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## **Milestone 4.2- Assessment of Current Approaches to Alignment:**

### **Case Study No.4- The network for Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA)**

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## ABSTRACT

This case study examines the key features, outputs and overall strengths and weaknesses of a specific modality that supports greater alignment of research activities across countries, namely a **transnational network of 25 research funding organisations called “Humanities in the European Research Area” (HERA)**. This 15 year old network has provided an effective framework for funding and coordinating new research in the field of humanities thanks to the ERA-NET scheme (European Research Area Networks), which is co-funded by the EC and enables to launch transnational calls for project proposals. While focussing on the specific experience of HERA, the case study also provides lessons for other public-to-public research partnerships wishing to develop a similar instrument to promote **transnational research cooperation and coordination amongst European research funding organisations**, and alignment more generally. The case study does however not aim to provide an in-depth assessment of HERA nor of the ERA-NET instrument.

The study highlights HERA’s many benefits. The establishment of a first HERA ERA-NET allowed for **networking, trust-building and mutual learning** among research funding organisations, which is a precondition for coordinating research activities across borders and for boosting alignment at strategic and operational levels. In addition, HERA partners have successfully put in place a **central funding and call monitoring system** (i.e. Handling Agency), which has brought about efficiency gains and operational alignment. HERA’s “fair share” funding model has encouraged partners to engage significant financial contributions and allowed to fund an optimal number of joint research projects (by pooling EC co-funding into a real common pot for gap-filling only). Furthermore, the participation of European researchers in HERA joint research projects has **enhanced their research capacities** and provided opportunities for transnational collaboration. HERA partners and a large number of HERA research projects participants have prioritised **knowledge exchange and outreach** activities, especially vis-à-vis non-academic stakeholders in the context of HERA’s Knowledge Exchange Strategy. Lastly, the HERA network has successfully **promoted humanities within the European Research Area** and demonstrated its **sustainability** over time, by facilitating long-lasting collaborations amongst researchers and research funding organisations.

Yet, the HERA network has also been confronted with: (i) a need to adapt the governance structure of the network to the evolving membership; (ii) weak inter-operability between national eligibility criteria and low awareness of the network’s management rules, leading to confusion and difficulties regarding project implementation; (iii) time-consuming administration and reporting requirements; and (iv) the difficulty to assess the longer term impact on stakeholders and society at large.

The case study builds on the ERA-LEARN 2020 Task 4.1 (“Definition and Typology of Alignment”), and relies on a review of existing literature and targeted interviews with the Programme Coordinator of HERA. The case is part of a series of nine short case studies that form the basis of the ERA-LEARN 2020 Task 4.2 “Assessment of Current Approaches to Alignment”. The nine case studies that have been selected for this Task each rely on a different instrument (Member-State instrument or EC instrument, e.g. ERA-NET), cooperation mode (e.g. networking amongst researchers, programme integration, institutional cooperation, etc.) and approach (strategic, operational and/or financial) that promote alignment, and that are often put in place at different stages of the research programming cycle (planning, strategy, implementation, etc.).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## 1. Introduction

This case study examines the key features, outputs and overall strengths and weaknesses of a specific alignment modality, namely the transnational network of research funding organisations “Humanities in the European Research Area” (HERA), which has been established thanks to the ERA-NET scheme (European Research Area Networks), that is co-funded by the EC and facilitates the launch of joint calls for project proposals (see Annex 3). The study assesses in what context such a tool is best used for promoting greater alignment of national research programmes and activities. While focussing on the specific experience of HERA, it also provides **lessons for other JPIs and public-to-public research networks** wishing to develop a similar instrument to promote transnational research cooperation and coordination amongst European research funding organisations, and alignment more generally.

The set-up of a **network of research funding organisations** mainly aims to coordinate national research funding strategies, pool national funding resources and synchronise calls for project proposals that address common research priorities, which allow researchers from different participating countries to jointly apply for funding. This approach particularly fosters alignment at financial and operational levels. Moreover, strategic alignment can be enhanced when the research network focuses on a broad multidisciplinary research topic such as the humanities.

## 2. Key features of HERA

### 2.1 Overview

HERA – standing for “Humanities in the European Research Area” – was established in 2004 as a Member-State initiative from Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands. It is a transnational **network of 25 national research funding organisations**, committed to developing funding opportunities for humanities research in Europe.<sup>1</sup> It was initially launched as an ERA-NET under FP6, allowing to strengthen the network through **foresight and mutual learning activities** amongst members. Since then, HERA has supported **transnational coordination of research activities** through the launch of three joint calls<sup>2</sup> in 2009, 2012 and 2015 via the ERA-NET scheme.

The humanities have been recognised as crucial to the identification and analysis of socio-economic and cultural changes in Europe. HERA was able to set up a successful instrument to foster a **transnational research approach that enables the application of comparative views** and a mutual understanding and learning process amongst European researchers. Thanks to the identification of joint research priorities by national funders, HERA has greatly contributed to **implementing new cross-border research activities that address European research gaps, both in thematic and transdisciplinary focus**.

