ERA POLICY BRIEF

SCOPE OF THE POLICY BRIEF

In this policy brief FilmEU reports on ongoing cooperation in selected R&I areas and provides a set of recommendations to the European Commission for further policy development.

Policy background:

In order to strengthen strategic partnerships across the EU amongst higher education institutions, the European Commission targets the emergence of "European Universities" by 2024 by funding alliances from across Europe. The ambitious mandate aims to trigger systemic, structural and sustainable institutionalized cooperation between higher education institutions. As a complement to the Erasmus+ action geared towards supporting higher education cooperation models, Horizon 2020 support is dedicated to contributing to the research and innovation dimension of the alliances between European universities, in line with their shared, integrated, long-term joint strategy and in synergy with their education dimension.

This initiative is one of the flagships of the European strategy for universities that aims at supporting and enabling universities to adapt to changing conditions, to thrive and to take a leading role in the recovery of Europe, and in making our society greener, more inclusive and more digital. The adoption of this strategy was accompanied by a Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation.

In parallel, the European Research Area Policy Agenda sets out 20 voluntary actions for the period 2022-2024, including several of which are relevant for universities. The feedback from the alliances will help co-shape the design and implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022 – 2024, such as ERA actions 1 (sharing of data), 3 (reform of research management), 4 (strengthening careers), 5 (gender equality), 7 (knowledge valorisation), 8 (research infrastructures), 13 (empowering universities), 14 (engaging citizens), 15 (role in R&I ecosystem), 17 (research management capacity).

FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS

1. Challenges FilmEU identified regarding R&I cooperation

FILMEU_RIT brings together four European Higher Education Institutions: Lusófona University (PT), Tallinn University (EE); LUCA School of Arts (BE); Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology (IE). We collaborate around the common objective of jointly promoting high-level research, innovation and educational activities in the multidisciplinary field of Film and Media Arts and, through this collaboration, consolidate the central role of Europe as a world leader in the creative fields. Through this process, the Alliance is directly expanding the uptake of Artistic practice-based research in Europe, which will in turn impact the creative sectors and Europe's positioning as a leader in this field. FilmEU_RIT integrates four transformational modules: (a) R&I Resources and Strategic Agenda; (b) Impact and Engagement; (c) Talent; (d) Networking. These four transformational modules were defined in view of attaining the main challenge the Alliance faces which is how to design and implement a model to promote the uptake of research and innovation activities in non-research-intensive higher education institutions.

R&I Resources and Strategic Agenda addresses the challenge of defining the profile of the research carried by the Alliance and the strategies to do it. As already mentioned, most of the participating HEIs are non-research-intensive institutions with a distinct focus on film and media arts education. In order to allow these institutions

to transform themselves into research driven institutions, the clear and distinct focus of the project on practice-based-artistic research provides the framework for the implementation of this module and the joint development of dynamic research clusters that bring together resources (researchers and labs) from all participating HEIs, provides the strategical approach to enact it. Challenges include how to facilitate the emergence of jointness? How to bring together people (researchers) across all HEIs; how to identify potential areas of convergence in terms of resources (I.e. labs) and incentivize their joint use?; how to foster a joint understanding of practice-based artistic research that can support the emergence of a joint research agenda?; how to increase the capacitation of the Alliance in view of pursuing its joint research agenda?

Impact & Engagement addresses the objective of transforming the Alliance into a critical cultural intermediary. FILMEU_RIT postulates that our HEIs are not only suitable for "synthetic knowledge" (knowledge produced in response to a specific problem) but also for "symbolic knowledge", defined as the continuous interpretation and understanding of tastes and fashions of the day. Like synthetic knowledge, this is a tacit form that is highly contextual and evolving. Accordingly, the production of such knowledge also depends on 'know-how' and 'know-who'. For symbolic knowledge, however, 'know-who' is even more important than 'know-how' because new cultural meanings and symbols are generated through a blending of ideas, and a network of interactions that provide access to diverse sets of competencies ('know-hows') that make a blending possible. Moreover, this blending is most innovative when ideas are spilling across, rather than within, the networks, and expansive networks can facilitate such spills-across. Challenges faced in this regard are the best means and strategies to engage with internal and external stakeholders.

