Research Infrastructures in the European Research Area (ERA)

Open Letter by Science Europe Governing Board

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In the context of the discussions on the ERA Roadmap and its governance, Science Europe wishes to highlight the importance of research infrastructures within the ERA. The forthcoming conference 'Opening up to an ERA of Innovation' (22 and 23 June 2015, Brussels) also offers a great opportunity for Science Europe to share its views and to highlight where it feels it could contribute effectively and efficiently to the discussion with its European partners.

Diversity and Complementarity in the European Landscape of Research Infrastructures

At European level there is broad consensus that access to first class research infrastructures boosts Europe's research capacity and thus its future competitiveness, and therefore they are at the heart of implementing the ERA[1]. Individual European countries are not usually able to develop new facilities of global performance on their own, and so collective approaches, as fostered through the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) and Horizon 2020, are proving crucial to safeguard a leading role at global level.

- Acknowledging the importance of research infrastructures of pan-European and global relevance, Science Europe also points to: the importance of research infrastructures at regional (sub-national) and national level; the fact that they often represent the founding basis of pan-European distributed facilities; and the crucial role that research funding and performing organisations play in their funding and operation.

[1] European Commission Communication 'A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth' - COM(2012) 392 final

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- Science Europe engaged with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) on the development of the ERA Roadmap, inducing reflections on the ERA monitoring mechanism for research infrastructures. Science Europe is concerned that only ESFRI projects are at the core of ERA discussions and monitoring. European research relies on a well-functioning ecosystem of research infrastructures at regional and national as well as international levels; all of these should be taken into account when assessing progress with the ERA.

The funding for research infrastructures, in the most part, originates at national level through varied funding systems and mechanisms. As such, much effort is required to achieve a balance between the needs required for ongoing sustainability of existing facilities and the development of new research infrastructures – while also considering the regional, national, or global landscape.

- Science Europe urges the recognition of the diversity of national funding models and their complementarity with European and global actions, including the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).
- Science Europe also notes that inter-agency co-operation is an effective and efficient means to decide and ensure the deployment of regional, national and even trans-regional research infrastructures, complementing the co-operation at European level.
- As an initial contribution to this discussion, Science Europe is analysing the role of its Member Organisations in strategic priority setting and decision making for research infrastructures.

Research infrastructures are continually generating broader and larger data sets. The need to store, process and analyse this becomes ever greater. An ecosystem of interoperable and sustainable data infrastructures, e-services and technological infrastructures is needed to sustain this.

- Science Europe considers it important to map the research data management practices of research funding organisations, of the European research performing organisations and of data service providers to support to interoperability and harmonisation across scientific disciplines.
- Science Europe is currently mapping the European funding landscape of research data management systems and related infrastructures.

European Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures

Science Europe is committed to further shaping the ERA as a stakeholder organisation, and welcomed the invitation to make an active contribution to the development of a European Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures[2], setting out common standards and harmonised rules and conditions for the access to, and use of, research infrastructures.

- Science Europe provided consolidated inputs based on its Members' expertise and on previous positions such as the *Basic Requirements for Research Infrastructures in Europe* (ESF & EUROHORCs, 2011).
- Science Europe commends pro-active and constructive co-operation between all partners involved in realising this endeavour, and offers its expertise and support for the future.

[2] http://ec.europa.eu/research/infrastructures/index_en.cfm?pg=access_ri

Horizon 2020

Horizon 2020 focuses on developing new world-class research infrastructures, and integrating and opening national and regional research infrastructures of European interest. Furthermore, Horizon 2020 aims to support the development, deployment and operation of ICT-based e-infrastructures, fostering the innovation potential of research infrastructures and their human resources and reinforcing European research infrastructures policy and international cooperation.

- Science Europe recognises the major role and high impact of the European research framework programmes on transnational access to existing regional or national facilities.
- Science Europe urges the protection of the limited resources available for research infrastructures. Science Europe is concerned that the Horizon 2020 budgetary reductions made for EFSI, and in particular to the Research Infrastructures work programmes, will have a significant long-term negative effect on the ERA. As a means to help address this, Science Europe offers to assist in the mid-term review of Horizon 2020.

European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI)

ESFRI is currently updating its Roadmap using a new procedure to identify suitable projects. ESFRI will now analyse pan-European research infrastructures within their disciplinary landscape and global research infrastructure ecosystem. It will require evidence that a research infrastructure has obtained commitments from the hosting country and at least two additional countries, and is ready for a decisive preparatory phase.

- Science Europe emphasises the role of research funding and performing organisations for the fulfilment of many of the ESFRI Roadmap projects and proposes a strengthened co-operation between these organisations and ESFRI where useful, in order to optimise the funding and operation, and safeguard the sustainability, of pan-European and global research infrastructures, consistent with the needs of national research infrastructure provisions.

In conclusion, Science Europe wishes to express its willingness to engage with all stakeholders in the development of effective policies for research infrastructures in the ERA, and looks forward to further constructive discussions in this area.