### 2.2 Mission and activities

HERA’s main objective is to ensure that the ERA can fully benefit from key contributions from humanities research by stimulating strategic reflection for this research area and promoting its role in European research programming. HERA focuses on several activities:<sup>3</sup>

- 1) Coordination of national research policies, strategies and programmes in the field of humanities;
- 2) Launch of joint calls (named HERA Joint Research Programmes as indicated in the footnote n°2) and implementation of selected transnational and multidisciplinary research projects;
- 3) Definition of best practices for the promotion and evaluation of the impact of humanities research;
- 4) Promotion of the humanities at the level of the European Research Area;
- 5) Set up of a single HERA funding management body for each HERA joint call (i.e. HERA Joint Research Programmes), which acts as a centralised funding and management system;
- 6) Assistance to humanities researchers to succeed in HERA joint calls (e.g. through match-making events).

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<sup>1</sup> Currently, 24 countries participate in the HERA network: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and UK.

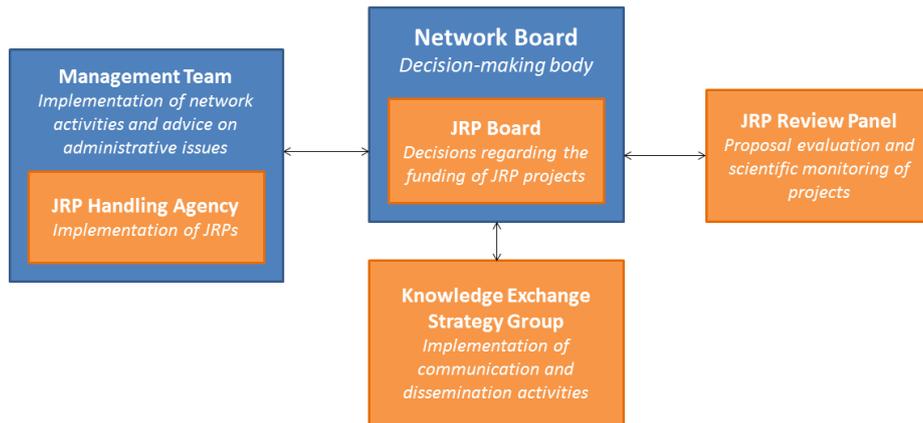
<sup>2</sup> HERA has named its joint calls Joint Research Programmes (JRPs). So far, three joint calls have been launched: JRP1 in 2009 and JRP2 in 2012 as ERA-NETs Plus, and JRP3 in 2015 as an ERA-NET Cofund (see timeline in Section 2.4).

<sup>3</sup> <http://heranet.info/hera-network-funders-humanities-the-european-research-area>

### 2.3 Governance structure

HERA’s governance model (see Fig. 1) has evolved since its first design thanks to the application of lessons learnt over the years. Its current structure reflects the will to integrate the implementation of HERA joint calls (HERA JRPs; related governing structures in orange) to the overall governance of the network (in blue). The highest decision-making body of HERA is the Network Board which brings together all HERA partners. The funding organisations involved in HERA joint calls (HERA JRPs) have their own decision-making body (HERA JRP Board). For each joint call, participating HERA members jointly contract a Handling Agency (i.e. one of the HERA partners). The latter is in charge of the management of joint calls. In order to ensure the selection of best proposals and scientifically monitor the funded projects, the JRP Board appoints leading scholars to be part of the Review Panel.

Figure 1. Governance structure of HERA

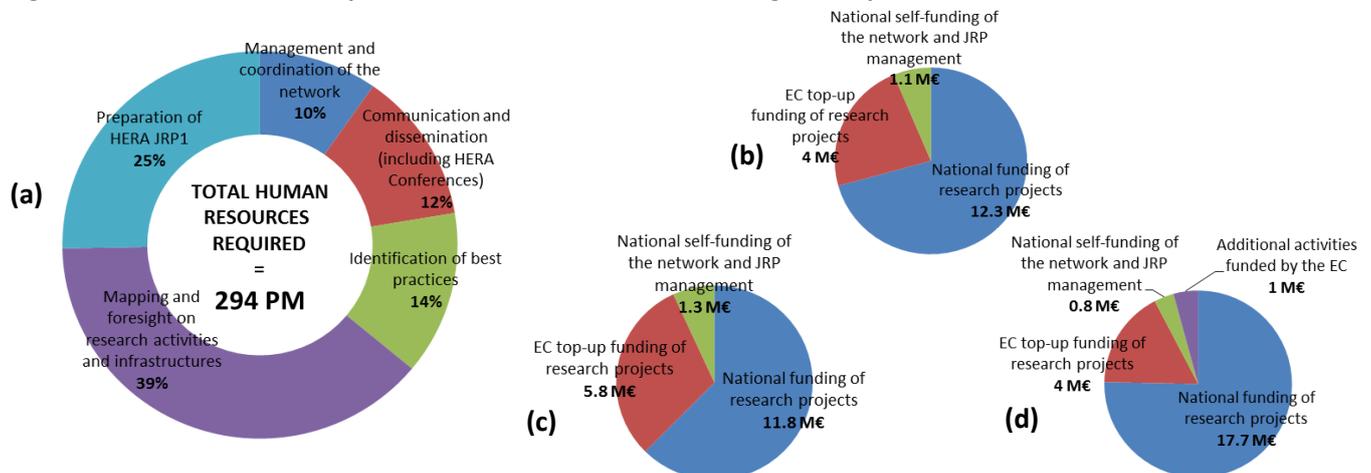


Source: HERA JRP UP Description of Work (JRP3; ERA-NET Cofund)

