

## DISCUSSION MATERIAL FOR SESSION 2

The following is an abstract from the “Study on Research Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region: Existing Networks, Obstacles and Ways Forward,” report written by Visionary Analytics with the support from Ventspils High Technology Park, ordered by Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia in 2017. The whole [report](#) and the [executive summary](#) are accessible [here](#).

### General cooperation patterns in the EU

The data suggests that:

- Germany, Italy, UK, France, Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium form central positions within the networks. This is hardly surprising, given that these countries are leaders in terms of number of FP funded projects and size of secured share of the FP budget.
- The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) do intensively cooperate with each other. However, links with FP leading countries (Germany, UK, France, etc.) are at least as important as the links between Nordic countries.
- The Eastern BSR countries (particularly Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) are at the periphery of the network and more frequently cooperate with researchers from Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, France, Italy and Spain rather than with other BSR researchers.
- Researchers from EU-13 tend to join large H2020 projects that cover all or nearly all of the EU-28 countries and therefore, in relative terms, cooperate very closely (because the EU-13 are overall involved in a relatively small number of projects). The leading Western EU countries (Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, etc.) are important partners for EE, LV, LT and PL, but the reverse does not hold true.<sup>1</sup>
- While the Nordic countries have been able to jointly develop a Nordic research and innovation area supported by transnational governance structures (such as NordForsk), such mechanisms (and funding for such initiatives) are absent in the BSR macro-region.
- National and regional operational programmes outlining priorities for the European Structural and Investment Funds do little to coordinate national investments with the transnational framework.
- A significant share of current cooperation is driven by the partners’ perceptions on how to maximise their chances in securing funding from the FPs. Therefore, cooperation is mostly

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<sup>1</sup> Study on Research Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region: Existing Networks, Obstacles and Ways Forward, Visionary Analytics, 2017. Section 4.1.

project-driven and does not necessarily lead to structured partnerships or long-term joint activities.<sup>2</sup>

### Obstacles behind low levels of participation and cooperation

During the discussions on the design of the FPs, two distinct approaches on fostering participation of the EU-13 resurfaced repeatedly. The first approach emphasises the excellence of R&I as the central pillar of FPs. It argues that researchers from all MS should participate under equal conditions and the overall excellence of the proposal should be the main criteria for awarding funding. However, the current number of centres of excellence in the EU-15 is insufficient to secure Europe’s global competitiveness. The second approach emphasises a widening of participation. Interviews with researchers from the EU-13<sup>3</sup> suggest that a lack of contacts and networks as well as a lack of experience with similar funding schemes (rather than excellence *per se*) are among the most important obstacles to successful participation in FPs. If given more chances to develop networks and engage in learning-by-doing, researchers from the EU-13 may develop the capacities necessary for subsequent participation on equal footing with the EU-15. Both approaches to obstacles for participation indirectly refer to the Matthew effect. To counter this dynamic, researchers from LV, LT and PL should “run twice as fast” to catch-up with other organisations in the EU-15.<sup>4</sup>

The surveyed participants argue that the **quality of a proposal** is the main factor behind success and failure. On the other hand, the excellence of proposals does not necessarily equal excellence in research and innovation activities. Close to half of the respondents argued that international recognition of the consortium leader (42%) and the experience of the proposal writers (38%) were among the most important factors behind success. In contrast, only 12% of respondents viewed frontier research as a very important factor. Furthermore, 52% of respondents argued that “bad luck” was an important factor behind unsuccessful proposals<sup>4</sup>. A large share of respondents argued that a **lack of staff with necessary skills** and experience in drafting proposals prevents them from coordinating more proposals for Horizon 2020. This could be explained by two factors. First, research units in LV, LT and PL had limited opportunities to engage in learning-by-doing, because: a) they have comparatively less experience with coordinating projects funded by FPs and b) competitive national funding of R&I has been only recently introduced to LV, LT and PL. Second, developing the necessary systems, processes and skills lags behind. It seems that the development of such capacities was not at the top of priorities in most organisations due to: a) a predominant focus on teaching, rather than research in most universities in LV, LT and PL; b) a perceived lack of R&I excellence (self-selection not to participate); c) a perceived lack of preconditions (network of

<sup>2</sup> Section 4.3 of the same study.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, „Assessment of the Impact of the 6th Framework Programme on new Member States“, 44–

<sup>4</sup> Study on Research Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region: Existing Networks, Obstacles and Ways Forward, Visionary Analytics, 2017, Section 5.

partners) necessary for successful competition; d) low success rates that reduce incentives to invest in the necessary capacities. On the other hand, **limited funds** also sometimes lead to tensions within networks, whereby each member seeks to secure a higher share of the budget in the event of success. Interviewed researchers feel that they lack leverage in such negotiations due to their limited past experience with FPs and the low prestige of researchers from Eastern Europe. Therefore, they decide to limit their own investments in proposal preparation by choosing the role of partner rather than Coordinator.<sup>4</sup>

Other barriers mentioned by the respondents were high-perceived administrative burden for coordinators of projects, perceived lack of transparency, very low success rates and limited funding for fundamental research, the under-defined national and institutional priorities.<sup>5</sup>

**Networks** of researchers and institutions play a critical role in implementing FP projects. This is because a single institution does not have all of the infrastructure and competences to carry out ambitious R&I work. Furthermore, specific programmes also fund cooperation, where a strong consortium is a prerequisite for securing funding. Interviewed researchers argued that most of the participation and cooperation opportunities emerge when partners are invited to join a consortium. Most of these partnerships have evolved from past collaborative work, including projects funded by the FP6, which explicitly aimed at building partnerships between the EU-15 and the EU-13. However, researchers that to date have not joined a well-established network, face difficulties in doing so. The successful consortia are reluctant to expand because a larger number of partners increase the costs of coordination. Furthermore, interviewed researchers also felt that they are not trusted enough to effectively contribute to specific tasks. Trust also played a very important role when interviewed researchers sought to become coordinators of projects. Well-regarded institutions from the EU-15 were reluctant to join efforts with project coordinators from EE, LV, LT and PL, if there was no prior collaborative experience. As a result, researchers from EE, LV, LT and PL usually were partners rather than coordinators of projects and played a peripheral rather than central role within the networks.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Section 6, same study.

<sup>6</sup> Section 5.3, same study.