POLICY BRIEF   September 2016

Monitoring and evaluation of P2P initiatives

In the context of tighter budgets and more public attention to the effectiveness of public funding and EU-funded research, there is a need to demonstrate the performance, impact and added value of EU programmes.

Horizon 2020 has marked a shift towards the use of indicators that aim to capture results and impacts. While the focus of evaluation under past EU Framework Programmes for research has primarily been on analysing participant characteristics, R&D inputs and EU-funded project outputs, the emphasis under Horizon 2020 is to assess its impact on Europe's scientific and technological performance and research capacity and more widely on the European economy and society. For the first time, the Horizon 2020 has introduced key performance indicators, which form the basis for the monitoring and evaluation for Horizon 2020.

Similarly, more emphasis has been placed on shedding light on the results and impacts of P2P networks.[1] This goal is supported through the ERA-learn initiative, which aims at developing and supporting more comprehensive and cohesive reporting practices as well as developing a common impact assessment framework for P2P networks.

This policy briefs introduces the P2P level outcomes and results to date and good practices regarding the monitoring and evaluation of the P2P networks. The policy brief is based on the research carried out under the ERA-learn initiative.

P2P outcomes and results to date

There are around 80 active P2P networks, comprised of around 25 ERA-NETs, 13 ERA-NET plus, 25 ERA-Net Co-funds, 10 JPIs, and 13 self-sustained networks.[2] Since 2004, the P2P networks have implemented over 450 calls, and 97 calls under Horizon 2020. A majority of the calls under Horizon2020 have been implemented under ERA-Nets.

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[1] P2P networks cover: JPIs, Article 185 initiatives, EN FP7 (the FP7 ERA-NET Coordination and Support Actions), EN+ (the FP7 ERA-NET Plus Instrument), EN Cofund (the Horizon 2020 ERA-NET Cofund Instrument)

[2] https://www.era-learn.eu/network-information/networks/view

According to the Annual Report (2015) on P2P Partnerships[3], by the June 2015 the P2Ps had mobilised a cumulative pre-call budget of just over Euro 5 billion with the actual investment in projects standing at around Euro 4.5 billion. The annual budget has been increasing, and is expected to reach around Euro 1 billion in 2016. For the period 2017-2020, based on current data, there are already an estimated 155 joint calls planned, with a total budget of more than Euro 2.5 billion. The number of funded projects by June 2015 was around 4,500, giving an average of 10 per call. The average project budget is highest for the FP7 ERA-NET Plus and H2020 ERA-NET Co-fund projects.

While there is a tradition to report and collect these P2P level outputs, by the European Commission and the ERA-learn initiative, there is no comprehensive data available of the outcomes and impacts of P2Ps, and the funded projects. ERA-learn initiative has carried out meta-level assessments on the experiences of P2Ps, which shed light on the factors affecting their impacts and the areas, in which the impacts are expected to occur.

A recent study[4] (University of Manchester 2015) found that 'programme interoperability' or 'operational alignment', that is, compatible timing across different programmes, common or compatible rules in funding and participation in research activities and common procedures for project monitoring / evaluation, is of major importance affecting almost all types of perceived impacts. Secondly, benefits in relation to 'opening up national programmes to transnational research areas' presented reliance on a different set of factors that related to the level of complementarity between the national programme and the ERA-NET and the existence of cooperation agreements between the national programmes. Complementarity and synergies between the national programme and the ERA-NET were also important for achieving high impacts in relation to 'new types of research projects' and 'new researchers, with no prior international or European experience, benefiting from joint activities'. A third key finding worth noting is that joint activities that relate to knowledge access and sharing are important for achieving high impacts both in relation to 'higher quality of research funded at the national level' as well as 'opening up the scope of national programmes to transnational research areas'.