### 2.4 Approximate resources and time needed for implementation

The first HERA ERA-NET under FP6 had a total budget of 2.8 M€ over five years provided by the EC. Required human resources per type of activity are presented in Fig. 2.a). Regarding the funding model of joint calls (HERA JRPs; see Fig.2b), c) and d) respectively for JRP1, 2 and 3), the appointed Handling Agency acts as a **centralised funding and contracting body** for the calls. JRP1 applied a real common pot approach while JRP2 and 3 rely on a virtual common pot for national contributions and a real common pot for the EC top-up funding (i.e. only used for gap-filling). In all three cases, a model has been used in order to determine the “fair share” each country should contribute according to the national budgetary situation before being able to tap into the gap filling pot (see Section 4.2). Under FP7 (JRP1 and 2), the coordination of the network and the implementation of joint calls were entirely funded by participating countries. Under H2020 (JRP3), these costs have also been partially covered by HERA members, in addition to the funding of Additional Activities by the EC through the ERA-NET Cofund scheme.

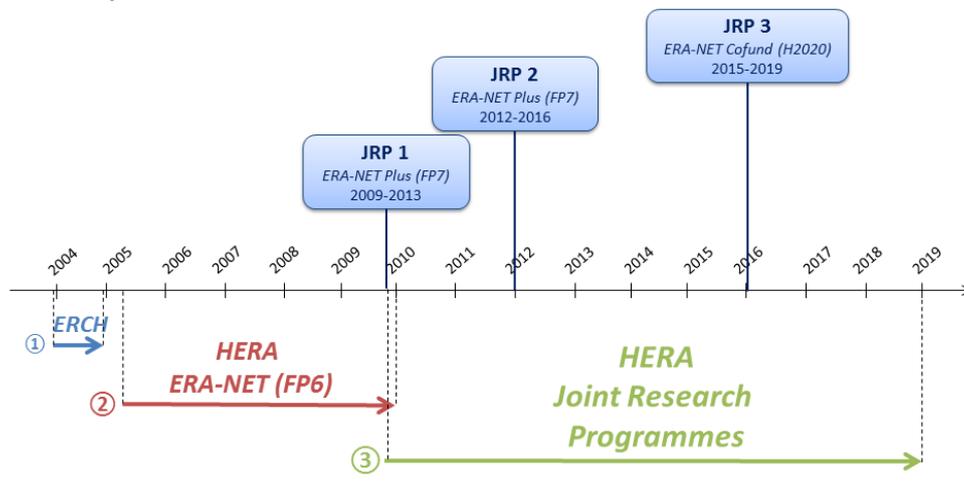
Figure 2. Person-Months required for the ERA-NET (a) and budget composition of JRPs 1 (b), 2 (c) and 3 (d)



Source: Interview and HERA FP6 ERA-NET Final Activity Report

The timeline below (Fig. 3) gives an overview of the evolution of the network HERA and its activities. A first initiative, the European Network of Research Councils in the Humanities (ERCH), was established in 2002 by the Danish, Dutch and Irish Research Councils. It was followed by the implementation of the ERA-NET HERA in 2004, which was joined by the European Science Foundation (ESF)<sup>4</sup>. The **FP6 ERA-NET** period was the key preparatory phase for developing and strengthening the network, and for promoting the alignment of national research strategies. Three joint calls have since been implemented (JRP1 and JRP2: ERA-NETs Plus; JRP3: ERA-NET Cofund).

**Figure 3. Timeline for implementation**



Source: HERA FP6 ERA-NET and ERA-NET Cofund (JRP3) Descriptions of Work

### 3. Principal outputs to date

The key achievements of HERA up to now have been supported by the strengthening and expansion of its network. The HERA membership has increased from 14 to 25 partners since 2004. HERA has greatly contributed to advancing European knowledge in the humanities, especially through its first two joint calls, of which the projects are now completed on the following three research topics: “Cultural Dynamics: Inheritance and Identity” (JRP 1 – 2009), “Humanities as a Source of Creativity and Innovation” (JRP 1 – 2009) and “Cultural Encounters” (JRP 2 – 2012). The third HERA joint call (JRP3) has launched projects addressing the issue of “Uses of the Past” (see Annex 1 for more information on JRP topics). So far, HERA has allowed to finance and support:

- During the first FP6 ERA-NET (i.e. initial networking phase): five main deliverables on best practices regarding application procedures, peer review, impact assessment, evaluation and programme management; and six main deliverables resulting from joint mapping and foresight processes regarding national research activities and joint research priorities in the humanities;
- The establishment of an online reference index for scientific journals in the humanities and social sciences (European Reference Index for the Humanities);
- Three matchmaking events, each one of them taking place during the launch of a HERA joint call<sup>5</sup> in order to facilitate networking and exchange of ideas amongst researchers regarding potential project proposals;
- The pooling of national resources amounting to (i) 41.8 M€ in order to fund HERA’s joint research projects and (ii) 3.2 M€ in order to fund the operation of the network and of the launch of joint calls, and knowledge exchange activities;
- The completion of 37 joint research projects under HERA’s first and second call (JRP1 and 2) and the launch of 18 new projects involving 21 countries under its third call (JRP3);
- The involvement of 173 associated partners and of nearly 300 PhD students and postdoctoral researchers.

