E³UDRES² Research networks policy

Work Package 4

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Authors: Raquel Barreira(IPS), Hanna Hopia (JAMK), Oskars Java (ViA), Atilla Gere (MATE), Sirpa Laitinen-Väänänen (JAMK), Rui Madeira (IPS), Muguras Mocofan (UPT), Henny Oude Maatman (Saxion), Maria Catarina Paz (IPS), Gabriele Permoser (STPUAS), Gabriel Pestana (IPS), AndreiTernauciuc (UPT), Jos Tomassen (Saxion), José Tummers (UCLL), Pauliina Uusi-Penttilä (JAMK), Radu Vasiu (UPT), Mettina Veenstra (Saxion), Franziska Wehner (HFD), Alex Xafis (STPUAS), Birgit Zimola (STPUAS)

Overview

Milestone nr.	Deliverable name	Person responsible	Corresponding HEI
MS14	E³UDRES² Research networks policy	Raquel Barreira	IPS

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Brief summary

This E³UDRES² Research network policy describes the plan and concept for inspiring research cooperation within the E³UDRES² Focus Areas and beyond. It describes mechanisms for networking and knowledge exchange between researchers.

Furthermore, the concept delineates how E³UDRES² aims to monitor and review joint research effectiveness, aiming at the establishment of Applied Research Centers of Excellence in specific fields within the Focus Areas in the future.

List of concepts

Bank of Researchers (BoR) - a database of researchers' profiles and expertise

Executive Board – Presidents and Rector of E³UDRES² partner universities

E³UDRES² capacity building team – currently, Work Package 7 – "Capacity building"

E³UDRES² dissemination team - currently, Work Package 10 – "Interaction, Impact, Dissemination" team

E³UDRES² Focus Areas - the areas in which E³UDRES² focus, currently:

- Creative Industries for Regions' Identity
- Digital Solutions and (Applied) Deep Tech for Regions
- Health, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion for Regions
- Resilient Economy & Innovation for Regions

E³UDRES² research supporting team – currently, Work Package 4 – "Research and Knowledge Serving Users" team

E³UDRES² research networks – the set of relationships between researchers, registered in the BoR, that share a scientific interest and are willing work together, preferably under one of the Focus Areas of the alliance, and the relationships between them and regional stakeholders that collaborate in joint research projects and/or projects proposals

E³UDRES² researcher – a researcher from any of the partner universities that is registered in the Bank of Researchers

E³UDRES² Scientific Council - the relevant body for academic and strategic aspects of research activities in E³UDRES². It was established in May 2024 and it is composed of senior researchers/scientists from all partners.

1. Introduction

E³UDRES², the Engaged and Entrepreneurial European University as Driver for European Smart and Sustainable Regions, a European University alliance established in October 2020, promotes the development of small and medium-sized cities and their rural environments into smart and sustainable European regions and shapes a prosperous future with the best possible quality of life for self-determined people in a progressive European society. The main aim of this policy is to contribute to this overarching goal.

The following universities (in alphabetical order) currently compose the alliance:

- Fulda University of Applied Sciences (Germany)
- Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences[1] (Hungary)
- Jamk University of Applied Sciences (Finland)
- Politehnica University Timișoara (Romania)
- Polytechnic University of Setúbal (Portugal)
- Saxion University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands)
- St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences (Austria)
- UC Leuven Limburg (Belgium)
- Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (Latvia)

Regarding the specific challenges, opportunities and assets of the regions, E³UDRES² builds research collaborations related to the Focus Areas, which are currently four, as follows:

- Creative Industries for Regions' Identity
- Digital Solutions and (Applied) Deep Tech for Regions
- Health, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion for Regions
- Resilient Economy & Innovation for Regions

The E³UDRES² alliance aims to enhance its joint research potential, strengthening the synergy of capacity and diverse expertise of all individual partners, yet also reflect on relevant European policies and opportunities. This should allow E³UDRES² to develop a basis for research, translate its results into user-oriented solution, reflect upon emerging challenges from regional stakeholders, yet also strengthen the links between research and education and ensure career development of a young generation of academics.

