



II RICH Symposium: “Fostering the Innovation Potential of Research Infrastructures”

Press release

“**Innovation is like love: you can’t buy it, you can’t force it**”. The somewhat lame metaphor from [ICOS-ERIC](#)’s Director General Werner Kutsch stuck like no other at the II RICH Symposium, held on the 8th of May, at the [Gulbenkian Foundation](#) in Lisbon.

The objectives of the symposium were to showcase approaches to innovation taken by Research Infrastructures and projects in all scientific domains, as well as to provide a floor for the discussion of policies and incentives for innovation. If the presentations made during the day are representative of the European Research Infrastructures, then all stakeholders should feel inspired and motivated by the creativity and resourcefulness of the research community.

Aptly, the day started with an overall introduction to the theme by Octavi Quintana Trias, who framed the issue of innovation with the supporting studies by the EC and [ESFRI](#), on [Innovation](#) and Long-term Sustainability of RIs, as well as the support being provided through H2020 for the promotion of innovation. The latter was to be later further developed by Philippe Froissard, who presented the funding opportunities being deployed through the 2018-2020 H2020 Research Infrastructures WP. Quintana, Froissard and Sergio Bertolucci defined a policy axis on the symposium, with Bertolucci’s [ATTRACT](#) project (possibly to be funded in the coming months), playing a more direct role in the acceleration of imaging and detection technologies spinning-off, through cascade granting.

Which begs the question: so, **can you actually buy innovation** (unlike love)? Maybe. At least, even if you can’t straight-up buy it, you can deploy multiple types of funding instruments to stimulate it. And besides H2020 granting and cascade granting through [ATTRACT](#), the symposium showcased [HNSciCloud](#), the Pre-Commercial Procurement (PCP) instrument being used to build a Public-Private hybrid cloud for research (Bob Jones); [EIB](#) instruments and support structures (Laura Busato), including the [InnovFin advisory](#) and reports, such as on [funding for RTOs](#); and structural funds investments for the construction of [ELI](#) (Roman Hvezda), with a view of Research and Innovation geographic integration in interconnected campuses. The theme of *location* was of interest to the audience: can you promote pan-EU industry access to RIs through the Transnational Access tool, or will the SME users of RIs be more or less invariably local? Maybe alternative schemes for SME access should be studied.

And not only geographical clustering was heralded as a positive factor. RI projects thematic clustering was hailed as a successful structure to promote integration and stimulate innovation. Examples came from the Biomedical ([Corbel](#)), Environmental ([ENVRI-plus](#)) and Social ([SERISS](#)) sciences, all of which deploying innovation-promoting actions. Philippe Froissard promised continued support to clustering through H2020, though the main focus will be on data management. Which, as noted by the [e-IRG](#) chair (Gabriele von Voigt), is an important condition for innovation. Position papers and their recommendations are of unsung importance for standardization, and the e-IRG, together with ESFRI (Giorgio Rossi) plays a central role in policy recommendations.

Continuing to deconstruct Werner Kutsch’s metaphor: **can Innovation be forced?** Taking all of the examples showcased and discussions had during the day, the answer seems to be an emphatic **no!** Rather, it needs to be continually nurtured. Inspiring examples of approaches to innovation were



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presented, from the complex, yet streamlined Technical Liaison Network of [NFFA-Europe](#) (Roberto Gotter), which chaperones SMEs' ideas through the partner RIs usage possibilities, to the *Innovation platform* of [ACTRIS2](#) (Gelsomina Pappalardo), with 25 Associated SMEs committed to co-development of instrumentation, to [Laserlab-Europe's](#) (Claes-Göran Wahlström) SME spin-off capacity, relying on multi-country partnerships and supportive instruments, such as the [ERC-PoC](#) grants. In common: all these examples come from long-lasting scientific community networks, nurtured by FP funding. The quality and length of the relationships need not to be publicly funded, though. As defended by Ed Parsons, a lot of the innovative capacity at Google comes exactly from the quality and nurturing of the human factor inside the company. Continuing support to *moonshot* projects makes them come through.

What else have we learned from the symposium? As Philippe Froissard himself has assumed, for many people Innovation in Research Infrastructures was the backyard of the Engineering / Physics communities. Not anymore. If a single point has to be highlighted from this symposium, it has to be the coming-of-age of every scientific domain in the Innovation arena. The environmental sciences community seemed particularly advanced in this domain, with well-structured and apparently effective strategies being shown by [ACTRIS2](#) and [ICOS-ERIC](#). But also in the medical sciences, through the example of [EATRIS-ERIC](#) (Anton Ussi), with their impressively high numbers on industry use of RIs. As has been the case in the past, the social sciences and humanities struggle to find their spot in this arena. The points of view from the recent project [SoBigData](#) (Roberto Trasarti) and the well-established [European Social Survey ERIC](#) (Eric Harrison) brought different approaches to the discussion, with the former trying to exploit the transformative potential of big data through thematic Virtual Research Environments, and the latter taking a 10,000 feet view of the impact of the RI, where the policy implications of Social Sciences RIs can be construed as *Social Innovation*.

This second-to-last thought brings us full-circle, back to Werner Kutsch, who challenged the audience with the somewhat provocative question: who was the greater innovator – Charles Keeling or Elon Musk? In this question, the fundamental issue of “Fostering the Innovation Potential of Research Infrastructures” is, perhaps, encapsulated: Innovation is a desirable outcome of Research, and it is one that is very convenient for the community to promote when attracting the attention of national and European funding authorities. But it is just a component that should not be blown out of proportion. Translated into an aphorism, Werner Kutsch's question might read ***thou cannot innovate what thou cannot see.***

Finally, as a practical outcome of this symposium, prospective applicants to H2020 RI projects will now have a toolbox of strategies to benchmark. Presentations and video recording of the event will now be permanently accessible through the [RICH project's website](#). These will undoubtedly be useful tools for newcomers, but also for the seasoned FP participants.

Let there be R&I!

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