<sup>4</sup> Established in 1974, the ESF provides a platform for research councils in the Humanities and develops related networking instruments.

<sup>5</sup> Matchmaking Events took place in Paris in 2008 (JRP 1), in Berlin in 2012 (JRP 2) and in Tallinn in 2015 (JRP 3).

#### 4. Overall strengths of this tool, including key achievements

HERA has greatly contributed to transnational cooperation and mutual understanding as well as financial and operational alignment in the field of humanities. The use of the ERA-NET and ERA-NET Plus instruments has allowed to build a strong transnational network and to provide an effective framework for funding joint research activities. The ERA-NET Cofund scheme brings both of these aspects together (i.e. networking and coordination).

##### 4.1 *Networking and trust-building among research funding organisations as a precondition for alignment*

As mentioned above, the HERA network was established through a first ERA-NET in 2004, which was key to build trust and a common desire to coordinate research activities across borders. It focused on the following aspects:

- 1) **Establishment of the network's governance model** (see Section 2.3) in order to clearly define rules regarding decision-making processes and involvement of partners. This governance model has evolved over time in order to gain effectiveness in implementing joint calls and strengthening the network.
- 2) **Networking activities for trust building:** the establishment of the network has required mutual understanding of each partner's expectations and common benefits from transnational cooperation. This was achieved by delegating responsibilities to various partners for stronger involvement and community building, holding meetings of manageable size in various locations using premises of most of the partners in order to increase their commitment towards the network, etc.
- 3) **Outreach towards new partners:** in particular, the ESF joining the ERA-NET allowed to build on the experience of its Standing Committee for the Humanities, enhancing HERA's outreach to policy-makers.
- 4) Joint activities for **mutual learning and capacity building of partners** such as the sharing of best practices (see Section 3) and the identification of legal and administrative barriers to a joint call. Partners then applied best practices when launching HERA's first call (JRP1). This learning and capacity building process has continued with the implementation of subsequent joint calls (JRP2 and 3; see Sections 4.2 and 4.3).
- 5) **Joint activities for strategic alignment**, including benchmarking of current research activities, mapping of research priorities, thematic scoping, mapping of and strategy for humanities infrastructure. These activities responded to the need for new humanities research, in addition to networking and coordination activities. They were carried out through a bottom-up approach thanks to a broad consultation process among a large number of scholars and led to the elaboration of several deliverables (see Section 3).

##### 4.2 *Gradual financial alignment thanks to the "fair share" funding mechanism*

For each HERA joint call (JRP), the appointed **Handling Agency** was in charge of collecting national funding contributions and distributing them to project coordinators.<sup>6</sup> This **centralised funding management** saves time at national level and is appreciated by partners, especially by countries that face political instabilities and hence that would be more affected by variations in national research budgets if this delegated model was not applied. Also, transferring project budgets to project coordinators enables to empower the latter in their leadership position.

As mentioned in Section 2.4, **HERA's call funding model has evolved over time in order to take account of specific national financial situations**. While applying national eligibility criteria, the first joint call (JRP1) adopted a real common pot based on the Scandinavian experience through which Nordic countries share their financial resources to fund joint research activities. A **"fair share" model** was developed to calculate reasonable national contributions according to national research budgets. For HERA's second call (JRP2), the real common pot did not suit new HERA partners, which is why a virtual common pot was applied that still used the fair share model. In order to fund as many excellent projects as possible, some partners voluntarily increased their contribution. For the third call (JRP3), members also applied a virtual common pot. However, this joint call could not rely on the same fair share model as the one used in JRP1 and 2. Indeed, specific EUROSTAT data on national research budgets had been used for previous calls but were no longer available for JRP3. Hence, the model that was used for this last call relied on data regarding GDP and population, which is of less direct relevance than national

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<sup>6</sup> This is referred to as the "delegation coordination" model in the Final Report on Investments in JOint and Open REsearch Programmes and analysis of their economic impact (JOREP; 2013).

research budgets to determine a “fair share”. In addition to the initial commitment calculated by the model, most partners managed to secure an additional 25% reserve of funding at national level in order to easily follow the ranked list of projects.