The E³UDRES² Research network policy was developed in accordance with the Work Package 4 – "Research and Knowledge Serving Users" objectives described in E³UDRES² 2.0 Grant Agreement, E³UDRES² Vision and Mission, prior experience of the Research Networks in the phase of development of the E³UDRES² (10/2020-09/2023) and project deliverable D4.10 I-R&Di Network methodology from that first phase.

1.1. Scope

This Research Network Policy outlines the strategy for inspiring and supporting research cooperation within the alliance, especially in the E³UDRES² Focus Areas. It establishes the criteria for a researcher to be considered an E³UDRES² researcher, a definition on the research networks, details the mechanisms for encouraging networking and knowledge exchange, and describes the approach for monitoring and reviewing research results from the alliance.

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[1] *Fully engaged in E³UDRES² activities, currently holding the status of Associated Partner due to restricted access to EU funding*

2. E³UDRES² researchers, Bank of Researchers and Research Networks

2.1. E³UDRES² Bank of Researchers

The Bank of Researchers (BoR) is a database of researchers' profiles and expertise, which can be accessed via E³UDRES² website[2].

The Bank of Researchers, at its current stage of development, offers the possibility to search for researchers based on any of the following filters:
- Name
- Area of Expertise
- Research Expertise
- Area of interest
- Institution
- Keywords

Researchers at all career levels of all partner institutions are invited to create their individual profiles, providing information on their research experience and fields of expertise as well as publications and other relevant data. By integrating the official E³UDRES² website, a researcher gets optimal visibility and accessibility to a wider audience.

2.2. Definition of E³UDRES² researcher

Any researcher from a partner university of the alliance who registers in the BoR, is considered an E³UDRES² researcher.

During the registration process in the BoR, researchers are invited to express their interest in one or more E³UDRES² Focus Areas, meaning a researcher may be part of more than one network.

By registering in that database, the researcher agrees on having the personal profile available online and should be open to contacts that may arise from other researchers and from E³UDRES² Research Supporting Team to explore research opportunities.

Researchers should seek cooperation that:

(i) aligns with at least one of the E³UDRES² Focus Areas (but it is not mandatory)
(ii) includes members from at least two different partner institutions, encouraging cross-institutional collaboration
(iii) shows commitment to the E³UDRES² vision and mission[3]

These criteria are deliberately broadly defined with the intent of capturing the whole variety of potential collaboration within E³UDRES², which may lead in the future to a revision on the Focus Areas for the alliance.

2.3. E³UDRES² research networks

E³UDRES² research network should be understood as the set of relationships between researchers, registered in the BoR, that share a scientific interest and are willing to work together under one of the Focus Areas of the alliance, along with the regional stakeholders that collaborate with them in joint research projects and/or projects proposals.

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[2] https://eudres.eu/researchers
[3] https://eudres.eu/assets/files/eudres_2.0_vision_mission_statement.pdf

Connecting researchers will allow E³UDRES² to enhance the joint research potential, create synergies and reach critical mass of expertise, experience and resources to co-create transformational results. Research cooperation in research networks plays a pivotal role in enhancing the research profile of the alliance, facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, and addressing complex global challenges.

3. Forms of establishing cooperation

Networking between researchers in E³UDRES² occurs by:

- Direct contacts they can individually make, after finding other researchers in the BoR that share an interest or may potentially bring extra expertise needed to conduct some research
- Use of virtual individual matchmaking via technological platforms that may be made available to them by E³UDRES² Research Supporting Team or by E³UDRES²
- Networking opportunities that may arise from attending conferences or meetings and from the Regional Innovation Hubs' activities

In the following subsection more details on the virtual matchmaking concept are given.

3.1. Virtual individual matchmaking

To inspire cooperation within the E³UDRES² Focus Areas and to support identification of joint research topics and researchers, E³UDRES² research supporting team (see Section 4.1) places special importance on providing researchers with diverse networking opportunities, including virtual opportunities which are supposed to support matching researchers with relevant profiles to other researchers and to relevant topics within the Focus Areas. Pivotal to this end is the E³UDRES² BoR, described in 2.1, which is instrumental in forming the basis for the networking of researchers in E³UDRES².

