CALL FOR CHAMPIONS
COOPERATE PROJECT

TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITEIT EINDHOVEN

CESKE VYSOKE UCENI TECHNICKE V PRAZE

STAM

BRAINPORT DEVELOPMENT NV

SCIENCE CITY LYNGBY

DANMARKS TEKNISKE UNIVERSITET

IDEA STRATEGISCHE ECONOMISCHE CONSULTING

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1. Introduction

In 2021 the Council of the European Union set the basis for the establishment of the European Research Area (ERA) and Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (Council of the European Union, 2021)[1], which foster the definition of priorities and policy agenda. One of the main outcomes of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 (European Commission, 2021)[2], was the intention to focus on Research and Innovation ecosystems for the benefit of regional/national competitiveness. From this, it followed the piloting and definition of the ERA Hubs. The latter are considered as "holistic knowledge strategies at regional level, based on a close collaboration of all relevant stakeholder of the quadruple helix and a structured collaboration of key regional, national and European policies and programmes that can support place based- innovation eco-systems" (European Commission, 2021, p. 18).

The **COOPERATE project is developing a framework and tools to support ecosystems achieve a higher level of integration and collaboration between quadruple helix actors in R&I activities by fostering knowledge valorisation. The COOPERATE project is therefore developing and piloting the ERA Hub concept**, benefitting from the successful examples of the EuroTech Universities Alliance and their R&I ecosystems.

For the COOPERATE project, the main building blocks to define the ERA Hub concept are: the mission; the thematic scope; the lines of actions and the actors involved. Another key component are the co-creation arenas, which allow Eurotech Universities members, their ecosystems and a broader community of quadruple helix actors to interact and exchange on the ERA Hub concept developed by the consortium. The **COOPERATE project** works toward the definition and testing of the ERA Hub concept among different European regions; based on interoperability, scalability and adaptability requisites; while the project outcomes (such as Toolbox, Playbook, Platform and Digital Tools) favour the implementation of the ERA Hub in different context and realities.

Through this "Call for Champions", two emerging ecosystems will be selected. Led by local universities, these ecosystems will receive support from the project to foster the collaboration and knowledge exchange in R&I activities between quadruple helix actors in accordance with their shared mission.

This includes the support in the assessment of the maturity of the ecosystem and the identification of actions that can help the ecosystem make progress taking into consideration the needs of the actors involved. Through mapping exercises, interviews and workshops, the selected ecosystems will have the opportunity to better define their orientation and mission, as well as to identify concrete steps for further development. The selected ecosystems will also have a direct involvement in the reflexions to define and apply the ERA Hubs concept in future EU policy (e.g. future European Commission´s R&I Framework Programme). They will have access to networking opportunities and an increased visibility within their regions and with other EU R&I ecosystems and stakeholders through the project´s co-creation sessions.

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[1] Council of the European Union. (2021, November 19). Council Conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA). Retrieved from https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14126-2021-INIT/en/pdf

[2] European Commission. (2021, November). European Research Area Policy Agenda. Overview of actions for the period 2022-2024. Retrieved from https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf

2. The concept of the ERA Hub

The "Call for Champions" targets emerging R&I ecosystems that are aligned with the ERA Policy and the Pact for R&I in Europe. Therefore, based on the experience and activities carried out within the COOPERATE project, the "Call for Champions" is meant to foster the maturity and growth of the ecosystems, while contributing to their path in becoming ERA Hubs. According to COOPERATE project, ERA Hubs are defined as:

"An ERA Hub is a central access point that stimulates the knowledge flow among quadruple helix actors to foster excellent and sustainable place-based R&I ecosystems. It provides a range of services to accelerate knowledge valorisation[3] and to improve interregional collaboration".

Being the catalyst of the quadruple helix[4] interaction, the ERA Hubs support intraregional excellence by fostering knowledge valorisation, intra and interregional collaboration and learning.

Universities are considered core actors of the R&I ecosystems as they have the potential to act as orchestrators of the broader ecosystem, fostering knowledge valorisation and exchange among quadruple helix actors[5]. This is in line with the evolving role of universities, which pays an increasing attention to giving response to changing societal needs.

