

Helmholtz comments on the 7th Framework Programme

The Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres appreciates the possibility to contribute to the public consultation of the European Commission on the ex-post evaluation of the 7th Framework Programme.

I Brief portrait of the Helmholtz Association

The Helmholtz Association carries out top-level research to identify and explore the major challenges facing society, science and the economy. The Helmholtz Association brings together 18 scientific-technical and biological-medical research centres. With more than 37,000 employees and an annual budget of almost € 4 billion, the Helmholtz Association is Germany's largest scientific organisation.

Our research organisation is an active player in the international research community. The members of our organisation do not only take part as participants and coordinators in the 7th Framework Programme, but also participated in former framework programmes of the European Union and are willing to take a leading role in Horizon 2020.

II Achievements of the 7th Framework Programme

- One of the main strengths of FP7 was its openness for different kinds and sizes of **collaborative research** projects. It opened national borders by encouraging European collaboration in multi-national consortia and it built bridges between Academia and Industry by stimulating communication and cooperation in research projects. This ensured an improved exchange of information between industry and research organisations across the whole innovation chain.
- FP7 also made the best national **research infrastructures** available to the best researchers across European borders. It built on the diversity of the national research facilities and allowed a sharing of their resources, thereby building on one of the strengths of the European Research Area. If the significantly higher EC budget proposal for research infrastructures in FP7 had been approved, the impact of this unique European funding scheme would have been of major proportions.
- Another milestone of FP7 was the establishment of the **European Research Council**, which fostered excellence and provided unique opportunities to the best European researchers. The concept of ERC is a clear success story and it was developed positively in Horizon 2020. However, the ERC should not be the only remaining catch basin for fundamental research. It is important to point out that the whole innovation chain, from low technology readiness levels (TRL) to high TRL needs to be addressed by collaboration between academia and industry. This is an area where FP7 was more comprehensive than its successor, Horizon 2020, which

is limiting collaborative research mainly to higher TRL levels. This endangers Europe's competitiveness in the years to come.

- The set-up of programme priorities and funding instruments allowed implementing **European research strategies**.
- Although the cooperation with high level partners from the U.S. or Japan could have been easier, the 7th Framework Programme offered almost ideal possibilities to cooperate with **international partners** on research matters.
- The **unique registration facility** and the **research participant portal** improved transparency and ensured that all participants of a consortium were kept updated on all relevant documents and developments.
- The sound, objective and transparent **evaluation process** of the proposals and the good selection of experienced research experts in FP7 have to be recognized.

III Room for improvement in the 7th Framework Programme

- The 7th Framework Programme added complexity and uncertainty by allowing divergent funding rules of the different **Joint Technology Initiatives (JTI)** and by channelling major parts of its funds to those structures. The JTI had a tendency to develop into closed shops and did not always reach the high standards of the independent evaluation processes of the European Commission.
- The rules for average personnel costs and the **certificates of methodology for personnel costs** were, for the vast majority of participants, impossible to implement.
- The new **guarantee fund** does not, as might be assumed, protect a coordinator advancing prefinancing to project partners according to her/his obligations under the Grant Agreement.
- **Rules were interpreted** by each project officer or financial officer in a very **individualistic** way, with few common standards, leading to significant uncertainty. The setting up of a common legal support service for H2020 has thus the potential to be a major step forward.
- The **Marie Curie** actions, another success of the 7th Framework Programme, were overshadowed by the low **success rates** of the proposals.
- The **community building measures** for research institutions developed in the 6th Framework Programme were unfortunately abandoned (e.g. the funding of conferences and summer schools via Marie Curie or of Platforms via Support Actions). The more important cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral initiatives become, the more useful it is, however, to bring the very divergent actors together.

IV Conclusions

Analysing FP7 provides extremely useful input for the further design of the research and innovation programmes to follow. The main lessons we draw are the following:

Much has been achieved to reduce the administrative burden of EU projects between FP6 and Horizon 2020, notably by the development of the participant portal and by some of the simplification measures of H2020. Some of the reporting requirements of Horizon 2020 however show that **scope for further simplification** remains and that it is very important to continue on this path.

Even more importantly, the analysis shows that the European Framework Programmes are of high importance for the European Research Area and for the Competitiveness of Europe as a whole. FP7 has done much to attract the brightest minds in research and innovation to Europe, a main precondition for competitiveness. **We therefore should increase the budget of the framework programmes for research and innovation because they ensure we are ready for our future – cutting their funding, as now proposed, sends the wrong signal and sets Europe’s future on a dangerous track.**

FP7 also has set incentives for more collaboration between Industry and Academia across European borders and provided funding to **support the entire research and innovation process** starting with fundamental research, via technology development and technology validation up to system demonstration.

Horizon 2020 only sees a role for collaborative projects if they are close to the market. This drives Academia away from these projects and so reduces their collaboration with Industry. In view of the strength of Europe in research and its weakness in bringing this research to the market, however, we need to create more opportunities for Industry-Academia collaboration, not less.

A new framework programme is an opportunity to build on this experience and it must not be missed. It needs to give a prominent role to collaborative projects across the complete innovation chain in order to make sure that Europe is prepared for the challenges ahead.

This paper presents a consensus of the views of the Helmholtz Association and its centres.

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