The fair share model is of high importance in the eyes of HERA partners as it strongly encourages Member-States to engage themselves significantly in transnational research initiatives which benefit from an EC top-up incentive. This model has been contributing to trust-building among HERA partners, especially as it is mostly medium-sized countries that run the network and implemented joint calls. As explained above, the fair share model has faced some limitations such as the lack of appropriate EUROSTAT data. Therefore, HERA is in the process of improving this model to calculate fair contributions per country that would better take into account national funding constraints. The real common pot used for the EC top-up (see Section 2.4) is considered by partners as essential to fund as many projects as possible following the ranking list. Furthermore, the HERA Network is now also investigating the possibility to fund additional joint activities in “variable geometry”.

#### **4.3 Strong operational alignment through centralised programme coordination and management procedures and delegation of responsibility**

The Handling Agency provides a centralised system for both funding and management procedures. The workload is distributed over time and follows the main two phases of the implementation of joint calls: 1) management of the call, including monitoring of the joint selection of projects by the International Review Panel in a two-step procedure (Outline and Full Proposals); and 2) management of the programme and projects.<sup>7</sup> Although some partners may have been reluctant at first in delegating their responsibilities, the implementation of centralised procedures has proven to be **time-efficient** and greatly contributes to **capacity building and operational alignment amongst HERA partners and possibly the EC**.

#### **4.4 Effective capacity building of participating European researchers**

Research projects funded by partner countries usually involve researchers of at least three or four countries. Bearing in mind that until recently the national focus has been more pronounced in the field of humanities than in other research areas, the transnational approach adopted by HERA to conduct research has had several beneficial effects on participating researchers. The latter indicate that their involvement in HERA projects under the first call has **enhanced their research competences** through their interaction with researchers from other countries. This has enabled an active exchange of ideas and the comparison and integration of different national research traditions and methods, leading to the overall **improvement of the scientific quality** of their work.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, researchers have benefitted from an **increasing number of opportunities for networking and collaboration** amongst the European and international scientific communities in the field of humanities. In addition to the networking provided through HERA research projects, the HERA network has set up online partner search tools and organised matchmaking events during the launch of each joint call to allow researchers from different countries to meet and discuss ideas for potential joint projects. These matchmaking events have also provided capacity building for researchers regarding proposal writing and consortium building.

#### **4.5 Strong emphasis on knowledge exchange and outreach activities**

A key criterion for the selection of HERA project proposals includes knowledge exchange activities, which have been deemed as essential for the projects’ impact (e.g. conferences, policy forums, workshops, trainings, documentaries, podcasts, etc.). Thus, **HERA joint project consortia have been strongly encouraged to collaborate with non-academic partners**. HERA partners and participants have found this approach much more effective, instead of only relying on the implementation of an overall HERA outreach strategy. The involvement of non-academic stakeholders as co-researchers in certain projects has improved the latter’s scientific quality by bringing

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<sup>7</sup> For HERA’s first call (JRP1), a single Handling Agency (European Science Foundation) was in charge for both phases while for the second and third call (JRP2 and 3), two Handling Agencies (European Science Foundation and Irish Research Council; Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research and Irish Research Council) have been each responsible for one of the phases. In any case, only one Handling Agency at a time is operating as the first phase does not overlap with the second one.

<sup>8</sup> This is explained in further detail in the Evaluation Report of HERA JRP1.

in a different type of expertise and has enhanced significant impacts at various levels (e.g. impact on research and researchers, pedagogical impact, impact on professionals, on policy, commercial impact on related industries and businesses).<sup>9</sup> For example, the participation of museums is of particular interest as they provide extra resources, infrastructures and/or expertise for dissemination of research results to a wider audience.

Furthermore, a specific body is dedicated to the development of an **overall Knowledge Exchange Strategy for the network as a whole** (see Section 2.3), beyond the knowledge transfer activities included in each HERA project. This strategy sets out the activities to be implemented for broader dissemination of HERA results (e.g. HERA JRP Launch and Final Conferences, workshops with policy-makers, festivals for broader outreach). For instance, after HERA's first joint call, an additional call for Knowledge Transfer activities was launched in order for HERA projects to jointly disseminate their results. In addition, target groups of stakeholders and appropriate means of communication have been defined for effective knowledge transfer.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4.6 Strengthening of the European Research Area and increased visibility of humanities research in Europe**

HERA has greatly contributed to strengthening the ERA over time. During the first ERA-NET, Annual HERA Conferences emphasised the **contribution of humanities to the ERA and to European cooperation** more generally. The ERA-NET's joint mapping and foresight activities demonstrated the collective desire to strengthen the ERA as a whole and an "influence list" was defined in order to enhance the network's visibility and impact on the ERA.<sup>11</sup> HERA joint calls aim to **provide EU policy advice** and to **enhance synergies with related European and international programmes**. In particular, this has been fostered thanks to HERA partners' affiliation with initiatives such as the Joint Programming Initiative on Cultural Heritage, the ERA-NETs Norface and Net4Society, and the Trans-Atlantic Platform.<sup>12</sup> HERA's increased visibility at European and international levels has been demonstrated in several ways. For example, approximately 600 Outline Proposals were submitted for HERA's second and third joint call (i.e. double compared to the first call). In addition, some associated research centres are located in China, India and the USA, hence increasing HERA's international visibility.