The COOPERATE project has identified four types of ecosystems (see Table 1 - Types of ecosystems) showing the different maturity levels they can have. This maturity refers to the degree of interaction and coordination between the quadruple helix actors present in an ecosystem. This framework helps stakeholders understand where the ecosystem stands in terms of its networking and collaboration capabilities, identify areas for improvement, and determine appropriate strategies and interventions to advance the ecosystem toward higher levels of maturity.

Inspired by the "Local Ecosystem Readiness Levels"[6] and the "Technology Readiness Levels", the ERA Hub model developed within the project envisions different maturity levels, translated into a 1-5 scale called "Ecosystem Readiness Level" (ERL). These ERL combined with indicators of interactions[7] – ranging from networking to collaboration leads to the clustering of the four types of ecosystems mentioned in Table 1 - Types of ecosystems.

The Playbook and Toolbox developed by the COOPERATE project serve as valuable resources, offering guidance and support to improve various aspects of the ecosystem depending on their maturity level. These tools facilitate a structured approach to address areas of improvement and advance the ecosystem's journey towards becoming an ERA Hub.

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[3] Knowledge valorisation: see definition in the glossary at the end of the document

[4][4] Quadruple helix: see definition in the glossary at the end of the document

[5] Thomas, E., Faccin, K., & Asheim, B. T. (2021). Universities as orchestrators of the development of regional innovation ecosystems in emerging economies. Growth and Change, 52(2): 770-789.

[6] Lombardo, S., Sarri, D., Perna, C., Pagliai, A., De Pascale, V., Cencini, G., & Vieri, M. (2021). 90. Reliability of new technologies: local ecosystem readiness level, a composite index. In Precision agriculture'21 (pp. 753-759). Wageningen Academic.
7 Russell, M. G., & Smorodinskaya, N. V. (2018). Leveraging complexity for ecosystemic innovation. Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 136, 114-131. Adapted from: Camarihna-Matos, L. M., & Afsarmanesh, H. (2008). Concept of collaboration. In Encyclopedia of networked and virtual organizations (pp. 311-315). IGI Global.

Figure 1 - Levels of interaction and activity patterns.[8]

Non-existent	Emerging	Mature	Advanced
There is no or little interaction between the local actors involved in knowledge production, transfer and exploitation	There is some interaction between the local actors involved in knowledge production, transfer and exploitation but the coordination and development of joint activities is limited and requires further development.	There is interaction and coordination between the local actors involved in knowledge production, transfer and exploitation in the delivery of joint activities but there are major points requiring improvement	There is fluid interaction and coordination between the local actors involved in knowledge production, transfer and exploitation in the delivery of joint activities

Table 1 - Types of ecosystems

In addition, following the COOPERATE approach, the focus of the ERA Hubs is further unfolded into seven lines of actions:

1. **Research**: promoting high-quality research to contribute to the global knowledge.
2. **Talent**: providing opportunities for learning, training to spur talent development
3. **Knowledge valorisation**: facilitating the exchange of ideas with networking, dissemination, and collaboration activities.
4. **Funding**: boosting availability, visibility, and accessibility to relevant funding options
5. **Collaboration**: bringing together researchers, innovators, industry representatives, policymakers, and other stakeholders from different regions and sectors.
6. **Governance**: developing governance system to foster partnerships between the stakeholders of the quadruple helix
7. **Innovation**: encouraging innovation and the valorisation of ideas, leading to the development of new technologies, products, and services.

