



**UNIVERSITIES AS KEYS  
TO UNLOCK EUROPE'S INNOVATION POWERHOUSE**

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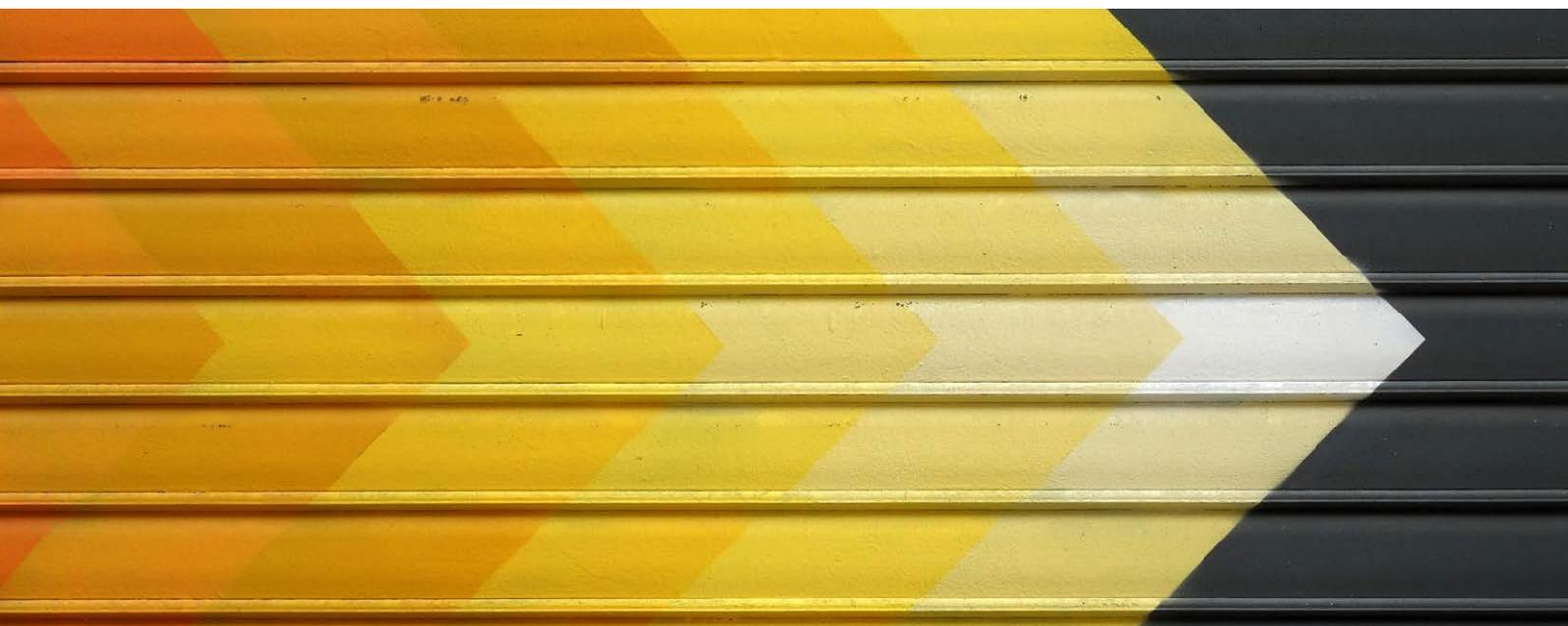
# UNIVERSITIES AS KEYS TO UNLOCK EUROPE'S INNOVATION POWERHOUSE

Universities are the regional connectors and drivers of open innovation

The European Consortium of Universities (ECIU) welcomes the proposal for Horizon Europe and its focus on impact and innovation. ECIU appreciates the inclusion of an Open Innovation pillar, which indeed should make innovation as open as possible. To realise a European Innovation Powerhouse, ECIU would like to see that particular emphasis is paid to fostering excellent local European Innovation Ecosystems, in which innovative universities play a very important role. Along the whole Horizon Europe programme and particularly in its Open Innovation pillar, innovation ecosystems must be supported and connected, because they are crucial for realising social and digital transformation.

Although ECIU understands the importance of breakthrough, market-creating innovation, other innovations should continue to be supported by Horizon

Europe, in particular social, business model innovation and the support and connection of local innovation ecosystems. Innovative universities are the drivers of these ecosystems and systemic change providing social transformation. Universities offering top-notch research, are fountains of new knowledge, increase Europe's human capital through education, and they actively support entrepreneurship and transfer of knowledge to industrial and societal actors. Universities link global innovation ecosystems with local ones, address issues from multiple perspectives and in an interdisciplinary way, and connect society with its creative minds. They provide a place for critical reflection and are transmitters of culture and common values. This broad role of innovative universities is particularly relevant for European citizens in the context of the digital transformation, which will challenge most of our socio-economic structures.