#### **4.7 High sustainability of the network**

**Long-lasting collaborations between researchers** have been developed beyond the life-time of HERA projects through the significant expansion of researchers' professional networks thanks to HERA projects (see Section 4.4). They provide a sustainable networking background for humanities research and the ERA more broadly. In addition, although HERA joint calls each require independent EC grant applications<sup>13</sup>, the HERA network has succeeded in developing **sustainable partnerships among participating research funding organisations**. This has been demonstrated by its 15-years existence and by the significant expansion of its membership over time.

### **5. Overall limitations with this tool, including difficulties encountered during implementation**

Limitations have mainly been identified for HERA's first joint call (JRP1) as it is the only one which has been completed and evaluated so far.

#### **5.1 Need to adapt the governance structure of the network to the evolving membership**

The HERA network has now 25 partners compared to only 13 partners at the beginning of the initiative. This significant expansion has led to much larger meetings. Indeed, two national representatives per country are around the table (i.e. one from the Network Board and one from the Management Team), and hence about 50 people in total. These conditions do not allow for efficient discussion and decision-making and for bringing

<sup>9</sup> An impact assessment has for instance been carried out for the JRP1 project "Creativity and Craft Production in Middle and Late Bronze Age Europe" 20 months after the end of the project in order to assess its post-project impact.

<sup>10</sup> Targeted stakeholder groups are: Humanities researchers; Researchers in other disciplines; Policy-makers; Museums, galleries, libraries; Businesses; Creative practitioners; Media organisations; Community/Grassroots groups; NGOs, charities, etc.; Educational sector (non-university); General public. Specific media used are: website, events, workshops, press, social media, blog, newsletters and leaflets.

<sup>11</sup> This list is divided in three sections: (i) List of individuals who are in a position to influence research policy in national contexts; (ii) List of individuals in national media; and (iii) List of individuals who are members of supranational agencies.

<sup>12</sup> HERA JRP UP Description of Work (JRP3; ERA-NET Cofund)

<sup>13</sup> The ERA-NET Plus/Cofund funding instrument does not provide funding for several successive calls in the perspective of a multi-annual research programme in a thematic area.

everyone to a consensus. Hence, the network's governance structure is in the process of being restructured, for instance with the elaboration of Working Groups which can individually work on specific themes and issues.

### **5.2 Weak inter-operability between national eligibility criteria and low awareness of the network's management rules**

Although HERA members had adopted a real common pot approach for the first joint call (JRP1), national eligibility criteria were applied. Hence, some JRP1 project leaders experienced difficulties in dealing with differing grant rules amongst national funding organisations. Similarly, some research organisations participating in the first and third call were not fully aware of HERA joint calls' management rules and conditions, which also led to confusion and difficulties regarding project implementation. In particular, appointing a central funding body that collects all national contributions into a centralised virtual common pot can be challenging. This requires the transfer of money across borders, which is not easily feasible for certain countries. For HERA's third call (JRP3), Spain and Italy had to carry out additional administrative work to overcome legal issues while the Czech Republic was able to change its national laws. However, even when using a virtual common pot, the benefits of having a centralised funding pot exceed the difficulties linked to transnational flow of money (see Section 4.2).

Such difficulties could be avoided by strengthening knowledge exchange regarding established HERA procedures, especially with new partners. Another option would be to harmonise certain national rules within the HERA network, which is unfortunately impossible for some countries. Also, familiarising oneself with the network's rules and related ones at the national and institutional levels requires a lot of time in order to become aware of potential issues and discuss them. Thus, pursuing mutual learning activities is crucial in order to develop a common understanding and, when possible, an increasing operational alignment of funding, application and management procedures. HERA partners have for instance started to set up a HERA Handbook.

### **5.3 Time-consuming administration and reporting requirements**

JRP1 project leaders evaluated reporting requirements as very demanding in terms of content and frequency, especially considering the available human resources. This left less time for them to address research issues. However, this close project monitoring supported an increasing interest of funding providers in project outcomes.

### **5.4 Difficulty to assess the longer term impact on stakeholders and society at large**

As mentioned in Section 4.5, the involvement of non-academic stakeholders was considered as a valuable experience for the majority of HERA projects under the first call (JRP1). In cases where project participants had not put priority on collaboration with stakeholders, potential benefits were diminished. In addition, as the JRP1 evaluation was conducted at a late stage, many stakeholders that had been involved in projects were already engaged in other activities and could not provide a feedback on their experience in HERA projects. Hence, the evaluation may not be sufficiently representative of the real involvement of stakeholders and related benefits and impacts. Stakeholders should be approached earlier after the end of projects for effective evaluation.