Talent addresses the need to reinforce the competences and research HR critical mass of the Alliance. Three main challenges were identified: how to implement joint recruitment strategies in a context of highly different legal and regulatory environments? how to foster a common system for PhD students' attractiveness and inclusion in R&I activities? how to properly jointly reward and incentivize our researchers

Networking addresses the need for the overall valorisation and legitimization of the Alliance. Two challenges are: how to facilitate collaboration in activities that could be common to all alliances; how to increase the ability of the Alliance to intervene at policy-making level.

2. How we are tackling these challenges and examples of good practices in FilmEU

*R&I Resources and Strategic Agenda: a*n initial mapping of all researchers' areas of expertise and interest was conducted, and info collected made available via collaboration platform TEAMS. Analysis was conducted on the identification of areas of convergence. Following that, specific calls for joint research activities were launched – so far two calls conducted one for joint research pilot projects and one for seminal joint research activities with seed funding associated – and a matchmaking system. A tailored system labelled "Collegium" was designed and put in place to support mobilities specifically targeting teachers and researchers across the Alliance. Initial work was conducted on the mapping of existing joint resources for research and then benchmarked against the convergence areas previously identified. FilmEU_HUB, a joint cluster of labs, was designed following the identification of existing resources relevant for different schools but needs analysis was also conducted on areas identified as relevant but lacking resources. FilmEU_HUB is currently being implemented and the use of joint resources will become compulsory in the context of joint projects to which funding is awarded. Joint workshops were conducted with external guests for all researchers. Examples of case studies across all institutions were collected and disseminates. An event on the topic was produced and several joint publications edited with a final manifesto on what artistic research means for the Alliance being published. We also created a joint task force solely dedicated to identifying potential calls that correspond to the remit of the Alliance and jointly apply when opportunities are identified. This strategy as so far proved to be very efficient! During this funding period, we secured further funding for research from other EU programmes (e.g., C-ACCELERATE funded by EIT – HEI initiative, and CRESCINE funded in Horizon Europe Pillar 2 - HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01, project ID: 101094988) with a particular focus on the wider cultural and creative industries.

Impact and Engagement: For internal stakeholders, this is found through the setup of the joint dynamic research clusters that bring together researchers around concrete internally funded projects and the set-up of up of joint communication and dissemination initiatives – e.g. joint peer reviewed journals – International Journal for Film and Media Arts and International journal of Stereo and Immersive media; joint events; joint communication and collaboration platforms (e.g. setup of dedicated task forces for new applications in

TEAMS). For external, we utilise our communication and dissemination tools and platforms mentioned above I.e. newsletter.

Talent: We are tackling this challenge by formalising the creation, under Belgian legislation, of a non-for-profit (*Vereniging zonder winstoogmerk* - VZW) "FilmEU Association" with headquarters in Brussels (FilmEU Association VZW: 0782.407.740) that will in the future once a legal statute for European Universities is defined, be able to promote the recruitment of joint staff and researchers. We are also designing a joint program for knowledge sharing, supervision and evaluation of PhD students named FilmEU DOCTUS (example joint seminars and joint programs of scholarships for PhD students) besides a joint doctoral summer school.

Networking:We have been an active member in FOREU2, the forum that brings together all the Alliances selected in the second round of funding for EUuni, and in a number of EU-funded projects that seek to take a transversal approach to the European Higher Education Area. In this context, the focus of FilmEU on film and media arts allows for the testing of broad theories and toolkits in a well-defined context, while also ensuring that the perspectives of the CCSI are reflected in system-level outputs. Such projects include UniSearch - Developing Responsible ReSEARCH and Innovation in European Universities, and Horizon Results Booster, the flagship initiative of the European Commission boosting impacts of EU funded R&I projects. FilmEU also engages with the project CALOHEE - Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe. Performative and fine arts are one of the five subject areas considered under CALOHEE and the particular sub-domain of film is being led by two members of FilmEU core team. Our ability to intervene at policy-making level is being increased in two complementary manners: a) by directly promoting Research and innovation projects that deal with policy making for the film and media arts sectors and more broadly with cultural and creative industries related research; b) by participating in transversal initiatives with a particular focus on the wider cultural and creative industries (e.g. EIT CCSI KIC, New European Bauhaus Initiative)