This view can be summarised in the following 3 points:

1

Innovative universities are the most needed and the most natural connectors of international, local and regional ecosystems.

**Europe must consider universities as the main actor for connecting local, regional and pan-European ecosystems when implementing Horizon Europe.**

2

Universities are not only connectors but also drivers of innovation ecosystems. They provide systemic change with the results of excellent research and their contributions to social transformation.

**Europe must consider universities as enablers for innovation-led growth and social innovation. Universities must be included in the core of the EU innovation policies.**

3

Universities practice open science and innovation and allow innovation to be accessible by the wider society and all European citizens..

**Europe must consider universities as relevant actors for realising the most needed European entrepreneurship culture. Therefore universities must be represented in the relevant Expert Groups and Management Boards, not only for growth-related aspects but also for the societal transformation dimension in the scope of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Horizon Europe should embrace a broader perspective of the role of universities as drivers of systemic change. To this end ECIU proposes the following for improving the otherwise commendable proposals for Horizon Europe:

## **INNOVATION**

Horizon Europe must practice **a broad definition of 'innovation'**, focusing not only on the role of disruptive breakthroughs but also value social innovation. Innovation in support of wealth and job creation depends just as much on business model innovation as on technology. Application of the award criteria **'impact'** should take this into account and make clear that different types of impact - societal, scientific and economic - may be addressed. As a consequence of the existential importance of the UN 2030 Agenda, pre-eminence shall be given to impact in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals.

While the notion of **Technology Readiness Levels** (TRLs) can be helpful classifying the positioning of a project in terms of scientific and technical maturity, it is not an appropriate methodology for all knowledge fields. Innovation is not a linear process that can be described in terms of TRL. Furthermore, it is hard to come to a full agreement concerning TRL, since in many cases a normalising definition does not exist. Alternative models of describing the positioning of projects should be used and proposers should be given more freedom to propose what they think is appropriate, e.g. the Innovation Readiness Level tool.



## THE EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL

The architects of the **European Innovation Council (EIC)** must take into account that deep tech is important for innovation, and also acknowledge that innovation encompasses more than technology. The role of universities as educators for people to address the consequences of rapid technological and societal change should not be overlooked. Measures to strengthen the links between education, research and innovation should be supported.

The recommendation of the Independent High-Level Group of Innovators on establishing a European Innovation Council, published in 'Europe is back: Accelerating breakthrough Innovation', to **include university representation in the EIC management structure** should be followed.

Universities play a key role in European **regional innovation ecosystems**. To realise innovation, the EIC must push the regional innovation agenda in close collaboration with universities and other stakeholders, seeking synergy with the existing Smart Specialisation Strategies.

Financing entrepreneurs and innovation champions through the EIC Fellowships is warmly welcomed. Horizon Europe must support universities in their mission to nurture entrepreneurial spirit amongst

academic researchers and provide those from outside the university with opportunities to access relevant knowledge. Opportunities should be given to **potential entrepreneurs**, as talent and creativity have to be identified and curated to grow towards the champions of tomorrow. To foster talents, mutual **exchange of personnel between industry and academia** must also be enabled. The EIC has to support existing initiatives on university campuses that offer opportunities for students to develop their innovative ideas with guidance from researchers and entrepreneurs. To make optimal use of Europe's innovation potential, innovation must be democratised and the right to be creative must be ensured. Europe's talents must be cherished by including students, society and citizens in Horizon Europe's innovation activities. To realise this, **social innovation infrastructures** are key. Funding must be made available to support these activities, either on a regional, national or European level. Synergies with Europe's educational programme **Erasmus** are also crucial..

Sustainable support for excellent **research infrastructures** is important and has to be linked with the regional funds. The possibility to open up excellent research infrastructures is key for the flourishing of the local community and to attract international partners.

## EFFECTIVE INNOVATION

To realise innovation, and a sustainable and competitive Europe, clear political choices are needed urgently. The EU and its member states must provide the resources to act on the proclaimed priorities and policies. ECIU does not consider the current budget proposal to be adequate to meet the stated goals of the Programme. It should be increased to at least be in line with the Lamy proposal (**160 billion euro**)<sup>1</sup>.

To ensure that Horizon Europe achieves the desired impact, effective bridging mechanisms and **synergies** within and between the different pillars, instruments and clusters of Horizon Europe, and also with national programmes, are crucial. E.g. through the Seal of Excellence (national funds and European Structural and Investment Funds) and entrepreneurship training (Erasmus).

The role of **knowledge transfer professionals**, found in innovative universities, should be recognised for their potential contribution to bringing together different actors. These organisations have the expertise and experience to shape and manage complex coalitions of different types of stakeholder required by the instruments of Horizon Europe. In particular, such organisations are well placed to act as mission delivery agencies, balancing public and private interests and managing different stakeholder contributions.