Concerning the implemented activities related to the overall HERA Knowledge Transfer Strategy, several JRP1 project participants were sceptical about their added value. The objective and target audience of a knowledge exchange event should be clearly defined (e.g. raise awareness about humanities research among the general public, or discuss projects with relevant and more experienced stakeholders in order to enhance the scientific quality and impact of projects). Lessons learned from HERA's first call have been used in developing revised Knowledge Exchange strategies for its following calls. Marking the close of JRP2 projects as well as the launch of JRP3 projects, the HERA conference that took place in September 2016 (#HumanitiesMatter) featured sessions to discuss knowledge exchange strategies, a panel on how to deal with media, and several screenings, concerts, etc. This allowed to exchange best practices for knowledge transfer and collaboration with non-academic stakeholders amongst experienced researchers and those who are new to HERA.

Lastly, it should be kept in mind that a project's impact is in any case difficult to measure as it mostly reveals itself after a longer time frame and is influenced by various factors.

## 6. Conclusions: Suitability and key factors of success

The set-up of a network of national research funding organisations is most suited to **coordinate national research funding strategies and pool national resources** at the European level in order to jointly fund new high quality research activities of high priority to all partners. If the network is established in a broad research area such as the humanities, it is also well-suited to carry out foresight activities and jointly define common research priorities, hence **influencing and aligning research strategies at national levels**. Above all, such a network is an appropriate framework for the **identification of best practices and mutual learning exercises** amongst network partners.

The evolution in time of the EC's instrument that supports this type of network, i.e. the ERA-NET scheme, demonstrates the desire to implement transnational networking and joint research activities in parallel in order to address European research issues, and the need to effectively combine both aspects as they go hand in hand. Indeed, a research network alone may not sufficiently enhance the transnational coordination and alignment of research activities. At the same time, only focusing on the operational dimension of implementing joint research does not allow the development of long-term objectives and vision for strategic alignment in the considered research area.

*Key factors of success:*

### 1) At strategic level:

- **Establish a network that facilitates trust building** and mutual learning activities amongst partners: this is especially important in research areas with few transnational networking and research activities.
- **Implement an efficient governance structure** that facilitates a long-term strategic reflection on common research priorities that can be addressed jointly via transnational research activities: in particular, the established governance model should effectively support a potential expansion of the network if desired. Also, the governance model should support a strong knowledge exchange between policy makers, funding organisation managers and scientific representatives in the network.

### 2) At financial level:

- **Develop a funding mechanism that is adapted both to networking/mutual learning and joint research activities:** this funding mechanism can evolve over time and should take into account available funding resources at national levels, i.e. take into account the type of available funding (in-kind and/or in-cash funding) and the amount of available funding.
- In particular, **agree on common funding rules to finance new research projects and clearly discuss them amongst involved partners and participants:** for instance in the case of a delegated coordination model with a single funding and contracting body, it is crucial to make sure that all partners are able to transfer their committed funding into the centralised virtual or real common pot of the research programme.
- **Enhance the financial commitment of participating countries:** this can for instance be achieved by adopting a "fair share" model, which estimates "reasonable" national contributions according to national budgets and constraints, and empowers countries regarding their financial commitments. It contributes to trust building amongst countries and hence to long-term sustainability of the network.

### 3) At operational level:

- **Develop common procedures for centralised programme management** (e.g. project selection, monitoring, evaluation, impact assessment): a centralised programme management structure is required in order to facilitate the implementation of common procedures that are defined by network members.
- **Ensure stakeholder engagement:** when relevant, **involve non-academic stakeholders in project and knowledge exchange activities:** the interaction of non-academic partners within certain research projects can be valuable for increasing the quality, relevance and impact of the conducted research. Similarly, knowledge exchange activities should be designed bearing in mind their defined objective and target audience.

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### Interview

Alice Dijkstra: Coordinator of HERA JRP1, 2 & 3 – Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)

## ANNEX 1. RESEARCH TOPICS ADDRESSED BY HERA JOINT RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

### ***HERA Joint Research Programme 1: “Cultural Dynamics: Inheritance and Identity” and “Humanities as a Source of Creativity and Innovation”<sup>14</sup>***

The 1<sup>st</sup> HERA JRP focused on two humanities research themes. The first one addressed the issue of **“Cultural Dynamics: Inheritance and Identity”**. It has aimed to look at culture as a process rather than as a product, as a praxis rather than a pragma. These cultural processes and practices were to be addressed as complex dynamic systems, the focus being specifically on the way in which cultural exchanges and dynamics cross between social strata, between countries, and between media. Culture was to be studied, not as the output of a given society, community, or generation, but as a form of traffic between societies, communities and generations.

The second theme addressed by the HERA JRP 1 call focused on **“Humanities as a Source of Creativity and Innovation”**. It has aimed to address creativity in all its aspects in the expectation that new research, whether it be disciplinary or interdisciplinary, into the processes and conditions of human creativity adds new understandings of the value systems of the humanities and the practices and conditions of the creative, performing and visual arts, and a much better understanding of how these values and processes might contribute to cultural, social and economic innovation. In particular, the programme has aimed to draw value from the collaboration between researchers in a range of European countries with different experiences of the creative industries, different models of the creative community or the „creative city“, and different histories of engagement in the agenda which links creativity and innovation.