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[8] Russell, M. G., & Smorodinskaya, N. V. (2018). Leveraging complexity for ecosystemic innovation. Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 136, 114-131. Adapted from: Camarihna-Matos, L. M., & Afsarmanesh, H. (2008). Concept of collaboration. In Encyclopedia of networked and virtual organizations (pp. 311-315). IGI Global.
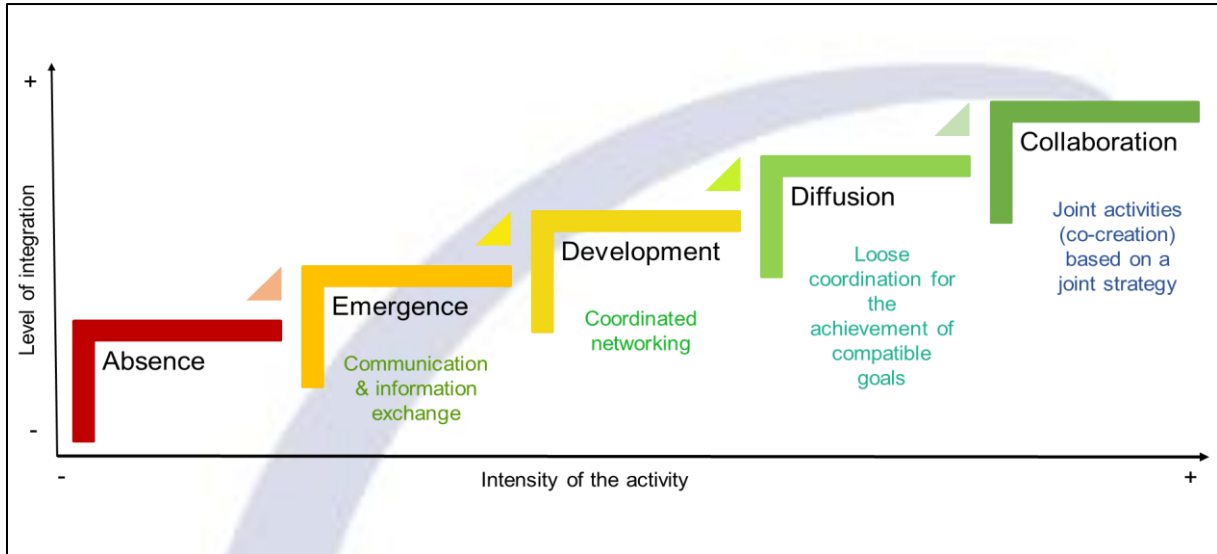
3. Call for Champions

The objective of the "Call for Champions" is to **select two emerging[9] ecosystems**, which **will benefit from the activities organised in the second phase of the piloting with the aim to progress in their path of becoming more advanced ecosystems (i.e. ERA Hubs)**. The two emerging ecosystems will be selected based on a series of criteria (see Eligibility Criteria and Evaluation criteria). The two selected ecosystems will come from different geographical areas to ensure a good geographical coverage.

The 2 ecosystems which will be selected through this call will benefit from:

- **Support and guidance provided by the COOPERATE consortium in their progress as ecosystem**
  - This includes the support in the assessment of the maturity of the ecosystem and the identification of actions that can help the ecosystem make progress taking into consideration the needs of the actors involved. Through mapping exercises, interviews and workshops, the ecosystems will have the opportunity to better define their orientation and mission as well as concrete steps for further development.
- **Direct involvement in the reflexions to define and apply the ERA Hubs concept in future EU policy** (e.g. future European Commission´s R&I Framework Programme).
- **Networking opportunities within their regions as well as with other EU ecosystems** and R&I stakeholders through the co-creation sessions
- **Increased visibility at European level and within the ERA community**

3.1 Overview of the "Call for Champions" within the COOPERATE project activities

In line with the overall scope of the project, the "Call for Champions" is designed based on the lessons learnt during the first piloting phase of the project. The first phase of the piloting consisted of testing the ERA Hub model developed within the project in the Czech ecosystem, in cooperation with the Dutch and Danish ones[10]. This piloting exercise helped to define the mission, the thematic scope, the lines of action and actors involved within the ERA Hub model. The image below summarises the piloting activities envisioned in the project.

