Utilisation of Structural Funds for e-Infrastructure development (experience of Hungary)

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Goals and opportunities in Horizon2020
History of SF in eRI - a brief overview
Dilemma of compatibility
Various challenges and issues
The case of Hungary
Conclusions
H2020 goals and opportunities

- e-Infrastructure is key component of the ERA
  (mobility, openness, RI, joint programs, global hub...)

- Distributed / integrated (remote) resources in the ERA
  (humans, funds, tools, info)

- Exceptional role of e-Infrastructures (glue):
  e-RI → RI → R → R&D → R&D&I → Competitiveness …

  Widely recognised role, function, importance !
  High priority (both EU & MS) !
History of SF in eRI

- **Past (2007-13):** FP7 50 B€ + SF slowly entering RI  
  (HU: ~20 M€ for e-RI)

- **Horizon2020 preparations/transition (2011-2013):**  
  "RI funding by SF only (!)"  
  Background: SF serves infrastructure developments  
  (road, rail, energy … ICT)

- **Present (2014-2020):** joint handling of R&D and RI =  
  = harmonised FP + SF (ESIF) funding  
  ~80 B€ Horizon2020 + ~100 B€ SF! (7 years)  
  S3 (Smart Specialisation Strategy): MS!
Compatibility dilemma

Difficulties in using SFs for RI purposes:
- RIs should offer unique research services to users, and solve grand societal challenges
- SFs should inclusively narrow the development gaps among regions and Member States

Possible additional difficulties:
- RI and ESIF (NDP/OP) matters often under different Ministries
- lack of correlation between NDP/OP time-frames

in case of multinational RI Projects
Challenges

RI challenges (vs. ESIF requirements):
- Integral parts of strategies (not just individual large-scale budget absorbers)
- Elements of major discovery process (not just desired by researchers)
- Contributors to research excellence (not just tools for competitiveness)
- Catalysers of economic growth (not just new components of old systems)
- Providers of EU attractiveness (not only improvement)
- Pan-European dimension and interest (not just local / regional necessity)

ESIF challenges (vs. RI demands):
- Projects to be integrated into NDPs (Operational Programs)
- Project-level lengthy evaluation and approval for major projects by the EC
- Special goals (environmental, legal, financial, socio-economic, etc.)
- Rigid time constraints
The case of Hungary

- During FP7: ~20 M€ for e-RI*
- During H2020 (up to now): ~12 M€ for e-RI*
  
  Network, HPC infrastructure, data infrastructure
  
  Beneficiary organisation: the Hungarian NREN

- We expected more. The trend is not promising…

- Reasons might be:
  - Weak lobbying
  - Dramatic organisational changing of the Hungarian NREN in 2016
  - Low level of understanding and commitment on political level
  - Development needs of the school network and general broadband access attract attention and resources
  - Unlucky geographical coverage of the SF (eligibility of Central Hungary is limited)
ESIF eligibility
Conclusions

- Funding for Research Infrastructures is a key issue
- NRENs face considerable problems
- OPEX of e-Infrastructures: govt + users + FP ...
- CAPEX: in most cases only Structural Funds can help
- Key to sustainability: combined cost coverage
- Solution (EU and MS): Horizon2020 + ESIF (S3)
- Compatibility issues and feasibility challenges
- Combining RI and SF requirements can be difficult
- Better implementation is needed
Thank you!

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Closing comments

- Some figures may somewhat be incorrect
- Combining RI and SF requirements can be difficult
- There are a lot of question marks (e.g., MS attitudes) but
- Attractive opportunities – demanding challenges ...
- A new situation: no lack but abundance of funds
- A promising future ... Are we ready?
- Let’s try to do our best to exploit the SF option –
- for the benefit of the widest possible community!
Conclusions

- Funding e-RI CAPEX: no more a bottleneck!
- NRENs should discuss:
  - How to best exploit the SF opportunities
  - How to convince / motivate MS governments
- NRENs should consider:
  - Vertical & horizontal extension: increasing SF need!
  - Greening, innovation, PCP: also increasing SF need!
- Specific issue wrt. EC rules on regional use of SF:
  - higher priority of convergence regions
- Major issues needing NREN move:
  - expert workforce + business model + CAPEX / OPEX issue