

Summary:

Case studies of current approaches for aligning national research strategies, programmes and activities

Task 4.2, ERA-LEARN2020 Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2008, the Council of the European Union adopted the concept of “Joint Programming” to promote the pooling of national research efforts in view of making better use of Europe's public R&D resources.¹ Joint programming is a strategic process whereby EU Member States agree on common visions and Strategic Research Agendas in order to address major societal challenges that cannot be tackled only at the national level in a coordinated and collective way. The practical implementation of joint programming mainly relies on the alignment of existing or planned national research strategies, programmes and activities in areas of mutual strategic interest. The European Research Area and Innovation Committee’s High Level Group for Joint Programming indeed notes that “*alignment is the key to successful joint programming*”.²

This publication contains nine case studies that examine different approaches and modalities used by EU Member-States (and Horizon2020 Associated Countries) to facilitate the alignment of national research strategies, programmes and other activities in the context of joint programming processes. These case studies have been conducted in the framework of Task 4.2 of the [ERA-LEARN2020 Project](#) (2015-18), and build on the “Typology of Alignment” developed under the project’s [Task 4.1](#). The case studies do not constitute in-depth evaluations of ongoing practices. Instead they aim to *illustrate* how selected approaches have been used to promote alignment at strategic, operational and financial levels, and what the key “*lessons learned*” are from these experiences. The case studies outline the main benefits and challenges practitioners have faced when putting in place such approaches, and the key factors for their successful implementation. The main target audience for this publication are national research funding and research performing organisations.³

The case studies examine approaches and instruments used in the context of existing EU public-to-public research partnerships (P2P), including European Research Area networks (ERA-NETs), Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) and Article 185 Initiatives. They focus on (joint) actions undertaken by participating countries/ organisations at different stages of the research programming cycle and that rely on different cooperation modes (see Table 1 below). Some of the examined cases rely on a “bottom-up” approach (e.g., transnational networks of researchers) while others follow a “top-down” logic (e.g., Article 185 initiatives). The case study analysis relies on a review of existing literature and targeted interviews with relevant P2P programme managers and participants.

Table 1. Overview of the case studies conducted under Task 4.2 of the ERA-LEARN2020 Project

Case study	Type of approach/ action
1- FACCE-JPI’s Knowledge Hub for Modelling European Agriculture with Climate Change for Food Security (MACSUR)	Set up of a transnational and interdisciplinary network of scientists
2- European Metrology Research Programme (EMRP) Article 185 Initiative’s Joint Research Proposals	Establishment of a strategic, long-term and integrated joint research programme
3 - Infravation ERA-NET Plus’ Real Common Pot Approach	Organisation of a transnational call for research proposals via delegated funding and management
4 - Network for Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA)	Set up of a transnational network of research funding organisations
5 - JPI Oceans’ Shared Research Vessel	Transnational access to a national research infrastructure
6 – FACCE-JPI’s Joint Mapping Meetings	Conduct of joint mapping of existing (national and EU) research
7 - Open Access Infrastructure for Research in Europe (OpenAIRE)	Open access to national research data/ results
8 - Network of Centres of Excellence in Neuro-Degeneration (CoEN)- JPND	Establishment of a transnational network/ alliance of research performing organisations
9- JPI Climate’s Updated Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda	Elaboration and update of common strategic priorities, via a participatory approach

Key lessons learned

¹ COM(2008) 468 final

² ERAC-GPC 1305/1/14/REV1, 30 October 2014

³ Good practices to promote alignment at the policy level have been identified by the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility, see [here](#).

All case studies highlight the multiple benefits that accrue to countries/ organisations that align their national research strategies and activities, including: (i) greater cost-efficiency and effectiveness, thanks to the possibility to leverage research related resources (e.g., research funding, infrastructures or data) that exist elsewhere (cf., MACSUR, JPI Oceans, OpenAIRE cases); (ii) a stronger visibility at EU and international levels (cf. MACSUR and EMRP cases), including increased international partnership-building opportunities (cf. HERA and CoEN cases); and (iii) strengthened scientific excellence and research capacities (cf. MACSUR and HERA cases).

The cases also pinpoint a number of factors that enable effective alignment at strategic, operational and financial alignment, such as :

- **Strategic: Agreement on common strategic research priorities from the start**, via the development and update of a common Strategic Research (and Innovation) Agenda across participating countries. Such an Agenda should be well-understood and owned by all relevant national actors; reflect stakeholder views (thanks to participatory approaches), and be based on a common mapping of already existing research (cf. JPI Climate and FACCE-JPI cases). Developing such joint Agendas is a crucial alignment mechanism in itself, and is a prerequisite to enable additional alignment actions along the programming cycle.
- **Operational: The set-up of centralized governance and programme management and implementation systems** (e.g., via delegation of responsibility to a single legal entity, cf. Infravation, HERA and EMRP cases), which allows setting up an integrated steering body as well as **common programme procedures** for all participants (e.g., for proposal evaluation; project selection; monitoring and evaluation; and reporting), as such generating important efficiency gains and facilitating collective strategic reflections. Such centralized management systems should be adequately resourced by participating countries.
- **Financial: The cross-border pooling of national funding**, either via: (i) a “real common pot” with no “fair return on investment” which allows to fund a maximum of research projects irrespective of the applicants’ nationality (cf. Infravation case); (ii) a “virtual common pot” with a “fair share financial model” whereby national in-cash contributions are calculated according to national research budgets (cf. HERA case), (iii) a virtual common pot with national funding reserves, which allows for greater flexibility (cf. CoEN case); or (iv) the pooling of in-kind institutional or infrastructure-related resources (cf. EMRP and JPI Oceans cases).

Yet, the case studies also highlight a number weaker points or obstacles that need to be addressed, such as:

- The lack of **multi-annual, sustainable (funding) mechanisms** to promote long-term and deep alignment (except for Art. 185 initiatives); the need for greater commitment by countries (e.g., willingness to pool institutional funding) and more effective incentive/ support mechanisms from the EC.
- The need to **adjust some national research funding rules**, so as to facilitate the pooling of resources. In some countries it is not possible to transfer money to an organisation outside of the country or to allocate such money without a competitive call. There is a need to better explain the benefits of resource pooling and facilitate transnational agreement around a common set of financial and operational rules.
- Insufficient investments made in stakeholder (industry) engagement, communications and **knowledge dissemination and transfer** activities (cf. EMRP; CoEN cases).
- The need to **align open data policies** across participating countries/ organisations, in order to promote the standardisation and inter-operability of research outputs and allow end-users to access them more easily, for example via the establishment of a common online platform or database (cf. OpenAire case).

The choice of alignment approach or action used often depends on (i) the research area concerned (e.g., volume of already funded research; EU vs. national value-added); (ii) the level of ambition (e.g., commitment for alignment, mutual trust, history of cooperation); and (iii) institutional features (e.g., ability to commit a share of national funding to transnational research; the share of competitive vs. institutional funding).

Finally, some countries have first established networks of researchers or research performing organisations, or shared a research infrastructure, to **build trust and facilitate networking and mutual learning**. This has in turn often facilitated the implementation of deeper alignment approaches, such as the launch of an integrated joint research programme. Alignment can thus be seen as a gradual, long-term process.