### ***HERA Joint Research Programme 2: “Cultural Encounters”<sup>15</sup>***

The 2<sup>nd</sup> HERA JRP focused on the research theme **“Cultural Encounters”**. It has aimed to address the general historical and theoretical issues related to the analysis of cultural encounters: to understand cultural encounters is to understand the history and meaning of Europe and the world, from the earliest periods of human settlement to the present day. HERA JRP 2 has also supported the investigation of more specific and exemplary aspects of cultural encounters. The programme has aimed to investigate the phenomenon of cultural encounters in spatial terms (i.e., cultural encounters within geographical frames) as well as temporal terms (i.e., in contemporary time, as well as in long-term historical perspectives).

### ***HERA Joint Research Programme 3: “Uses of the Past”<sup>16</sup>***

The latest HERA JRP aims to address how and by whom European, non-European or global pasts are actively and instrumentally used, and to what ends (including their relation to essential issues such as solidarity, trust and imagined futures), always taking into account an explicit connection to past or present debates or transformations in Europe. It seeks to examine which historically-informed orientations and actions in society are promoted, mobilised and legitimised, and which mechanisms and motives lie behind the work of historical understanding – in arts, film, literature, drama, media, social media, landscapes, public spaces, languages, philosophy and religions as well as in research, education, politics, economics and journalism. This knowledge will enable to see more clearly the complex ways in which European cultural diversity has been formed, and the dynamics by which it may be shaped and directed in the future. Ultimately such awareness of the past and its profound effects upon present decision-making and cultural practice can assist in building effective policies to encourage societal resilience, creative thinking, responsible citizenship and intelligent responsiveness to new challenges.

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<sup>14</sup> HERA Joint Research Programme 1 – Call for Outline Proposals

<sup>15</sup> HERA Joint Research Programme 2 – Call for Proposals

<sup>16</sup> HERA Joint Research Programme 3 – Guidelines for Applicants: Full Proposals

## **ANNEX 2. WORK PLAN OF HERA'S THIRD JOINT RESEARCH PROGRAMME (ERA-NET COFUND)<sup>17</sup>**

The HERA JRP UP (JRP3) activities consist of two parts. Firstly, work package 1 – 6 are activities related to the new co-funded HERA JRP joint call (see list A below). Secondly, work package 7 – 8 refer to the additional activities planned to a) to stimulate and support capacity-building for humanities scholars to participate in trans-national calls, to engage in multidisciplinary problem solving, to collaborate with different types of stakeholders and to stimulate them to engage with all Horizon 2020 challenges and b) strengthen and enlarge the network and to prepare for new joint activities (see list B below). Both additional work packages ensure coordination of activities with related European programmes such as e.g. the Trans-Atlantic and the EU-Indian Platform, NORFACE and Net4Society. Furthermore, links with activities such as the “Social Platform on Reflective Societies”, the “Communication and Dissemination Platform”, the “Social Innovation Community” and the “Platform for ICT for Learning and Inclusion” are realised as well.

### **A. Activities related to the co-funded call and the consortium management**

- WP1: Consortium Management
- WP2: Preparation and publication of the Joint Call
- WP3: Evaluation of Proposals (steps I and II)
- WP4: Negotiations and start of Trans-national Research Projects
- WP5: Monitoring and financial administration of Trans-national of Research Projects
- WP6: Knowledge Exchange and Communication

### **B. Additional activities**

- WP7: Capacity-building and Embedding
- WP8: Strengthening the network and exploring and preparing for new joint actions

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<sup>17</sup> HERA ERA-NET Cofund Proposal

### **ANNEX 3. EVOLUTION OF THE ERA-NET INSTRUMENT UNDER FP6, FP7 AND H2020**

#### ***Under FP6***

The EU 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (FP6) launched a research funding scheme called ERA-NET (European Research Area Networks) in order to support transnational coordination, networking and collaboration of national research agendas and programmes in different thematic areas of research. The ERA-NET scheme aims at giving a framework for capacity building through knowledge sharing and identification of good practices within a specific research community (e.g. via joint trainings and workshops) as well as strategic alignment through the joint elaboration of research agendas (e.g. via meetings with national representatives) and operational alignment, especially through the design of joint calls.

#### ***Under FP7***

However, the FP6 ERA-NET scheme was only focused on supporting coordination and networking activities and did not allow for direct EC co-funding of joint research activities. Therefore, an additional module was created under the 7th Framework Programme (FP7): this new funding instrument, the ERA-NET Plus, was implemented in parallel of the first ERA-NET scheme and allowed the European Commission to co-fund joint transnational calls for research projects on specific subjects. This allowed for a significant increase of the average budget per transnational call launched under an ERA-NET (from 8 M€ with an ERA-NET to 19 M€ with an ERA-NET Plus).

#### ***Under Horizon 2020***

For more overall consistency and simplification, both funding instruments (ERA-NET and ERA-NET Plus) were merged under Horizon 2020 into one single funding scheme called ERA-NET Cofund: this latter mainly consists in the co-funding of a joint transnational call by the EC on a specific large-scale research topic of high value at the European level and can also support networking activities around the joint call.

*Source:* The ERA-NET scheme from FP6 to Horizon 2020 (J. Niehoff, 2014)