

[Theme in Focus] In Focus: Enhancing capabilities of WB countries' research infrastructures and their socio-economic impact

We all know that innovation in science and technology is vital to solving economic and societal challenges. These solutions, by the way, require access to complex and costly **Research infrastructures (RIs) meaning those facilities, resources and services used by the science community to properly conduct research and foster innovation** (as stated in the H2020 program). By pooling effort and developing RIs, countries can indeed achieve excellence in highly-demanding scientific fields. On the other hand the scientific and technological cooperation, including knowledge transfer and training of the young generation can strengthen innovation, information exchange and the development of human capacity building. It might be concluded that efficient RIs namely enable big discoveries in science and technology, represent an attraction towards researchers and can build also bridges between research communities as they facilitate training, innovation and knowledge-sharing.

At European level the approach is to allow open access to the existing research infrastructures to all researchers (see for instance the [RIs offering access landscape](#) and the [currently open call of CERIC-ERIC](#)), to avoid duplication of efforts and to coordinate the use of RIs, to trigger the exchange of best practice, develop interoperability of facilities and resources, develop training and connect national research communities while increasing the overall quality of the research and innovation. The objective is eventually to ensure that Europe generates first-class sustainable RI and services (read about the , impacting on discovery acceleration, as well as on innovation and competitiveness, through high-quality RI management. In such a context, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures – ESFRI –updated its Roadmap to provide a coherent and strategic vision ensuring that Europe has excellent world-class Research Infrastructures in all fields of science and innovation. The [ESFRI Roadmap 2018](#) will be presented in September this year. The European Commission has moreover published the [‘Call For Action Report’](#) which aims to set the basis for a discussion with Member States and stakeholders on the measures to be taken at all levels in Europe to address RI sustainability in medium and long-term.

When it comes to the South East Europe the establishment of a [‘SEE Europe Institute for sustainable technologies’](#) has de facto become a regional project with now full attention by the European Commission as well.

“The region of South East Europe is extremely important for us and the SEEIIST project will have our full support in the coming period. This is a great example that deserves our attention and I will personally engage so that you get a clear funding formula for the next three-year period by the end of this year, Mr. Carlos Moedas recently announced.

The realisation of the project will take several years which gives sufficient time to train not only the future team that will help to build and later operate the installations but also to form a user community. Technology and know-how transfer in general will be vital parts of the initiative. With the building of this facility there will be indeed many opportunities for technology transfer to the SEE-countries as well.

Another initiative is furthermore quite active in the region with the objective of facilitating the macro-regional scope and link up to socio-economic actors of Research Infrastructures. This is the **ResInfra@DR** project funded by the Interreg under the Thematic Pole 2 (RDI Framework Support) of the Danube Transnational Programme. The project's mission is to **improve framework conditions for research infrastructure and innovation while facilitating transnational cooperation and emphasising the macro-regional scope of the sustainable development of research infrastructures**. The initiative is indeed mainly focused on the Danube Region but it **covers Western Balkans countries as well by including partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia**. ResInfra@DR thus contributes also to enhancing the capabilities of Western Balkan countries' Research Infrastructures and their socio-economic impact.

We spoke with Sinisa Marcic, Assistant Minister for Science Ministry of Science and Technology, Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina who explained us how ResInfra@DR matters as an effective link between various countries and their research infrastructures.

*“...Activities such as dialogue workshops, trainings and conferences allow partners and other participants to gain a better understanding of RIs in the region, obstacles that research organisations have to deal with in terms of establishing and managing complex RIs. **This project is even more salient for smaller and less developed countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina**. A training event was organised in Banja Luka Training in April 2018; it shown that many of our research organisations are in need of such educational activities and are happy to offer their expertise to the region. More importantly, the training proved to be an outstanding networking tool that reaped some concrete results in terms of inter-organisational cooperation in less than two months.”*

A wide variety of stakeholders such as policy makers and representatives of agencies hosts of research infrastructures such as universities or academies, as well as staff of sectoral agencies from the Western Balkans countries and other countries across the Danube macro-region took part in the mentioned [training event](#) in Banja Luka. It delivered substantial **knowledge on the planning, management and monitoring of Research Infrastructures**. The training covered indeed Research Infrastructure-related topics including the planning and preparatory steps before the establishment of a Research Infrastructure, operation and management, monitoring, long term sustainability, and socio-economic impact. In addition, the comprehensive four-day cross-thematic capacity-building training facilitated interaction among actors across the Danube Region. Seven experts acting as trainers and 34 participants attended the training which was organised by the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The participants came also from Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, thus covering eight countries in total. Other three training events to build capacity for evaluation, planning, monitoring and management of research infrastructures (RIs) events were organised by ResInfra@DR and [materials are available](#) also to WB stakeholders.

Further activities of the ResInfra@DR project include: a policy dialogue focusing on relevant regional, national and macro regional but also EU level policy fields involving also end-users of RIs; the collection of a dataset of competent (and qualified) reviewers for RI assessments; dedicated dissemination and capitalisation actions contributing to the policy take-up and utilisation of the project's results by other projects under the Thematic Pole 2 of the Danube Transnational Programme, the EU's Danube Strategy, and beyond. We invite you to visit the [ResInfra@DR project website and to register to the related newsletter](#) for keeping updated with all project information.

[At WBC-RTI.INFO, a selection of topic-related events, news, calls, documents, organisations, links etc. is available here.](#)