

The identification of topics must take into account Horizon 2020 priorities and, of course, the priorities of the national/regional research and innovation funding bodies. This means that the future ERA-NET instrument will move further from coordination of national programmes alone to coordination between national programmes and Horizon 2020.

**4. *What level of EU grant funding can be secured for an ERA-NET under Horizon 2020?***

The proposed grant will be 33% of the total cost for all eligible activities within the action, rather than just the total public co-funding of joint projects (as for FP7 ERA-NET Plus). This will include simplified financial rules including output based co-funding for the calls and lump sums for other activities (i.e. fixed amount per partner per year). The latter will eliminate overhead issues because there will be no indirect cost reporting. Further simplification may be achieved through the use of Framework Partnership Agreements that establish a long-term cooperation between the Commission and beneficiaries of grants. It will also be possible to secure EU co-funding under the future ERA-NET instrument for the co-funding of calls between governmental research organisations that can participate with in-kind contributions from their institutional funding. An example of this is the Metrology Article 185 that was co-funded in FP7.

**5. *Can a network use multiple sources of funding from Horizon 2020 and other 2014-2020 funding frameworks?***

Yes. It is Commission Services policy to encourage synergies between Horizon 2020 projects and other funding sources, especially the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). It is expected that the Commission will publish guidelines on how to make best use of the different funding sources.



Comparison between FP7 ERA-NET instruments and the proposed Horizon 2020 ERA-NET

EU Funding Opportunities for TNR Networks	FP7 Instruments		Horizon 2020
	ERA-NET/CSA	ERA-NET Plus	ERA-NET
Networking (Step 1)	Only for new networks	No	Only as part of an action that includes at least one substantial joint call
Joint Activities (Step 2)	Only for new networks	No	Only as part of an action that includes at least one substantial joint call
Preparation for Joint Calls (Step 3)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Implementation of Joint Calls (Step 4)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Co-funding of Joint Calls	No	Up to 33% co-funding of the Call and associated actions	Up to 33% of all activities within the action