These findings also apply to JPIs. The study found the impacts of JPIs emerging in six areas: capacity building, enduring connectivity, attitude/cultural change, conceptual, structural and instrumental impacts. According to the study, the main impacts in these categories were:
- The connectivity of JPIs was positively evaluated by the policy makers and project beneficiaries.
- There is identifiable evidence of new capacity-building being produced by the JPI programme in subject areas where previously transnational collaboration amongst Member States was poor or non-existent. This is relevant for research enabled by the JPIs in the areas of agricultural research, neuro-degenerative research, cultural heritage, anti-microbial resistance or water research for instance.
- Within Member States there are clearly impacts in attitudes manifested in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches being adopted in the research areas addressed by JPI.
- There is already evidence of conceptual impact through participation in the JPIs and a resultant increased awareness amongst national governments to specific issues and topics. JPI participation is an argument to draw the attention of the national government to the relevant subject and there is

[3]https://www.era-learn.eu/monitoring-and-assessment/Monitoring%20and%20impact%20assessment%20of%20networks/ERALEARN2020AnnualRep ortonP2PPartnershipsNo.1FINAL.pdf
[4]University of Manchester (2015). Deliverable 3.2. Policy Brief on Impact assessment of networks -2015. Accessed 24 August 2016 https://www.era-learn.eu/monitoring-and-assessment/Monitoring%20and%20impact%20assessment%20of%20networks/copy_of_ERALEARN_2020_ D3.2_Final_Exec_Sum.pdf

some early indication that participation in a JPI by a Member State increases the visibility and draws more attention to that subject.

- New, inter-ministerial forms or structures have been created responding to the need to coordinate national participation in P2Ps. Structural impacts also emerged from developing SRIAs, which have affected the national strategies.

Towards a comprehensive framework for monitoring and evaluation of P2P networks[5]

The P2P networks must report the call results and from the funded projects after the end of the projects to the European Commission[6]. Although these P2P level outputs and project results are centrally collected and reported, project-level output and impact assessment is still the exception rather than the rule for P2P networks. ERA-learn implemented a mapping of 27 ERA-Net Co-fund actions, which indicated that around 50 percent of them had a specific task to assess impact of funded projects. In addition to the Co-funds, several of the JPIs have developed monitoring and evaluation frameworks and this includes their intentions with regard to project-level assessment. These include JPI FACCE, AMR, Cultural Heritage, Oceans, and ND. There are also several ERA-nets, implemented under the FP7, which have pioneered impact assessment at the project level. These include for example ICT AGRI, M.ERA.NET, INNO INDIGO, BiodivErsa.

Although to date these P2P networks have demonstrated different approaches and practices on monitoring and evaluation, the most common approach is a logic model that considers six main steps, including:

- Inputs (human and financial resources, knowledge, facilities)
- Activities (the research and/or innovation project)
- Outputs (deliverables of the project)
- Outcomes (what has been achieved by the beneficiaries based on the project outputs)
- Direct Impacts (short term impacts for the beneficiary and/or those directly affected)
- Indirect Impacts (longer term economic, social and/or environmental impacts)

The first three points are covered by project monitoring activities while the latter three (i.e. outcomes, direct impacts and indirect impacts) are the focus for impact evaluation of projects, which are funded through joint calls. In addition to monitoring and impact assessment on project level, execution of calls and call procedures have been a subject of assessment.

In the following sub-chapters, the policy brief introduces good practices for the monitoring and evaluation of the P2P networks, drawing from ERA-learn monitoring and evaluation guidelines[7] as well as evaluations carried out by the P2P networks to date.[8]

Monitoring inputs, activities and outputs

Monitoring is based on following and reporting progress towards some key indicators on a call and project level. On a call level, the followed key output indicators should monitor the response to a call, and the monitoring information can be retrieved from the project proposals submitted to the call. These indicators should shed light on the "inputs", defined in the evaluation model. On a call level, the key indicators should include:

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[5] This chapter is based on ERA-learn material https://www.era-learn.eu/monitoring-and-assessment/reference-library
[6] Only the P2P networks that are co-funded through the European Commission's Framework Programme
[7] https://www.era-learn.eu/manuals-tools/call-implementation/after-the-call
[8] https://www.era-learn.eu/monitoring-and-assessment/reference-library

> Number of submitted proposals (stage 1 & 2)
> Number of applicants involved
> Number of funded projects and overall success rate
> Total costs and requested (or accepted) funding
> Number of proposals (projects) per funding programme, per region, per country
> Number of project coordinators per funding programme, per region, per country
> Average number of applicants per project consortium
> Average number of regions/countries per project consortium
> Response to thematic sub-topics
> Composition of consortia in terms of organisation type (e.g. SME, IND, RES, HE)
> Requested (or accepted) funding per participating programme, per region, per country
> Transnational networking of applicants –who cooperates with whom?

While the call level monitoring focuses on the response to the call, the project level monitoring should follow the project activities (e.g. research, capacity building, networking, communication, management) and outputs. The project activities can be followed through monitoring the projects' achievements towards project milestones, which can be reported periodically or at the end of a project. The monitoring should also go beyond just reporting the progress towards milestones, and capturing the immediate outcomes (e.g. publication, public events, dissemination activities) and intermediate outcomes (patent applications, new methods or tools etc.), which depend on the focus of the calls.

While in the common reporting and monitoring the focus should be on the total project each funding agency participating in the joint call normally require reporting from the project partner they are funding.

Analysing the impact of joint calls
The impact evaluation goes beyond monitoring of the projects. Analysis of impact is normally an activity that is carried out after completion of the funded projects and, depending on the type of impacts being considered, may need to be several year afterwards. Yet, the monitoring data collected during the lifetime of the projects may feed into the impact evaluation.

The basis for all impact assessments should be the specific objectives of the joint call and the global objectives of the wider P2P network. The type of research funded by the P2P network either through one of the Horizon 2020 instruments (ERA-NET Cofund, Article 185) or without EU co-funding (e.g. by a JPI or a self-sustaining ERA-NET) will also have a bearing on what the expected impact of the funded research should be. For example, basic research projects will have different outcomes and impacts than those that are focussed on industrial R&D for the benefit of SMEs.

The impacts of the P2P projects can be captured through interim and ex-post impact monitoring as well as surveys to funded projects. The impacts of the P2P networks are expected to emerge in the following areas:

- Networking and collaboration activities (Publishing, Joint Training, Capacity Building, Guidelines for Collaboration, Network Development, Network Sustainability, Research Continuity, Mobilisation of Additional Funding, Behavioral Changes, Improved Collaboration Coordination)
- Research (Additionality, Knowledge Exchange, Innovations, Standards Formulation, IP, Creation of new knowledge, Development of Scientific Field, Knowledge Dissemination, Formation of Human Capital)

Impact assessment of transnational research projects should consider not only the absolute outcomes and impacts but also the relative added value compared with national projects.

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Call procedures

The execution of joint calls and the evaluation and selection of the R&D projects will be followed by joint monitoring of procedures (call mechanics) in order to enable an acceleration of internal processes and efficient use of resources during future calls. This can include an internal as well as an external view on the quality of call management and include all phases of a joint call, including preparation and submission of proposals, feedback from the agencies and preparation of contracts, as well as support provided for the projects during call implementation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the context of more public attention to the effectiveness of public funding and EU-funded research, there is a growing need to demonstrate the performance, impact and added value of EU programmes. This applies also to P2P networks. While there is a tradition to monitor and report the P2P level outputs, project-level output and impact assessment is still the exception rather than the rule for P2P networks, and there is no comprehensive data available on their results and impacts.

Understanding the results, impacts and added value of P2P networks would be beneficial for the European Commission, all participating funding agencies, as well as the P2P network manager themselves. Therefore, P2P initiatives should be encouraged to capture the results and impacts and the ERA-learn initiative should continue its work towards developing a common impact assessment framework for P2P.

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