ECIU welcomes that the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) are seen as a key policy driver. This supports effective innovation, as the SDGs provide the opportunity for a vitally needed collective approach towards addressing global challenges. Supporting them ensures synergies and a focus of research and innovation investments. The EU has to continue and deepen measures to fulfil the SDGs. As a consequence, selection of proposals should take into account their contribution towards these goals.

ECIU welcomes Horizon Europe as a programme putting openness into practice as far as the strategic planning and missions, because this contributes to effective policy making. Participation in the debate must be open, fair, transparent and equal to all groups and citizens.

Also the new **Mission boards** must include all perspectives, including that of higher education and universities.

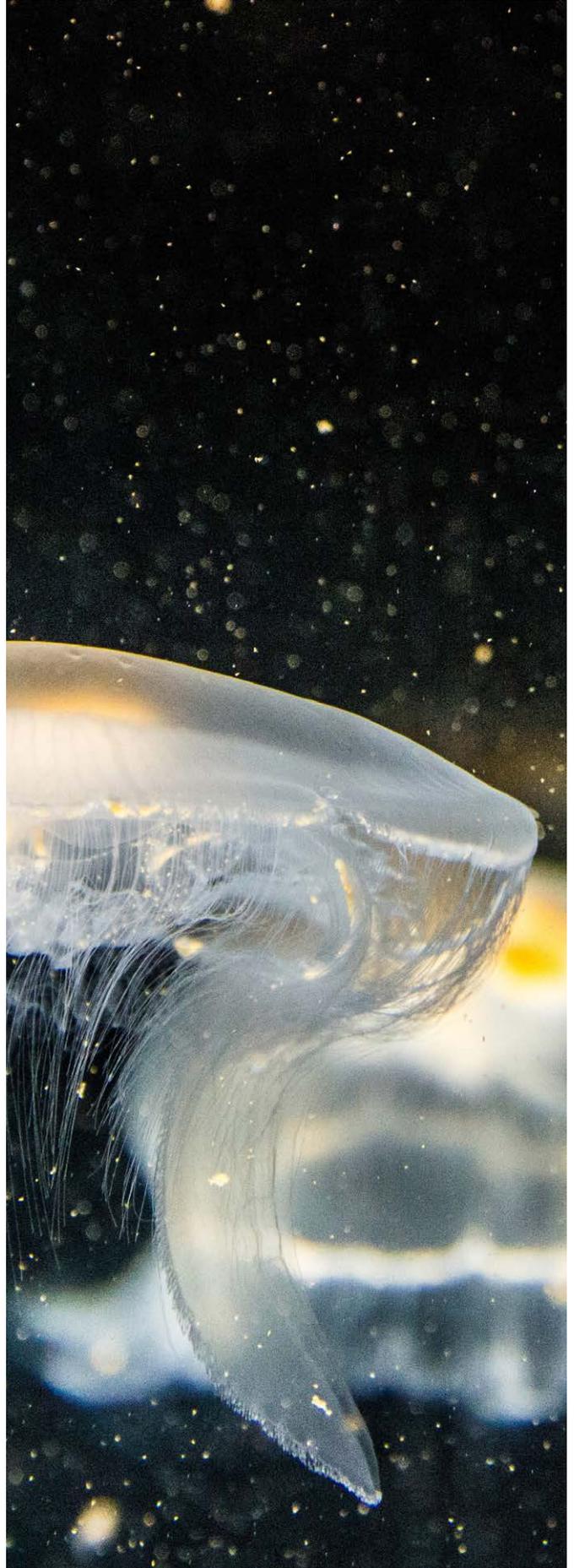
Horizon Europe should actively support the **integration of social sciences**, to realise effective innovation. Interdisciplinarity is an important way to stimulate innovation and achieve far-reaching social impact, e.g. fulfilling the SDGs.

<sup>1</sup>The Horizon 2020 success rates show that an additional 62.4 billion euro is needed to finance all 'excellent' Horizon 2020 proposals. Only 26.4 percent of the research proposals evaluated as excellent are currently funded (as per March 2017). Wasting resources and leaving excellent ideas without materialization.

## OPEN SCIENCE

ECIU is a proud signatory of the Coalition of Doers, endorsing the principles of the European Open Science Cloud declaration. A **European Open Science policy** is crucial for innovation. Research data must be as open as possible, and as closed as necessary. The need for exceptions for Intellectual Property Rights, personal data protection, confidentiality, security concerns, as well as other legitimate interests needs to be acknowledged to support innovation. To ensure compliance for making **data 'FAIR'**, the costs generated by the management of research data in line with the FAIR-principles, must be eligible.

To create a true innovation culture, universities need academic **incentives, awards and acknowledgements for innovation**. EU support, both from Horizon Europe, Erasmus and regional programmes, is crucial. Open Innovation rewards must be part of the Open Science-label.





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