This "Call for Champions" is an integral part of the approach (Phase 2 of the piloting actions) as it will allow to finetune the ERA Hubs concept and model, while being able to provide useful insights and support to the participant ecosystems.
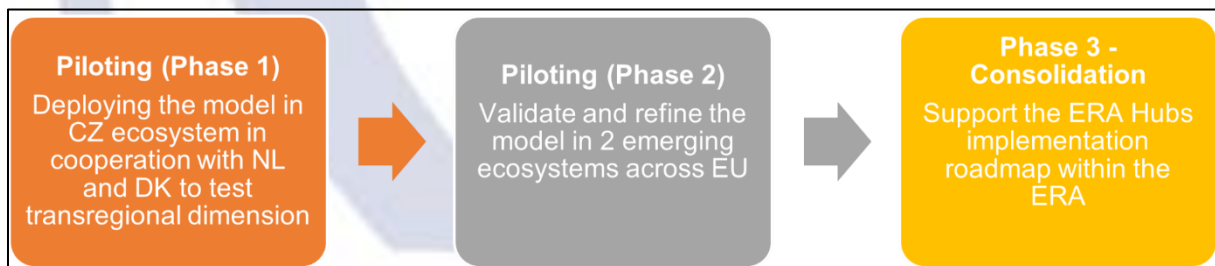
Figure 2 - Piloting phases

3.2 Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for this "Call for Champions", the applicant must follow the requirements below:

- **be established in one of the 27 EU Member States** (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
- **be a university, or an organisation with close links with it and active in the knowledge valorisation field**, such as

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[9] Emerging ecosystem: see definition in the glossary at the end of the document
[10] More information on the piloting is available on the COOPERATE project website: Piloting the ERA Hubs concept – COOPERATE (cooperate-project.eu)

- a knowledge Transfer Organisation (KTO),
- a technology Transfer Office (TTO),
- A university-based incubator,
- Or other academia-based intermediary.

Please note that:

- Natural persons are NOT eligible
- Entities without legal personality are NOT eligible
- EU bodies are NOT eligible

Beneficiaries of the COOPERATE project are not eligible to participate in the call.

3.3 Evaluation criteria

All applications will be assessed by a review panel composed of partners of the COOPERATE project. The panel is called "Call for Champions" Evaluation Committee (EV) and it will analyse and evaluate the applications.

The EV will respect geographic balance in line with the objectives of the call. In order to ensure a good geographic coverage, the parameters below listed will be followed:

- The 2 emerging ecosystems selected CANNOT be located in the same region/country
- In case of equal scores, for the second and third emerging ecosystems listed, the one finally selected within the "Call for Champions" will be the one located at the furthest location (kilometres) from the first one selected within the "Call for Champions".

The evaluation process will consider, among others:

Eligibility criteria

Be established in one of the eligible countries	✓
Be a university or an organisation with close links with it and active in the field of knowledge valorisation: such as Knowledge Transfer Organisations (KTO), Technology Transfer Offices (TTO), university-based incubators.	✓
Be part of an emerging ecosystem	✓

Evaluation criteria

Shows interest from quadruple helix actors to participate in the piloting activities	1-5 points
Has proven track record of actions in the field of knowledge valorisation	1-5 points
Has proven track record of actions on the seven lines of actions	1-5 points
Shows credible potential for maturity growth	1-5 points

3.4 Application process and deadline for the submission

The applicant must submit all the required in formation and document by **30 October 2024 at 29:59 (Brussels time)**. The information must be provided in English and contain ALL relevant information. No extra material and/or annexes should be sent. Incomplete applications may be rejected.

Only one application is allowed per ecosystem.

Application package

The applicant will be required to download, fulfil and return the following documents:

- Annex I → Questionnaire
- Annex II → DMP agreement

All the documents should be filled out in English and saved as pdf files.

The required documentation must be submitted by **30 October 2024 at 29:59 (Brussels time**) via email cooperate.era@gmail.com, with the following email object: "Application Call for Champions"

Applicants will receive a confirmation of the submission.

3.5 Evaluation and selection process
All received applications through the cooperate.era@gmail.com email within the deadline will be collected and checked against the eligibility criteria. If no errors/inconsistencies will be found the proposal will pass on to the evaluation phase.

Three members of the EV will check the proposals received and each member will report the outcome of the evaluation on a shared database. The database created for proposals evaluation purposes will compare marks given by different EV members. The evaluation will follow the evaluation criteria parameters above reported. The EV will then scrutinise the whole evaluation on the database and rank the applications. The evaluation procedures will take up to maximum 30 working days.