In addition, to further support collaboration between E³UDRES² partner institutions, E³UDRES² continuously creates other virtual opportunities. As an example, one other matchmaking platform that has been used already was Padlet, on which researchers could post new initiatives for joint research projects or draw attention to existing projects, make contacts, contact potential cooperation partners and plan joint activities.

E³UDRES² research supporting team will continuously assess other virtual tools for matchmaking and setting up the environments to promote further cooperation and will organize, at least, two virtual matching opportunities per year, per focus area.

4. Support provided to the researchers

4.1. E3UDRES2 research supporting team

The E³UDRES² research supporting team is the main responsible for the implementation of the policy. Currently, this is the Work Package 4 – "Research and Knowledge Serving Users" team.

4.2. Networking, Knowledge exchange and training opportunities

E³UDRES² offer a variety of opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange, to enable researchers to connect with new colleagues from the alliance, exchange knowledge and create new ties within the alliance. These include but are not limited to:

- Networking events and thematic workshops. For example, E³UDRES² research supporting team must organize one Citizen Science event each year. Whereas two of these events will focus more on reaching citizens, students and other stakeholders (Citizen Science Festivals, organized in collaboration with E³UDRES² dissemination team), for the other two years events will be planned that focus more on the academic aspect of citizen science and will provide researchers with opportunities to present their own work to interested colleagues, to network, connect and enhance their knowledge regarding citizen science (thus, also incorporating the need for trainings identified in the first funding phase).
- Promoting and encourage participation of researchers in activities developed within E³UDRES². For example, encouraging researchers to participate in the International Engagement Circus, Hackatons, i-Living Labs and Bootcamps as experts serves both the purpose of contributing with their scientific expertise, which will be imparted to the participating students and improve the quality of those formats, and also the purpose of creating an additional opportunity for networking with researchers from the other partners. Researchers should also be encouraged to be engaged in the joint teaching formats, and in the activities promoted by the E³UDRES² Innovation Hubs. E³UDRES² research supporting team should work in close cooperation with the teams that organize the different formats to make sure no opportunities are missed.
- Training opportunities: Opportunities for opening training courses offered by each partner to Master, PhD students and researchers in general are already under discussion. Besides, invitations to workshops and events such as International Staff Weeks are regularly distributed to all interested persons via the E³UDRES² newsletter and the other E³UDRES² communication channels.

E³UDRES² research supporting team will pro-actively look for all the networking and training opportunities, in close cooperation with the E³UDRES² capacity building team, and ensure those opportunities are continuously disseminated (see subsection 4.5 for further details).

4.3.   Information on funding and support opportunities

E³UDRES² research supporting team will aim to support involvement of and cooperation between R&D&I support units of the partner institutions. These units are usually very much in tune with funding opportunities, stakeholders looking for partners, etc., and can make suggestions for funding opportunities, trainings available and organizations looking for partners. The E³UDRES² research support team will disseminate these opportunities (via the BoR, virtual platforms or other or means) to create a group of researchers who can then collaborate on the preparation of a proposal for a specific call.

Research will be encouraged to be conducted among all researchers in the E³UDRES² community by creating critical mass to apply for external funding together.

4.4.   Student engagement

Enhanced student engagement will primarily be targeted on the Master and PhD levels and researchers should be encouraged to include students in their research.

A good opportunity to engage students is also to use the formats that are targeted at students (and were already described in subsection 4.2) to start the collaboration between students and researchers.

4.5. Communication

E³UDRES² research supporting team aims to maintain close interaction with E³UDRES² dissemination team to ensure optimal communication of research opportunities and results.

Some concrete actions:

- Start a regular newsletter focusing only on research matters, to be disseminated by all registered researchers at the BoR but having it also available from the E³UDRES² website, including the possibility of anyone interested to subscribe it and encourage also the relevant staff from the R&D support units at each partner to subscribe it.
- Regularly reach out to the BoR members inviting them to contribute to the newsletter with some news (e.g., an impactful paper that has been published, a grant that has been approved, a special issue for which they are guest editors for which they want to bring the attention of other researchers, a conference they are organizing and want to advertise, etc.).
- Exchange with E³UDRES² dissemination team to explore the possibility of using the E³UDRES² Talent TV, which is meant to be a channel powered by students and can be used as a platform to showcase research and serve also the purpose of attracting more students to research.
- Promoting meetings with the leads of the research centres based at each partner institution to enhance their knowledge about E³UDRES² and what their researchers may benefit by being part of this larger community. This should be ensured by the E³UDRES² research supporting team members at each respective partner.