3. FilmEU tangible progresses in the recent past

FilmEU_RIT promotes artistic research through the implementation of five dynamic research clusters in order to reach a research positioning of the Alliance as a critical cultural intermediary. These interinstitutional dynamic research clusters do not exist on their own but are embedded in the FilmEU_HUB, an umbrella structure of the HEIs infrastructures, i.e. virtual or physical labs, that span the main areas of research and technical expertise on which the Alliance is focused. The FilmEU_HUB supports the emergence of the dynamic research clusters organised in a bottom-up manner that integrate researchers coming from the different HEIs according to their interests and areas of expertise. The objective is to develop interdisciplinary projects supported by team-based work across at least three HEIs, with the intensive use of media technology provided by the labs, which in turn provisions the uptake of collaboration and the rise of areas of excellence that signal the differential nature of the research developed in the scope of the Alliance. This model engineered the Alliance as a network that hosts dynamic research clusters supported by labs and operating along implemented joint pilot projects that represent various stages of relationships among members with the aim of achieving a successful collaborative network. The tangible progress is that the five ongoing joint pilot projects allowed for 55 researchers from four HEIs from a wide variety in background, expertise, career development (early career to senior researchers) and research domains to work on interinstitutional research projects. These five pilot projects allowed for a tangible exchange of research expertise within the pilot, strengthened additionally through the organisation of workshops (e.g. with RE:ANIMA students) and joint doctoral seminars (e.g. DOCTUS) on their respective research domains. The FilmEU_HUB allowed for infrastructural support (e.g. XR Lab-LUCA and Virtual Production Lab-UL) for this interinstitutional collaboration. This integrated cooperation approach of the dynamic research clusters across the FilmEU alliance accelerated institutional change of all partners: participation in the pilot projects has fortified individual research with collaborative expertise (e.g. Belgian heritage and Portuguese VR technology), empowered individual researchers by using the projects as exploratory grounds and steppingstones for further collaborative funding applications or participating in other applications as mentioned above. The tangible progress for the Alliance is allowing the experience of these pilot projects to feed into sustainable research structures (formulated in reports) and research agenda setting (formulated in action plans). Tangible progress has also been attained via the joint seminars towards the development of a joint supervision model that is reshaping supervision at master and PhD levels in all HEIs and the development of a joint data management policy implemented across all

pilots as also impacted all HEIs approach to open science and is resulting in systemic changes in the HEIs and in the overall Alliance.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Policy topic 1: facilitating transnational cooperation**

   The two main actions that should be prioritised in order to address the challenges we have faced so far in terms of R&I would be the definition of a legal statute for European Universities because this would allow us to deal with core issues around HR management; talent retention and overall legitimization of the Alliance. The other key domain where actions are needed is towards the definition of sustainable long-term funding for the Alliances because only this will allow us to move from the pilot stage we are in and scale-up the achievements already realized.

2. **Policy topic 2: strengthening careers**

One of the objectives of FilmEU is the promotion of the institutional capacitation of the alliance via the design and implementation of common mechanisms for staff evaluation and talent retention, namely via a jointly designed tenure programme. Human resources strategies are central to the development and competitiveness of European Higher Education Institutions - not just attracting talent but also retention strategies. Multiple approaches and models to academic tenure are well known. This includes the formal tenure-track and tenure processes employed by many universities in the USA, but also models focused on permanent appointment subject to probation, and various collective agreements and legislative contexts, at the Member State level in many cases, which provide for the nature of academic staff contracts and the protection of academic freedom. More recently, there has been a good deal of reassessment and recalibration in Europe, particularly on the basis of the 2014 report by the League of European Research Universities, 'Tenure and Tenure Track at LERU Universities'. This report identified a range of emerging models with an explicit tenure track (e.g., appointment on a fixed term with the prospect of permanency towards its end in light of relevant criteria) and has in turn influenced more recent reform projects across Europe. In the meantime, other changes in the higher education landscape, such as the formal assessment or evaluation of research at the individual or departmental level, and the shift towards competitive funding, have had an impact on academic careers and on institutional human resource strategies. Nonetheless, there remain multiple legal and cultural impediments to the generalised adoption of tenure models in Europe, especially in specialised areas such as the arts. Indeed, although some features such as pay and conditions may be applicable across all disciplines, certain facets of academic careers (e.g., excellence in teaching, productivity in research) may be more specific to disciplines or groups of disciplines). As part of its work, FilmEU assessed the LERU models (which themselves intersect with the European Framework for Research Careers) from the perspective of practices in the FilmEU institutions, enriched by practice-based knowledge and qualitative information collected and analyzed at different research stages. As a result a preliminary model was defined that assumes appointment on a fixed term with the prospect of permanency and that integrates regular evaluations across different dimensions including artistic research and linkage to society.

