



## Introduction to “Science, society and citizens: suggestions (and hopes) on how to foster RRI in Horizon Europe”

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**Marzia Mazzonetto and Angela Simone**

**Abstract**

At the beginning of May, 2018, the European Commission has presented its proposal for Horizon Europe, the framework programme which defines priorities and budget distribution for the future of European Research and Innovation (2021–2027). The announcement has raised concerns within the community of stakeholders engaged in Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), a democratization process leading to connecting science to the values and interests of European citizens by mean of participatory processes. Through this flash commentary we aim at providing a wide range of arguments, as well as strong examples and concrete suggestions, to the importance of maintaining and strengthening RRI within Horizon Europe, with the hope to inspire amendments to the current proposal.

**Keywords**

Participation and science governance

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When reading the European Commission’s Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing Horizon Europe,<sup>1</sup> one word stands out more than anything else: “innovation”, coming up almost 170 times within the 57 pages long document. With most of its activities and pillars focusing on “maximising the European innovation potential”, Horizon Europe, the Commission proposal for the next EU Research and Innovation programme (2021–2027), currently under negotiation at the European Parliament, leaves no space to doubts in seeing Research & Innovation (R&I) as the “core of productivity and the competitiveness of an advanced economy like the Union’s.”

Innovation, as in the Commission vision for the future of R&I, is mostly seen as competitive market-oriented products and services. Nevertheless, very little attention is paid to one important innovation which Europe has been successfully pioneering, implementing and exporting all over the world in the past few years: RRI. Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) has become an established and inspiring practice within several contexts, ranging from research institutions to

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<sup>1</sup>The full text is available in PDF format at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-horizon-europe-regulation\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-horizon-europe-regulation_en.pdf). A summarized version of the proposal, provided by the European Commission, is available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/horizon-europe-presentation\\_2018\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/horizon-europe-presentation_2018_en.pdf) (also in PDF format).

SMEs and large industries. In her contribution to this commentary, Angela Simone, deputy-coordinator of the EU-funded SMART-map project and executive manager of the Lombardy Region Forum for Research and Innovation on behalf of Bassetti Foundation (Italy), provides an inspiring list of examples of EU-funded initiatives successfully bringing RRI to innovative industrial ecosystems, but also public institutions, professional and scientific societies worldwide, such as the IEEE Global Initiative on Ethics of Autonomous and Intelligent System, the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, and more recently the Chinese National “Science and Technology Innovation Plan”, which have adopted RRI elements within their priorities [Simone, 2018].

Society is highly present in Horizon Europe key priorities, but mostly as mere and grateful receiver of scientific advancements. Even societal challenges are now referred to as “clusters”, within a broader definition of “global policy and competitiveness challenges and opportunities”. In their commentary, members of the Danish Board of Technology Foundation (a Danish institution with 30 years of experience working with engaging publics, researchers and civil society in innovation and political processes) express doubts and concerns on how and if, despite its focus on societal needs and challenges, the current Horizon Europe proposal really supports the continued development and implementation of RRI, not only in its wording but also in terms of appropriate and dedicated resources (budget) [Bedsted et al., 2018].

The termination of RRI could have a strong negative impact not only on current inequalities within the European Union, as also explained by the Danish colleagues, but also on European innovation itself. Robert Braun and Erich Griessler from the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna (Austria), leaders of the NewHoRRizon project,<sup>2</sup> an ongoing EU-funded initiative aimed at fostering the integration of RRI into European, national and local Research and Innovation practice and funding, list some of the dangers of adopting “self-defined excellence” (by science practitioners) as the only model for improvement and progress [Braun and Griessler, 2018]. As they explain in their commentary, throughout Horizon 2020 (the current framework programme for R&I) RRI has sparked “new ways of seeing” the relationship between science, democratic institutions and citizens, and the wide benefits this leads to. They therefore advocate the need for stronger investments in RRI and the Open Agenda in Horizon Europe, “with greater attention to strategy and clear commitment.”

RRI has not been an easy concept to promote (nor an easy acronym to pronounce): most of us still remember the looks on listeners’ faces when trying to explain it for the first time. Despite so, it has been clear from the beginning that the “movement” of RRI EU-funded projects had the potential to entail great changes. Bringing together important elements of opening up science and innovation to societal actors through an institutionalized concept and the promotion of concrete structural changes has led to clear benefits, as Niels Mejlgaard and his colleagues of the MoRRI experts’ groups<sup>3</sup> outline in their contribution [Mejlgaard et al., 2018]. According to their study, not only researchers are more and more familiar with the concept of RRI, but when participating in RRI projects they are also “more likely to employ responsible practices in their own work, and they are more likely to identify democratic, social, or economic benefits for stakeholders beyond the R&I

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<sup>2</sup><https://newhorizon.eu/>.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.technopolis-group.com/morri/>.

system.” Researchers (and industrial innovators) are learning that science and innovation improve by being responsible.

When looking at the current RRI scenario there is still a great margin for improvement. As Alexander Gerber (Full Professor and Chair of the Science Communication Centre at Rhine-Waal University, Germany) underlines in his commentary, part of the research community, as well as several research policy areas within the R&I financed by the European Commission, are still struggling with finding the courage to, or the interest in approaching participatory processes [Gerber, 2018].

A substantial body of research, a wide research community, new tendencies within private financing and industrial processes and proved benefits should be strong and convincing elements of the importance of not losing such an essential approach to European Research and Innovation in the future.

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