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## ERA-LEARN – Supporting ERA-NETs

Welcome to the first biannual ERA-LEARN newsletter, where we bring you news and updates on ERA-LEARN and related ERA-NET activities.

Today more than 50 countries participate in ERA-NETs, which encourage EU member states and other countries to combine their existing research and development resources on projects in areas of common interest.

The networks implement around 35 calls per year and to date over 100 ERA-NET or ERA-NET plus activities have received funding through FP6 and FP7 up to the end of 2010.

To help facilitate ERA-NETs, the European Commission launched the ERA-NET Learning Platform in 2008. Its function is to offer opportunities for ERA-NETs to learn from each other and exchange good practice.

And since the start of 2009, the Platform's support action ERA-LEARN has been assisting the ERA-NET community in several ways.

A major support through ERA-LEARN has been to establish an online 'toolbox' to facilitate ERA-NETs in mapping programmes and scientific capabilities, implementing calls and carrying out internal reviews.

The mapping tools help to generate inventories of participating programmes in ERA-NETs and to identify scientific landscape in partner countries.



Meanwhile, another suite of tools offer descriptions, recommendations and guidelines about implementing transnational call proposals.

The toolbox also provides models and questionnaires to aid the internal review of ERA-NETs and to generate clear strategies, as well as guides for positioning ERA-NETs in the context of other instruments and initiatives.

These tools, which have been developed through comprehensive analysis of existing and validated procedures, are available to the community through the online platform NETWATCH (<http://www.era-learn.eu>), which also carries news and information about upcoming events.

To improve these services, an advisory board was recently invited to accompany the ERA-LEARN project. This panel of individuals from nine different organisations represents the views of stakeholders. Its mandate includes monitoring and discussing the activities and outcomes of ERA-LEARN, advocating the use of those outcomes, assisting in reviewing ERA-LEARN and helping to define its future activities.

ERA-LEARN continues to provide a forum for discussion of ERA-NET projects, challenges and experiences, and through outreach initiatives such as this newsletter it highlights news and projects of interest to ERA-NET participants.

## ERA-NET Participation Grows

The results are rolling in, and they show that ERA-NETs are growing in popularity. Analysis of the NETWATCH database, which provides an information platform for transnational R&D programme collaboration, shows that all EU Member States are highly involved in the ERA-NET scheme, the EU's main initiative for fostering R&D collaboration between countries.

In all, a total of 51 countries (including EU Member States, countries associated with the EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development and third countries) currently participate in the ERA-NET scheme.

This is a 27 per cent increase on the numbers participating in 2008. France and Germany are currently the leading participants, although there is significant involvement of a group of smaller countries, including Austria, Finland, The Netherlands and Belgium. Among associated countries, the most active are Turkey, Norway, Switzerland and Israel.

These findings are outlined in the report "Mapping ERA-NETs across Europe: overview of the ERA-NET scheme and its results", published by the JRC's Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS).

The update, published in January 2011, highlights that the most relevant thematic priorities for the ERA-NETs are: nanosciences and nanotechnologies (15 per cent of the total) and food, agriculture and fisheries (13 per cent). Meanwhile, health and environment each represent around 10 per cent.

Another update is scheduled for May 2011, but coordinators can continuously update information, on their own initiative, as and when necessary. The twice-yearly information updates are to ensure that the information is as complete as possible for the scheduled mapping and monitoring of ERA-NETs. You can see the full JRC Press Release here:

<http://ipts.jrc.ec.europa.eu/publications/pub.cfm?id=3919>

## Mapping a Broader Vision for the Seas



The health of our seas affects us all – whether through food supply, energy, biodiversity, security or a host of other contributions the ocean makes to our lives. There's a sizeable economic impact too: three to five per cent of Europe's Gross Domestic Product is generated from sea-related activities.

But how do you co-ordinate research efforts on such a vast and borderless resource? SEAS-ERA is looking to link research across participating Member States and others, in order to better understand and manage the seas around us.

The process started in the 6th Framework Programme, where initiatives looked to consolidate areas of marine and maritime research, explains Dr Joan Albaigés Riera of the Ministry of Science and Innovation in Barcelona.

He now co-ordinates SEAS-ERA, launched last year, which is looking to overarch these efforts, establish priorities and support more integrated marine-policy making in Europe.



"The idea was to continue with the process of implementing common strategy in Europe among the different funding

organisations, to enable better co-operation and co-ordination of the different initiatives regarding science and innovation," says Dr Albaigés.

One of the key drivers is to link into national research efforts and make better use of the resources already in place, and Dr Albaigés notes it makes sense for Member States to work together on common issues relating to the seas. "The sea has no borders," he says.

During this first year of SEAS-ERA, a goal is to develop the European marine/maritime research agenda: "This will be the first time that we get this broader vision about the main issues, the gaps, the priorities that need to be developed at European level," says Dr Albaigés.

So far, 20 European marine-research funding organisations have joined SEAS-ERA, and when combined with activity that covers the Baltic region (BONUS), it becomes clear from the map that much of coastal Europe is covered.

The initiative is looking at both pan-European issues as well as more regional questions.

“SEAS-ERA has two main axes,” explains Dr Albaigés. “One is the pan-European and the other is the regional, which encompasses the Atlantic, the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. And by the end of the year we will have a forum for everybody to establish the pan-European research agenda. This is the process we are engaged in.”

So what areas have they mapped out? One is the scientific knowledge of marine systems, such as oceanography and biodiversity, explains Dr Albaigés. Another looks at the sustainable use of resources, while a third looks at how to combine science and governance. And while the seas have no borders, countries do: so a key goal in SEAS-ERA is to create an environment where information can be shared easily.

“Trust is fundamental, and one of the scopes of this initiative is to build this kind of new, more friendly scenario for sharing and co-operating,” says Dr Albaigés.

The hope is to build the co-operative structure and put together common programmes with a view to a Joint Programming Initiative in the 8th Framework that will focus on healthy and productive seas and oceans.

“It is rather ambitious but at least we would like to work along these lines and establish a good vision of what is the present state of the art and what is needed for the next 10 or 15 years,” he says. “And I think it’s a good strategy to start with topical initiatives and then overarch and overarch and overarch.”

For more information see <http://www.seas-era.eu>

## SEAS-ERA at a Glance

Launched in May 2010

48-month period under the coordination of Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (MICINN)

Currently 19 marine-research funding organisations from 20 countries signed up

Aim to co-ordinate national activities in marine and maritime research

Focus on science, sustainable use and governance

View to building a Joint Programming Initiative in the 8th Framework Programme

And there are plenty more developments in the research pipeline that stand to make computers even more powerful and useful. But how do you keep on the crest of such a fast-moving wave?

CHIST-ERA (European Coordinated Research on Long term Challenges in Information and Communication Sciences and Technologies), is taking an innovative approach to this challenge – bringing small groups together to work on emerging areas, asking the risky questions with the big potential returns.

“It’s very hard to have a structure and co-ordination actions that is able to handle very hot topics around the cutting edge of research, this is the starting point,” says Dr Raymond Fournier of the French National Research Agency (ANR).

Dr Fournier is programme manager for CHIST-ERA which looks to engage with new ideas in emerging areas of ICT.

## Moving Quickly to Capture New Ideas in ICT



We all know how rapidly the world of ICT changes: the mobile phone you have today is probably far faster, smaller and more powerful than the one you had just a few years ago.



“The first CHIST-ERA (2010/11) call is considered a pilot for the new way to co-ordinate research and address very new

topics where there are not a lot of publications and there are a lot of teams working on it. The idea is to bring together little teams in many countries to build projects on very new topics,” he says.

“So it is innovative and risky research with a high return, and the sizes of the teams are small because we want

to catch these topics at the beginning of the growth - the idea is to bring all the small teams working on this topic in Europe to build a critical mass."

To help the ERA-NET capture new and fresh ideas, there's a short period between deciding the two topics for each call and actually making the call itself.

CHIST-ERA's first call, covering the topics of quantum information and moving toward 'consciousness' in computing, received over 30 proposals and successful applicants are expected to start work in the summer.

"These subjects are very hot and there is a high potential," says Dr Fournier.

CHIST-ERA has recently been deciding which topics to cover in the second call, which should be made in September, and their approach looks to accommodate innovation.

"Because we work with very new ideas it means the people and scientists in charge of building the calls don't want to focus too much on a topic," says Dr Fournier. "If we want to catch new ideas we have to let some degrees of freedom."

At present, 10 countries are involved in CHIST-ERA, and the hope is that a future, second phase will enlarge cooperation within and beyond Europe.

"We are open, people want to share this vision of novelty and this idea that we need a European tool of this short cycle from ideas to process the concept of these ideas," says Dr Fournier. "We are always looking for new progress."

For more information see <http://www.chistera.eu>

## CHIST-ERA at a Glance

Launched in May 2010

Covers emerging areas in ICT

First call covered quantum information foundation technologies and the challenges of moving beyond autonomic system to 'consciousness'

Short period between deciding two topics for each call and issuing the call – this allows for the capture of new, fresh ideas in rapidly emerging fields

Second call to be issued in September

## Joint Programming: Addressing the Grand Challenges Together

Sometimes challenges are so large, and affect society so deeply, that joint efforts across borders and disciplines need to be mobilised to tackle them.

Following public consultation, in 2008 the European Council asked the Commission and Member States to espouse this approach in the form of joint programming.

This involves pooling the resources that exist at a national level with a view to looking at key areas in which citizens across Europe have a stake: the health-related, social, technological and environmental "grand challenges".

Under the new process of joint programming, Member States work together to develop a vision for a particular challenge and define strategies and instruments to address it.

The following year, 2009, saw the launch of a pilot Joint Programming Initiative to tackle neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer's disease. Under this umbrella, 24 member states are combining research efforts to speed progress in our understanding of degenerative brain diseases with a view to better prevention, diagnosis, management and provision of treatment.

In April 2010, the Commission launched Joint Programming Initiatives to tackle three further areas of challenge: Agriculture, Food security and Climate Change; Cultural Heritage and Global Change and A Healthy Diet for a Healthy Life.

At the end of last year, new guidelines were set out to help facilitate Joint Programming Initiatives, and the Commission is currently considering additional challenges that would benefit from the approach.

## JPI-FACCE – Towards Sustainable Food Production in Europe

Every human needs food. But as the global demand for food increases – and is expected to double by 2050 – climate change is also threatening agriculture and food security.

Against this backdrop the FACCE-JPI, a Joint Programming Initiative

on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change, is bringing 20 European Member States together to address the intertwined issues.

Dr Heather McKhann, a European Officer at the French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) and a member of the FACCE-JPI Secretariat, explains that the Joint Programming Initiative grew out of common ground identified among the INRA, the UK Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and Wageningen University.

"They had a workshop on agriculture and climate change - that was when this proposal was born," she says. "And one of the priorities for the UK was food security, so it seemed important with agriculture and climate change to bring in food security too."



Accepted in 2009 and officially launched in 2010, the FACCE-JPI convened a scientific advisory board of 12 experts from

Europe and internationally. Together they identified five core themes covering sustainable agriculture, adaptation to climate change and greenhouse gas mitigation.

In March 2011, the FACCE-JPI Governing Board confirmed the pilot action theme of 'Sustainable food security under climate change'. The theme will examine how climate variability and change will affect regional farming systems in the near and far future, and look at the risks and opportunities for European agriculture, explains Dr McKhann.

"It's a detailed climate change risk assessment for European agriculture in a global context, and it will be in collaboration with an international programme, the Agricultural Modelling, Intercomparison and Improvement Project (AgMIP)," she says.

"The instrument is based on the Scandinavian system of centres of excellence. The idea is to bring together researchers in a virtual centre and have workshops and common protocols. The call is expected to be opening this summer and there will be a first action beginning at the start of 2012."

In practice, Member States in the JPI will opt into the calls on a voluntary basis depending on their own research priorities and expertise, notes Dr McKhann. "It could be that 10 countries are really interested in mitigation so they want to work on that while the other 10 are more interested in adaptation."



She stresses that the JPI approach involves not only calls but also the coordination of research programmes and alignment between Member States. And she highlights the need for FACCE-JPI to engage with existing and emerging ERA-NETS. "One

of the things that are very important is interacting with the ERA-NETS that already exist as well as the ones that are coming out now, as there are a lot of new international initiatives that are almost or partly on the same theme."

For more information see <http://www.faccejpi.com>  
Contact: [SecretariatJPI@paris.inra.fr](mailto:SecretariatJPI@paris.inra.fr)

### Strategy Meeting on Joint Programming

One of the issues highlighted by the Europe 2020 and the Innovation Union is fragmentation and duplication of research. Against this backdrop, Member States in the EU are being encouraged to facilitate collaboration across their borders.

The focus of a major workshop in Brussels on April 7<sup>th</sup> was to discuss the future of Joint Programming and its instruments in the context of the Green Paper "From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation funding" and the related open consultation

([http://ec.europa.eu/research/csfr/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/research/csfr/index_en.cfm)).

Themes covered include a common framework for national and European strategies, partnerships within the Innovation Union and the road ahead for Joint Programming and its instruments.

([http://netwatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/nw/index.cfm/static/event\\_7.html](http://netwatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/nw/index.cfm/static/event_7.html))

## Save the Date

**Joint Programming** - our common initiative to tackle challenges more effectively in a few key areas is continuing to develop rapidly as a process. It aims to find common solutions to major societal challenges that Europe is facing where research can play a key role.

To discuss the latest policy thinking on Joint Programming of research and the coordination of national research programmes in general, the European Commission announces that it will organise a major event for research funders on **9 & 10 November 2011** in Brussels. You may wish to keep the dates free in your agendas!

The 2 day event will integrate the former "Annual ERA-NET events" and is expected to attract approximately 400 high-level participants (policy makers, funding bodies and other stakeholders).

Please note that participation to this event is **by invitation only**. More information on the programme and registration will follow soon.

## ERA-LEARN at a Glance

Building on the importance of the existing ERA-NET Learning Platform, the ERA-LEARN action is designed to create a toolbox for the entire ERA-NET community. The Learning Platform, which was launched by the European Commission in 2008, has the ultimate goals of reducing the costs of cross-border programmes and increasing the efficiency of call implementation. Beginning in 2009, ERA-LEARN supports the Learning Platform in generating new tools. This 'ERA-NET for ERA-NETs' aims to streamline and drive the scheme forward, and to encourage the networks established to continue fostering collaborations well beyond the lifespan of their specific activity.

For further information please contact:  
[era-learn-feedback@ffg.at](mailto:era-learn-feedback@ffg.at)



Hands-on workshop: On March 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, Berlin hosted a workshop on implementing ERA-NETs. By using the ERA-LEARN Toolbox, participants learned more about the approaches, context and the practical questions and challenges experienced when implementing an ERA-NET. The next workshop is scheduled for fall, 2011.