- Reform of research assessment

Following the recommendations of the scoping report "Towards a reform of the research assessment system" we fully agree with the principle of having research proposals, researchers, research units and research institutions evaluated on their intrinsic merits and performance rather than on the number of publications and where they are published, promoting qualitative judgement with peer-review, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators. The diversity of outputs and tasks research in different fields, namely the arts and the cultural and creative sectors, imply call for the deepening of the autonomy of research organisations in setting their own recruitment and assessment policies and allow for a diversity of practices. This is particular relevant in the case of research organisations such as FilmEU that pursue practice-based artistic research as part of their core activities. This implies funding bodies assume that innovation in the arts is not Artistic Research (AR) per se, but systematically investigating and exploring new forms of and/or methods for artistic practice is R&D, especially if these are transferable or reproducible. From a methodological point of view this also implies we accept that methods used in artistic, scientific and technological research, as well as in the social sciences and

humanities, are all acceptable provided that they address uncertainty about a certain desired final outcome. Assessment of research and researchers must integrate artistic research (AR) as R&D that is carried out by means of artistic practice and reflection. AR is an epistemic inquiry, directed towards increasing knowledge, insight, understanding and skills. Through topics and problems stemming from and relevant to artistic practice, AR also often addresses key issues of a broader cultural, social and/or political significance. AR is undertaken in all art practices, including architecture, design, film, photography, fine art, media and digital arts, music and the performing arts - and achieves its results both within those disciplines, as well as often in a transdisciplinary setting, often combining AR methods with methods from other research fields and traditions.

3. Policy topic 3: digital transition

In FilmEU we clearly see a need for additional dedicated e-infrastructures for data management and storage namely considering the integrated model our HUB of labs implies and the complex requisites of the data we deal with. Currently we are strongly involved in several projects in the context of EBSI and the development of the ESC (i.e. DC4U) and we have already partially federated some of of our infrastructures. In order to pursue these efforts, we consider the following measures to be fundamental:

- Wide spread availability of testbeds (from the simple to the very sophisticated): The EU can help by both funding smaller joint testbeds and by providing training to the less technical fields, on how to use the testbeds/tools
- Truly F.A.I.R Open Data sets: A much more active role in disseminating the existing OpenData initiatives. The creation of a specific body to manage this activity and to enforce the thousands of Eu funded projects to truly make their DataSets available. To invest in tools to generate realistic synthetic DataSets and to provide incentives for the EU population to actively participate in the creation of Research data sets
- Funding availability (under Digital?) for the implementation of cross cutting (i.e multiple human activities) Labs to promote "cross-pollination" between technology and all other fields, To offer incentives to the Universities that create such Labs that can and should in the case of the European Universities, correspond to cross-institutional set-ups of joint laboratorial infrastructures.
- Support in the context of Joint degrees where technology is an integral part of the knowledge to be mastered (example: Arts and Engineering). We are already doing it in the DIGITAL program. Should be further extended and specifically referred as an objective of the program in Erasmus Mundus.
- Participation of experienced industry practitioners in the universities teaching and research activities (research IS NOT performed only within Universities). Special support for inclusion of professionals in European degrees.
- Wide dissemination of cutting-edge tools and technologies among non-technical researchers (as discussed under FAIR, above). Support for learning digital environments jointly promoted by European Universities.

