

Group 2 – FP6 and FP7: The invention of the European Research Area



At the time of the 6th Framework Programme (FP6), the efforts in harmonizing European research got an entirely new dimension by the invention of the idea of a European Research Area (ERA), including all research and development activities, programmes and policies in Europe which involve a transnational perspective.

The European Research Area (ERA)

The creation of a European Research Area was proposed by the European Commission in its communication “Towards a European Research Area“ of January 2000. The objective of creating ERA was endorsed by the EU shortly afterwards at the March 2000 Lisbon European Council.

The European Research Area is composed of all research and development activities, programmes and policies in Europe which involve a transnational perspective. Together, they enable researchers, research institutions and businesses to increasingly circulate, compete and co-operate across borders. The main aim was to give them access to a Europe-wide open space for knowledge and technologies in which transnational synergies and complementarities are fully exploited.

The development of ERA was needed to overcome the fragmentation of research in Europe along national and institutional barriers. Fragmentation prevents Europe from fulfilling its research and innovation potential, at a huge cost to Europeans as taxpayers, consumers, and citizens.

In particular:

- Researchers still see their career opportunities reduced by legal and practical barriers, which limit their possibilities to move between institutions, sectors and countries.
- Businesses often find it difficult to cooperate and enter into partnerships with research institutions in Europe, particularly across borders.
- National and regional research funding remains largely uncoordinated. This leads to a dispersion of resources, excessive duplications, and more generally a poor use of the resources that we collectively devote to research and innovation in Europe.
- Research system reforms undertaken at national level often lack a true European perspective and transnational coherence.
- On the world scene, there is almost no coordination of international S&T strategies and activities between the Member States and between them and these of the EU. As a result, Europe fails to take the leading role that it could have, notably to respond to major global challenges.

For these reasons, developing ERA was very important for Europe's future prosperity. The globalisation of research and technology was accelerating and new scientific and technological powers, notably China, India and other emerging economies, attracted considerable amounts of R&D investments.

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In the years 2000-2006, many actions were taken to progress in creating ERA.

- In 2002, the Barcelona European Council set a target for EU R&D investment intensity to approach 3% of GDP. Subsequently, the Commission proposed an extensive action plan to increase and improve R&D expenditure in Europe and all Member States set national R&D investment targets linked to the overall 3% objective.
- Policy coordination is addressed through the 'open method of coordination' and the use of voluntary guidelines and recommendations, stimulating a process of debate and reforms at national level.
- EU cohesion policy and its financial instruments - the Structural Funds - give strong priority to the development of research and innovation capacities, particularly in less developed regions. Together with the priority given in most Member States' internal policies, this can help the whole of Europe to participate in and derive full benefit from the European Research Area. These initiatives are valuable steps on which further progress can be built.
- Further to that, the EU Research Framework Programmes were explicitly designed to support the creation of ERA.

In FP6 two blocks contributing to the ERA were introduced: “Structuring the ERA” (including Research & Innovation, Human Resources and Mobility (Marie Curie Actions), Research Infrastructures, Science and Society) and “Strengthening the foundations of ERA” (including Coordination of research activities and development of research/innovation policies).

The **Seventh Framework Programme (FP7)** finally bundles all research-related EU initiatives together under a common roof playing a crucial role in reaching the goals of growth, competitiveness and employment; along with a new Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP), Education and Training programmes, and Structural and Cohesion Funds for regional convergence and competitiveness. It is therefore a key pillar for the European Research Area (ERA). The broad objectives of FP7 have been grouped into four categories: **Cooperation, Ideas, People** and **Capacities**. For each type of objective, there is a specific programme corresponding to the main areas of EU research policy. All specific programmes work together to promote and encourage the creation of European poles of (scientific) excellence.

- Many further initiatives were launched to improve the coordination of research activities and programmes. They include the European Technology Platforms, through which industry and other stakeholders develop shared long-term visions and strategic research agendas in areas of business interest, and the bottom-up ERA-Net scheme which supports the coordination of national and regional programmes.

Sources: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/index_en.htm - accessed 12.07.12; “Priority-setting in the European Research Framework Programmes” by Dan Andr ee, VinnoVA Analysis VA 2009:17