5. Impact in the involved regions; Monitoring and Review

The relevant body for supervising, advising and validating research work in E³UDRES², as well as overseeing the academic and strategic aspects of research is the E³UDRES² Scientific Council. It was established in May 2024 and it is composed of senior researchers/scientists from all partners

E³UDRES² research supporting team will ensure the monitoring of the activities and present, once per year, a report to the Scientific Council on the joint research activities within E³UDRES². To produce such report, which will provide an overview, both qualitatively and quantitatively for which the E³UDRES² research supporting team will keep track of the activities presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Activities that will be tracked by E³UDRES² research supporting team to monitor research activity

ActivitiesT	Indicators	(Potential) Support for information collection
Events organized by E³UDRES² research supporting team	Number of events, number of researchers	Site coordinators (in case E³UDRES² research supporting team) is not able to identify all participants)
Participation of researchers in events/formats organized by other work packages	Number of events, number of researchers	Other organizers
Proposals to research projects that have been submitted involving at least 2 E³UDRES² partners	Number of proposals, number of partners involved	R&D support units at each partner
Approved funding for research proposals involving at least 2 E³UDRES² partners	Number of proposals, number of partners involved, total funding	R&D support units at each partner
Communications presented involving at least 2 E³UDRES² partners	Number of communications	R&D support units at each partner
Published papers involving at least 2 E³UDRES² partners	Number of papers	R&D support units at each partner

Co-supervision of theses (Master and Phd)	Number of finished theses	Researchers involved in supervision should actively report to E³UDRES² research supporting team
Software produced	Number of software	R&D support units at each partner
Number of regional stakeholders involved in a joint proposal	Number of proposals, number of partners involved	R&D support units at each partner
Participation of researchers in trainings	Number of trainings, number of researchers	Organizers of the trainings
New methods for regional innovation	Number of methods	Researchers
Articles in local media	Number of articles	Researchers
Appearances in local media	Number of appearances	Researchers
Any other activities that may be perceived by the research support team as interesting for monitoring the impact of joint research	To be defined	Researchers

For the monitoring, E³UDRES² research supporting team should make an assessment on which Focus Areas a certain output falls in and will structure the report as much as possible to provide visibility on the level of activity in each Focus Area. However, one should keep in mind that some of the relevant activities (training, for instance) are independent of the Focus Area and yet still very relevant to be tracked. Moreover, some researchers do not feel reflected in any of the Focus Area but may still be producing high quality results by cooperating with other E³UDRES² researchers in different areas and that is also worth being tracked and assessed. In fact, if some new strong area emerges from these other cooperations, this may be the seed for revising the Focus Areas at some point in the future.

The Scientific Council will analyze the report presented by E³UDRES² research supporting team and provide some feedback to improve the quality and impact of the research groups/networks.

E³UDRES² research supporting team should be responsible to put in place additional measures in face of those recommendations.

6. Conclusion

The E³UDRES² Research Network Policy is designed to cultivate a vibrant and collaborative research community that drives innovative and interdisciplinary research forward. By establishing clear criteria, and support mechanisms for researchers, as well as by monitoring and reviewing their effectiveness, the alliance aims contribute to the sustainability and innovativeness of the involved small and medium-sized cities and their rural environments, to contribute to the quality of life of its citizens and to achieve significant advancements across its Focus Areas and make a meaningful contribution to global research challenges.

To ensure taking advantage of the full potential of the alliance, E³UDRES² research supporting team will foster close cooperation with the other relevant structures of E³UDRES² and institutional support teams.

7. Policy review

To properly reflect the current stage of development of the alliance and the experience gathered from the implementation of the policy, this should be reviewed regularly.

The regular schedule for reviewing the Research Networks is up to 12 months after last approval from the Executive Board.

E³UDRES² research supporting team is responsible for reviewing this policy and to send a proposal to be approved by the Executive Board.

Once approved, the policy should be updated at the E³UDRES² website and promoted internally.