4. Policy topic 4: access to excellence

In our view European Universities can accelerate access to excellence if they operate following what we have labelled as a "Cosmos" approach that implies that pathways to excellence are integrated across joint initiatives (i.e. application for Horizon funding) the Alliances constantly pursue as part of their mission. This can be further reinforced is specific dedicated funding if available, as already mentioned, for joint infrastructures that facilitate cross-pollination of excellence and knowledge transfer. This must be complemented by support to reforms in Widening countries embedded in dynamic university alliances in Europe such as FilmEU in view of setting-up networks with excellent partners that will develop new promising R&I domains and test novel approaches in smaller joint research projects. Our focus on this articulation between a "Cosmos" of initiatives and a HUB of joint structures assumes innovation excellence is the focus of excellence hubs where innovation ecosystems in Widening countries and beyond will team up and strive to create better links between academia, business, government and society that will foster a real placed-based innovation culture in Widening countries and beyond based on a strategic agenda in line with regional or national smart specialisation strategies. In this context, we are already working on synergies with the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) in the context of our already approved HEI-innovate project C-Accelerate and envisioned participation in the new CCSI KIC.

5. **Policy topic 5: increasing global competitiveness**

FilmEU is already engaging with the 2023 European Excellence Initiative call and welcomes mechanisms of this nature that offer support for research capacity-building and resource sharing, across its member institutions. As an Alliance which proposes to expand to eight institutions (five of which would be in Widening countries), we recognise that the link drawn between the EEI and the Widening agenda is a positive one, and linked to the broader goals of the European Universities Initiative in ensuring a strong HE and research system across the entire EU (see also discussion above under Topic 4).

Our work in FilmEU_RIT to date points to a number of things that should form part of a broader European Excellence Initiative. First, we see the need to support HE institutions in their transition towards full activity across the knowledge square. We have been robust and honest in our self-assessment, from the SWOT that formed part of the FilmEU_RIT proposal to the Action Plan we are developing for pooled and shared support and in the activities still to come. Similarly, we have sought to address historic deficits through an attention to staff capacitation, to ensuring involvement of researchers across career stages (and other staff including technicians, administrators, and so forth) in our dynamic research clusters, and in supporting new ambitions in doctoral programmes. So, the EEI could (through the current call and beyond) support *ambitious targets in terms of training and capacity* as part of institutional transformations, ensuring that the research-active workforce is well prepared for the R&I challenges that contribute to the competitiveness of our universities. Second, we are identifying the *importance of infrastructure and equipment*, with particular emphasis on challenging preconceptions that because research in film and media arts is historically aligned with the humanities and social sciences, its cost base is necessarily low. On the contrary, we see that for R&I in our field to have the maximum societal and economic impact, researchers must have access to emerging technologies, experimental spaces, and the ability to disseminate research outputs including those in artistic and creative modes. Current instruments offer limited support to these goals, presenting a particular role for the EEI. Third, through the initial findings of our pilot projects, we see the importance of *close liason with the cultural and creative sectors and industries* (from conventional galleries and archives right through to digital startups). While an EEI would need to look at other key sectors and not just the CCSI of direct relevance to FilmEU_RIT, one possible direction could be supporting Alliances in structured co-creation of research agendas with key sectoral and industrial partners in well-defined industries/sectors of critical importance to European competitiveness and growth.

On the second question of targeting EU objectives, we see a number of opportunities here. In particular, it is already the case that FilmEU (and we assume other European University Alliances) seeks to address the twin green and digital transitions in its work plan for the coming years. However, within the priorities and financial stipulations of Erasmus+ funding, a EEI could allow the same to happen in respect of R&I agendas in particular. FilmEU_RIT's pilot projects in its dynamic research clusters already see teams of researchers addressing questions of sustainability in respect of archives, virtual reality, and the like. While the current WIDERA call allows for some support for substantive research activities (subject to financial limits), global competitiveness could be improved through further mechanisms that allow Alliances to support on a longer-term basis challenge-based research that seeks to tackle societal challenges, sustainable development goals and 'wicked problems' at scale. Similarly, finding ways to ask Alliances to interact with the Missions set out in the Horizon Europe strategic plan would be useful; in FilmEU_RIT's case, the identification of the distinctive contribution of artistic research methods in our work to date would allow us to make a compelling case for support if Mission-driven work packages or components were a part of the EEI as it evolves.

6. **Other recommendations**

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