In case of equal ranking, these are the possible outcomes:

- If the equal ranked applications are the two first, they will be both selected (if in line with the geographical balance)
- If the equal ranked applications are the two second, the one geographically further from the first one will be selected (as per "evaluation criteria" above)

After the conclusion of the evaluation process applicants will be informed via email. The email used will be the one given in "Annex – I Questionnaire" under contact section.

3.6 Appeal a rejection
If the applicant considers that a mistake has been made and/or the evaluation process has been carried out in unfair manners, which prejudicated the final results, the following appeal procedures are available:

- The complain should be written in English and submitted via email to cooperate.era@gmail.com, including:
  - Contact detail
  - Subject of the complain
  - Evidence of the alleged breach
- The complain should be made **within five calendar days** since the evaluation results have been presented to the applicant.

Anonymous and/or incomplete complaints will be rejected.

The "Call for Champions" EV will investigate the complaint and provide a formal notification within 20 working days from the date of reception. If the time limit exceeded the EV will inform the complainant via email.

3.7 Absence of conflict of interest
Applicants cannot be COOPERATE consortium partners or affiliated entities nor their employees or co-operator under contractual agreement. Conflict of interest cases will be assessed individually. In case of any queries, applicants can contact the COOPERATE "Help Desk".

3.8 Contacts & Support
Applicants may contact the "Help Desk" available online at cooperate.era@gmail.com

Updated information on the "Call for Champions" are available on the COOPERATE Project website.

4. Glossary

Ecosystem: in social sciences, ecosystems "are comprised of autonomous actors (organizations and individuals) subject to distributed governance that capture enough value to justify their participation" (Baldwin, Bogers, Kapoor, & West, 2024)[11].

Emerging ecosystem: based on the definition provided within the COOPERATE project during the first piloting phase, an emerging ecosystem foresees "some interaction between the local actors involved in knowledge production, transfer and exploitation but coordination and development of joint activities is limited".

Knowledge ecosystem: "Involved actors bound together by a joint search for valuable knowledge" and "in pursuit of the higher-order goals unattainable independently" (Järvi, Almpanopoulou, & Ritala, 2018)[12].

Knowledge valorisation: It "is the process of creating social and economic value from knowledge by linking different areas and sectors and by transforming data, know-how and research results into sustainable products, services, solutions, and policies that benefit society […] Connecting with all relevant stakeholders and involving the whole R&I ecosystem, promoting an open entrepreneurial culture, moving from a conventional IP approach to a holistic intellectual assets management practice, enabling better circulation and co-creation of knowledge together with flexibility and mobility of skilled people, breaking functional and physical silos, are some of the crucial elements which define a robust and efficient knowledge valorisation process" (European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Kosova, H.(editor), Vanrie, P.(editor), 2024)[13].

Triple helix: it refers to the relation among different players coming from three different sectors, namely academia, industry and state. As also recalled by Etzkowitz "we are witnessing the transformation of the role of state in academia, the role of corporations in innovation and of the university in the economy. Coming from the three sectors, the members of this workshop are participants in the creation of a new innovation environment -a triple helix of academic-industry-government relations" (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995)[14] .

Quadruple helix: it is based on the "*Triple Helix* model and adds as fourth helix the 'public', more specifically being defined as the 'media-based and culture-based public' and civil society" (Carayannis, Barth, & Campbell, 2021)[15]

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[11] Baldwin, C., Bogers, M., Kapoor, R., & West, J. (2024). Focusing the ecosystem lens on innovation studies. *Research Policy, Volume 53*

[12] Järvi, K., Almpanopoulou, A., & Ritala, P. (2018). Oganization of knowledge ecosystems: Prefigurative and partial forms. *Research Policy, 47(8)*, 1523-1537

[13] European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Kosova, H.(editor), Vanrie, P.(editor). (2024). Mutual learning exercise on knowledge valorisation – Focus on skills, intersectoral cooperation and incentive systems – Final report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

[14] Etzkowitz, H., & Leydesdorff, L. (1995). The triple helix university-industry-government relations: a laboratory for knowledge based economic development. EASST Review 14.

[15]Carayannis, E., Barth, T., & Campbell, D. (2021). The Quintuple Helix innovation model: global warming as a challenge and driver for innovation. Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship