

Zane Šime
(Trondheim)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4690-3243>

UNRAVELLING THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD DYNAMICS OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA: TAILORED POSITIVE EXTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION AND SEGMENTATION

Abstract

This article explains how the European Commission steers the incorporation of entities from specific geographic areas and specialising in specific thematic domains into international research-intensive projects through detailed guidance elaborated in the documentation of open calls for project applications. This hoop-test guided process tracing study aims to better understand what factors come into play in the formation and facilitation of the engagement of the European Southern Neighbourhood-based entities in the European Research Area through projects funded by the European Union's Framework Programmes. This category-driven, qualitatively-oriented text analysis is based on the coding of various policy-relevant geographic reference points to clarify the exact contextual background that played a decisive role in including entities from Morocco and Tunisia in project consortiums.

Keywords

differentiated integration, external differentiation, segmentation, Framework Programmes, European Southern Neighbourhood

INTRODUCTION

Science and technology policies are closely intertwined with various developments in international relations¹. Scholarly output on international cooperation,

¹ Mayer, Carpes, Knoblich 2014; Cunningham, Williams 1993; Fritsch 2014; Jasanoff 2014; Wullweber 2014; Hallonsten 2014.

foreign policy stances and incentives for steering science and innovation with tailored public funded programming measures and initiatives attest to the notable role of higher education, research and innovation in international relations. These domains have played, play and will continue to exert a role in supporting the aspirations of subnational, national, intergovernmental, supranational and international bodies and forums.

Research policy is an important, yet not always fully appreciated, enabler of the aspirations of the European Union (EU) external action and the evolution of its fully fledged neo-Westphalian toolbox, namely, the supranationally steered and administered programming and funding tools. This article focuses on the supranational level and the EU. The chosen empirical focus on research collaboration contributes to the scholarly examination of various facets of the EU's external action. It spans beyond the established notions of much-debated state-centric diplomacy and relational encounters². This article traces how the European Commission guides and incentivises the incorporation of entities from specific areas into collaborative research-intense projects through thematic steering enshrined in the documentation of open calls for project applications. The term "entity" refers to the beneficiaries or applicants for a beneficiary status of the EU funding. Since various public, private, non-governmental and other organisations are eligible for the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for Research and Technological Development Including Demonstration Activities (FP7) funding, the term "entity" was selected as the most fitting to generally refer to this heterogeneous pool.

Positive external differentiation refers to the extensions of EU policies beyond its member states. Positive external differentiation studies diverging degrees of applicability of institutional rules to each state that engages in EU arrangements. Segmentation analyses structural characteristics that, by reproducing themselves repeat certain routines and the viability of future pathways over alternative ones. Koenig has empirically mapped the differentiated integration across time and policy areas and showed that the research policy of the EU is highly internationalised³. This propensity to foster ties with peers located across borders provides a very promising empirical context to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the recent track record of the EU in guiding positive external differentiation and segmentation. In this case, positive external differentiation and segmentation is studied as a selective or targeted internationalisation directed towards specific countries or geographical areas. Concretely, positive external differentiation and segmentation allow studying how the European Commission steers particular collaborative and integrationist dynamics. It is a salient research area because more than half of EU

² Arifon 2006; Batora 2021b, p. 1442; Canali 2019; Rieker 2021, p. 3.

³ Koenig 2015, p. 9.

policies are implemented within the scope of diverse modalities, such as the steering methods of various EU policies, as well as the non-unified applicability of EU policy rules across its member states and non-member states engaged in the implementation of specific policies⁴.

FP7 is a resourceful empirical material for the study of the involvement of non-EU countries. It is known for an unparalleled volume of international participation of individuals and entities from approximately 170 countries⁵. Nevertheless, this article pays particular attention to two countries with high involvement in the FP7⁶. This fact is interpreted as a substantial potential for integration into the European Research Area (ERA). This article builds on existing research examining how the EU addresses challenges faced in Northern Africa⁷. Particular attention is paid to the EU neighbourhood⁸ and the two closest Southern countries – Morocco and Tunisia⁹. The European Southern Neighbourhood (ESN) policy aspires to improve the resilience of the EU adjacent areas, including addressing various socio-economic challenges¹⁰.

To expand scholarly studies about the FP7, this article explores whether the findings obtained based on the study of the FP7 Specific Programme “Cooperation”: Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology (KBBE) are unique or share some commonalities with other FP7 Specific Programmes that had Morocco- and Tunisia-based beneficiaries among the consortium members¹¹. To increase the reliability of the findings obtained based on the FP7 KBBE, open calls of the Specific Programme “Cooperation”: Environment (including Climate Change) (ENVIRONMENT), the Specific Programme “Capacities” for international co-operation (INCO), the Specific Programme “Cooperation”: Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH), the Specific Programme “Cooperation”: Information and communication technologies (ICT), the Specific Programme “Cooperation”: Health (HEALTH) and the Specific Programme “Cooperation”: Energy (ENERGY) are put to the test.

This article answers the following research question: How does positive differentiation and segmentation enshrined in the FP7 incorporate Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities in the ERA and respond to the aspirations of the ESN? The article tests the following hoop test hypothesis: The participation of Morocco- and

⁴ Bures, Bätz 2021, p. 80; Schmidt 2019.

⁵ European Commission 2015, p. 19.

⁶ Šime 2021, p. 4.

⁷ Henökl 2022.

⁸ Carmona, Jongberg, Trapouzanlis 2021; Góra 2021, p. 440.

⁹ Gänzle 2019, p. 212; Gänzle, Wunderlich 2022, p. 55; Jongberg, Trapouzanlis 2021; Lannon 2019, p. 111.

¹⁰ Šime 2021, p. 4; Šime 2023b.

¹¹ Šime 2023a.

Tunisia-based institutions in the FPs funded projects is based on a recommendation expressed in the open calls for project applications to include in the consortium entities from the African Mediterranean countries. In a somewhat similar manner that was selected for the study of the KBBE calls¹², the hypothesis is tested by explaining-outcome process tracing to obtain more insight into the role of in-built thematic and administrative incentives of the open calls for project applications in shaping the consortiums of beneficiaries, especially lending support to the onboarding or sustained participation of Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities to collaboratively craft solutions to jointly faced issues, grand or societal challenges.

This introduction forms the first part of the article. The next or second part of the article elaborates on the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of positive differentiation and segmentation. The third part explains the methodological approach and steps taken throughout the process tracing. The fourth part captures the main empirical findings of the content analysis of open calls. It draws attention towards the guidance issued by the European Commission on thematic and geographic prioritisation. That is done to identify specific directions of positive integration and segmentation expected from the applicant consortiums. The fifth part discusses research results, including a demarcation for the generalisation of the results beyond the studied FP7 Specific Programmes. The paper concludes that a more nuanced study of successor Framework Programmes, namely, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe are instrumental. It would help to understand whether the identified trends of positive differentiation and segmentation are temporary or characteristic of a longer duration of time of the ERA implementation.

DIFFERENTIATED INTEGRATION

POSITIVE DIFFERENTIATION

Differentiation refers to the varying institutional rules applicable to each state participating in EU arrangements¹³. “Differentiation can result both from selective integration and disintegration processes”¹⁴. The notion of differentiation excludes uniform disintegration¹⁵. Attention is paid to the historical, sectoral and geographical variation of agreements¹⁶. Thus, it is possible to bring into the scope states that are not members of the EU.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Matthijs, Parsons, Toenshoff 2019, p. 211.

¹⁴ Cianciara, Szymański 2020, p. 255.

¹⁵ Patberg 2021, p. 604.

¹⁶ Schimmelfennig, Winzen 2020; Matthijs, Parsons, Toenshoff 2019, p. 212.

Distinguished from differentiated cooperation¹⁷, differentiated integration is defined in various ways. The chosen definition for this article captures some of the core elements that are common among the overall spectrum of academic attempts to define differentiated integration¹⁸. Differentiated integration stands for the “differential validity in the Union’s laws and in policies, rights, obligations and institutions created under those laws”¹⁹. The saliency for further study is founded on differentiated integration being the EU’s routine approach to accommodating diversity and avoiding deadlocks²⁰. Examining the patterns of differentiated integration brings more clarity about its multidimensional contours across various countries involved. Positive differentiation refers to those occasions when some of the most integrated EU member states go a step further and launch new integration-oriented initiatives²¹. This article explores how the thematic steering overseen by the European Commission in the research domain provides additional incentives for positive integration through international consortiums that span beyond the EU membership. The aim is to offer an extra dimension to both the notion of positive differentiation and emerging literature on the latter. Moreover, this article contributes to the literature on the involvement of third states, referred to as “external” or “mixed” differentiated integration²².

Differentiated integration and positive differentiation in the form of enhanced cooperation or other initiatives have been studied with attention paid to the national executive and legislative debates²³. However, the overall body of literature on differentiation and differentiated integration would benefit from a broader empirical scope than the legal exemption from the rules governing each of the EU policy areas²⁴ or the future pathways of Brexit modalities²⁵. This article addresses differentiated integration only from the perspective of positive differentiation, namely, “a formula that allows for diverse experiences and approaches to facilitate integration”²⁶. In the context of EU-funded projects, the positive differentiation taps into the consortium members’ diverse expertise and experience.

¹⁷ Pirozzi, Bonomi 2021.

¹⁸ For example, Duttie et al. 2017, p. 410.

¹⁹ Lord 2021, p. 548.

²⁰ Asderaki, Markozani 2019, p. 93; Kelemen 2021, p. 674; Kröger, Lorimer, Bellamy 2021, p. 567.

²¹ Gänzle, Leruth, Trondal 2020, p. 245.

²² Rabinovych, Pintsch 2022, p. 99.

²³ Leruth, Trondal, Gänzle 2020; Sitter 2021; Auel 2021; Badulescu 2021; Bučar, Udovič 2021; della Cananea 2019; Ferreira da Silva 2021; Heinikoski 2021.

²⁴ Hantrais 2021, p. 70; Winzen, Schimmelfennig 2016, p. 624.

²⁵ Phinnemore 2020.

²⁶ Blockmans, Crosson 2021, p. 87.

While drawing on the vast spectrum of the literature on differentiation and differentiated integration, this article pays particular attention to policy differentiation²⁷. The empirical focus is on the understudied area of the planning and thematic steering of the EU funding programmes. The empirical insights on supranational initiatives, EU policies²⁸, EU institutions²⁹ and European modalities in addressing challenging episodes in its neighbourhood³⁰ are still at a relatively nascent phase. The diverse modalities of how the European Commission aims at advancing “more Europe” or additional policy responsibilities to be taken over from the national by the supranational authorities remain to be explored³¹. This existing body of literature would benefit from empirical analysis obtained from understudied policy areas, such as the EU research and innovation policies, and key frameworks, such as the ERA (among others). New insights would contribute to the recently commenced scholarly scoping of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)³². Likewise, it would be relevant to the growing literature on multi-level administration³³, especially the scholarly enquiry into various programmes and instruments steered by the European Commission. Most importantly, such policy-specific findings are vital for a better understanding of the similarities and differences of differentiated integration that varies from policy to policy³⁴. Offering more findings grounded in understudied empirical material is essential for avoiding making too simplistic or too broadly stretched generalisations.

In sum, the actual exploratory work of differentiated integration and its policy, positive and external dimensions have only begun. The myriad of instruments tailored within the EU or with EU integrationist goals in mind offer a vast empirical field that remains untapped and holds a lot of insightful nuances for the future advancement of differentiation studies and the overall scholarly understanding of differentiation dynamics revolving around Europe.

SEGMENTATION

Differentiation studies include the interest in segments. Segments are “stabilized constellations of actors from government, parliament, regulatory agencies, NGOs,

²⁷ Telle, Brunazzo, Doidge 2021, p. 3.

²⁸ Merlo, Fasone 2021; Blockmans, Crosson 2019; Cross 2021; Góra, Zubek 2021; Jaeger 2002; Kovář, Kočí 2022; Svendsen 2021.

²⁹ Bertolini, Dawson 2021; Hanada 2021.

³⁰ Scicluna 2021; Riddervold, Bosilca 2021; Trauner, Carrapiço 2012.

³¹ Fromage, Fasone 2022.

³² For example, Holzinger, Tosun 2019, p. 652.

³³ Trondal 2015.

³⁴ Trein, Thomann, Maggetti 2019, p. 345.

regional authorities and the private sector involved in recurrent practices of patterned information exchange and participation in policy formation³⁵. As Bátora explains, it is a notion that refers to specific structural traits and patterns that produce certain options for solutions, thus giving way to some repetitive routines³⁶. Certain convening institutions and entities form segments. Segments generate routinised solutions and recommendations for the collective way forward. These suggestions downgrade or discard a range of less favoured options. Segments ensure more efficiency in generating response measures. At the same time the segment siloes and closes off alternative development avenues.

This empirical grounding for the presence of segments is based on the study of collaborative patterns in the European military and defence sector that resulted in the identification of the defence segment externalisation due to the close collaboration with the former EU member state – the United Kingdom³⁷. The segment externalisation echoes the interest in studying positive external differentiation. More empirical examples from other EU policy domains would help to broaden the understanding of what is the role of segments in specific policy frameworks.

Network patterns maintained by the European Commission span well beyond those established among entities involved in the EU defence cooperation or EU agencies in general³⁸. Besides other networked relations identified in the multi-level governance literature³⁹, project consortiums constitute a compelling form of facilitation of temporary network operation. Projects are means of convening expert circles that gain scholarly attention⁴⁰. It is an important area of enquiry, especially when attempting to fully grasp the environment and expertise resources accessible to *de novo* bodies to pursue their mandates⁴¹. For example, the European External Action Service is the essential entity responsible for EU diplomacy and external action.

However, in the context of differentiation studies, membership patterns and reasons for a specific constellation of expert circles funded by the EU Framework Programmes is uncharted territory. The segment is a scholarly talk of the town that should transition from a buzzword stage into a more mature status supported by more empirical findings. Bátora and Fossum made the first valuable step⁴².

³⁵ Bátora, Fossum 2022, p. 134.

³⁶ Bátora 2021a, p. 71.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 81

³⁸ Curtin, Egeberg 2008; Egeberg, Trondal 2016; Trondal, Jeppesen 2008; Turkina, Kourtikakis 2015.

³⁹ Stephenson 2013, p. 823.

⁴⁰ Gengnagel, Zimmermann, Büttner 2022.

⁴¹ Bickerton, Hodson, Puetter 2015, p. 705; Genschel, Jachtenfuchs 2015, p. 6

⁴² Bátora, Fossum 2022, p. 142.

They distinguish differentiated integration as more preoccupied with hierarchies, rules, boundaries established between participating organisations. In comparison, segmentation captures a scholarly preoccupation with networks and re-current interactions. This article represents one of the consecutive small steps taken to bring more empirical clarity with a focus on examining the approximate and potential contours of the Mediterranean segment of the ERA.

METHODS

Process tracing has proven its value in studying complex episodes with several viable explanations that could play a role in the observed outcomes⁴³. Process tracing studies causal mechanisms⁴⁴. This method pays attention to the role that specific entities play in the interactive process that puts in motion the causal forces of the mechanism⁴⁵. Comparative attempts aim to check the portability of findings across cases⁴⁶. Subsequent paragraphs elaborate on the chosen steps for process tracing.

“Hoop tests do not confirm a hypothesis, but they can eliminate it”⁴⁷. The hoop test hypothesis is tailored to increase confidence in earlier obtained research findings. The counterfactual would be no or extremely seldom references in the analysed documents of the open calls to the searched keywords denoting specific geographic contexts. The hypothesis relies on previous conclusions⁴⁸. Supported by the academic and grey literature and policy document review, this hoop test is tailored to better understand what factors come into play in the formation and facilitation of the engagement of the ESN-based entities in the ERA. Prior data-set observations⁴⁹ clarified that besides the FP7 KBBE programme, ENVIRONMENT and INCO programmes deserve attention. These two programmes are among the top three thematic funding streams that have funded most consortiums with a membership of entities located in Morocco and Tunisia (within the studied project implementation period of 2014-2017). SSH, ICT, HEALTH and ENERGY programmes funded less than ten projects. The analysis of these six FP7 Specific Programmes is instrumental in clarifying the role that the thematic incentives in-built in the programming of EU funding and allocation of funds play in offering

⁴³ te Lintelo et al. 2020, p. 1317.

⁴⁴ Beach 2018; Moumoutzis, Zartaloudis 2016, p. 337.

⁴⁵ Punton, Welle 2015; te Lintelo et al. 2020, p. 1318.

⁴⁶ Bengtsson, Ruonavaara 2017.

⁴⁷ te Lintelo et al. 2020, p. 1319.

⁴⁸ Šime 2023a.

⁴⁹ Some key details about the project selection criteria are explained in the earlier analysis of consortiums (Šime 2021, p. 9).

opportunities for Morocco and Tunisia to take part in projects that form one component of the ERA.

The documentation of open calls for project proposals of ENVIRONMENT, INCO, SSH, ICT, HEALTH and ENERGY Specific Programmes are available in an open access format on the Participant Portal of the European Commission. All packages of documentation were downloaded from the Participant Portal. Following the earlier findings produced on the basis of the KBBE Specific Programme, the annual work programme and the relevant thematic part of the work programme files were taken as the most informative and resourceful items of the whole documentation package of each call for project applications. Therefore, the annual work programmes of all six Specific Programmes are the only items subject to category-driven qualitative oriented content analysis performed for this article.

This article adopts the same coding pattern that was successfully applied in a paper studying the KBBE programme⁵⁰. All work programmes were screened and occurrence of the key terms and abbreviations (or codes), namely, “European (or EU) Neighbourhood”, “Southern Neighbourhood”, “North Africa”, “Middle East and North Africa” or “MENA”, “Mediterranean”, “Morocco” and “Tunisia” were counted to compile statistics of the presence. These terms have proven to be good indicators of conducive contextual background to integrate Morocco and Tunisia in consortiums of the project applications. The interest guiding the choice of terms that refer to some geographical areas is to find out which contexts are the most conducive for engaging Morocco and Tunisia in research collaboration.

The intermediary in the chosen methodological approach is the quantification of data. It helps to sum up the dynamics of content patterns of the examined working programmes. Further nuances come to the fore once analysing the relevant sentences where the coded items appear. It captures an attempt to reconcile the issues raised about quantitative and qualitative research by van der Ree⁵¹. This interpretation work broadens the overall awareness of the contextual factors that prove conducive to the engagement of Morocco and Tunisia in the ERA.

Future pathways to contextualise and explore further nuances of the results obtained from the analysis of the document packages of the open calls are based on the literature review and the insights obtained about the consortium dynamics during three semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted with representatives of Europe-based coordinating institutions of projects represented in the content analysis to explore the project's added value beyond the successful implementation of the planned deliverables and considerations influencing the consortium formation and performance throughout the project and beyond

⁵⁰ Šime 2023a.

⁵¹ van der Ree 2013.

it. This phase of all the consecutive steps of the research process is conducive for modelling the following stages on how to increase certainty about the findings’ reliability crafted during the completed periods of the broader research project.

RESULTS

ANALYSED DOCUMENTATION

To summarise the analysed pool of documentation, table 1 indicates how many projects were funded by each of the six chosen thematic funding streams. To add to this overall statistical picture, four projects coincide with both Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities participating in the same project funded by the ENVIRONMENT Specific Programme, seven projects coincide with both Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities participating in the same project funded by the INCO Specific Programme, three – funded by SSH, three – funded by ICT, two – funded by HEALTH, one – funded by ENERGY.

To sum up, this results in the analysis of 17 projects funded by the ENVIRONMENT Specific Programme, 15 – funded by INCO, eight – by ICT, six – by SSH, eight – by HEALTH, and four – by ENERGY.

Table 1: Project pool

Morocco		Tunisia		Morocco and Tunisia (both represented)
Specific Programme	Number of projects	Specific Programme	Number of projects	Number of projects
ENVIRON-MENT	12	ENVIRON-MENT	9	4
INCO	11	INCO	11	7
SSH	6	SSH	3	3
ICT	5	ICT	6	3
HEALTH	4	HEALTH	6	2
ENERGY	4	ENERGY	1	1

Source: Own compilation based on the prior findings obtained from the Community Research and Development Information Service open access data base⁵². The column “Morocco and Tunisia (both represented)” indicates how many projects out of the nationally listed projects under the “Morocco” and “Tunisia” columns had both Morocco and Tunisia partners.

⁵² Elaborated in Šime 2021.

Another overlap among the projects identified for the analysis is the open calls of six Specific Programmes on which basis the project applications of respective approved projects were submitted for the FP7 funding. Several projects were approved based on the same call for proposals. This results in an analysis of work programmes of seven open calls for proposals of the ENVIRONMENT Specific Programme, seven – for INCO, three – for ICT, three – for SSH, three – for HEALTH, three – for ENERGY.

The concentration of projects to specific calls for proposals diverges from the examined two FP7 Specific Programmes. While the ENVIRONMENT, SSH, ICT and ENERGY Specific Programmes have from one to three projects funded by each call for proposals, the INCO and HEALTH Specific Programmes represent a much more uneven picture. One INCO call has funded seven projects, one call funded three projects, and the rest financed only one project each. One HEALTH call funded five projects, one call – two projects, one call – one project. Thus, the weight of the findings of the content analysis of working programmes is much more even in the case of the ENVIRONMENT, SSH, ICT and ENERGY programmes than INCO and HEALTH programmes.

POSITIVE EXTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION AND SEGMENTATION PATTERNS

Following the document analysis of the open calls, the Work Programmes 2010 and 2011 of the ENVIRONMENT Specific Programme, as well as the Work Programme 2013 of the SSH Specific Programme prove to be the most resourceful documents of the coded items.

Overall, references to the Mediterranean area are present in all studied Work Programmes of the ENVIRONMENT Specific Programme. Much less prevalent but occurring in almost all Work Programmes is a reference to the European Neighbourhood or neighbouring countries of the EU. Even less influential is the North African context. Unlike in the wording of the KBBE Specific Programme, Africa is not a topical area. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has virtually no salience. Morocco and Tunisia are not prioritised as countries either. This quantitative pattern clarifies that a favourable context for incorporating Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities was created by either general prioritisation of the Mediterranean area or specific guidance to tailor a project for the Mediterranean setting.

The invitation for project proposals to explore the impact of ocean acidification in the Mediterranean in a changing climate, as well as an eligibility criterion of a project application to include at least two participants from the Mediterranean

partner countries help to illustrate in a detailed manner how the thematic steering is in-built in the Work Programme 2010. “Mediterranean partner countries” is a term used several times in the ENVIRONMENT work programmes 2010 and 2011.

The ENVIRONMENT Work Programme 2011 next to the Mediterranean also pinpoints the Black Sea. Thus, the Mediterranean does not present a unique basin in the thematic steering attempts of project proposals. However, the coding did not involve counting how often and where precisely the Black Sea is mentioned. Therefore, no further conclusions are made about the comparative role of these two basins in the Work Programmes. This is a geographical reference that ENVIRONMENT shares with KBBE. To conclude on the ENVIRONMENT Work Programme 2011, references to North Africa are often situated close to the mention of the Mediterranean. It is interpreted as a mark of a close relation between these two terms, not an altogether conflation of the two.

The INCO Specific Programme stands in stark contrast with the earlier findings drawn from the KBBE Specific Programme⁵³ and the findings elaborated in this article about the ENVIRONMENT Specific Programme. The INCO work programmes most often refer to the European neighbourhood or the ENP as an area from which consortium members should be incorporated. The second most widespread reference is made to the Mediterranean setting. Very seldom are explicit references to Morocco and Tunisia, such as a list of countries defined as Mediterranean Partner Countries. The overall frequency of the coded terms throughout the Work Programme 2011 differs from the ENVIRONMENT Specific Programme’s annual programmes. European neighbourhood is the most often mentioned term in the Work Programme 2011.

The INCO findings are exceptional and noteworthy in two respects. Firstly, the coding pattern contrasts the pronounced Mediterranean orientation of the KBBE and ENVIRONMENT Specific Programmes. What is crucial to note when interpreting the INCO findings is that only three projects were funded under the Work Programme 2011. In comparison, seven projects were funded under the Work Programme 2013 of the INCO Specific Programme with a principal focus on the European neighbourhood. In part 7 on international cooperation of the Work Programme 2013, the neighbourhood context is mentioned to encourage complementarities with other EU instruments: “Where appropriate, proposals will describe how they will build on, complement and ensure coordination with relevant activities (existing or planned), notably the Preparatory Action funded by the European Parliament and those implemented through” the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) “and its Knowledge Innovation Centres, the

⁵³ Šime 2023a.

Framework Programme, the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instruments (ENPI), especially those aiming to reinforce “science, technology and innovation (STI) “capacities in ENP countries”. Thus, the European neighbourhood context is not only an important reference point for indicating prioritised countries or geographic coverage that a project application should entail. The instruments designed for the European neighbourhood countries are a reference point for modelling mutually complementary EU funded temporary interventions. The INCO goal is to support the development of research and technology capacities in beneficiary countries. The excerpt (quoted earlier in this paragraph) proves that the funding authority pursues such efforts with full awareness of other EU-offered instruments and programming tools. Cumulative added value is sought after. It is not only a commendable characteristic of the INCO programme. Such a comprehensive approach benefits the ERA and its harmonious development as a single well-integrated space for research mobility and technological excellence.

This observation concludes that most INCO-funded projects were taking on-board Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities because this was an explicitly defined recommendation by the funding entity. Consortium members from both neighbourhood countries would increase the competitiveness of the project application and the consortium composition. Furthermore, other considerations, such as the preference for Mediterranean Partner Countries, guided the choice of the consortium composition and the involvement of Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities. The INCO Specific Programme shows that it is crucial not to over-generalise findings obtained from one funding stream of the Framework Programme. The INCO Specific Programme clearly outlines that for a considerable share of FP7 funded projects, it was mostly the neighbourhood context that enabled many Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities to be among successful project applicants.

Additionally, the INCO findings prove the methodological value of a hoop test and the nuances the chosen steps of process tracing allow to uncover. This hoop test has resulted in a mixed picture. The ENVIRONMENT Specific Programme passed the test. It convincingly confirmed the validity of the hypothesis. The participation of Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions in the ENVIRONMENT funded projects is based on a recommendation expressed in the open calls for project applications to include in the consortium entities from the Mediterranean countries.

Conversely, the INCO Specific Programme passed the hoop test with a different thematic orientation and prioritisation. The African geographical position had no role in the INCO context. The European neighbourhood context prevailed over the Mediterranean position. The Mediterranean setting was encouraged to be incorporated into the INCO successful project applications. However, it had

a secondary role in the overall recommended thematic propensity to engage European neighbourhood countries. This thematically diverging finding between the KBBE, ENVIRONMENT and INCO programmes invites a further study of other subsequent Specific Programmes. It should determine whether the INCO Specific Programme captures a unique pattern of recommended consortium-building or if it has some commonalities with another or several FP7 Specific Programmes.

In ICT, SSH, HEALTH and ENERGY Specific Programmes, the Mediterranean was an overall prevalent factor. While the SSH programme made many references to the Neighbourhood, it was done in association with the Caucasus, not the Southern neighbourhood. HEALTH programmes made frequent explicit indications of Morocco and Tunisia, to clarify which countries are referred to as the “Mediterranean Partner countries”. In sum, the Mediterranean context prevails in all examined work programmes except the INCO programme.

The findings prove that positive external differentiation and segmentation across the European neighbourhood significantly relies on top-down steering measures in-built into the open calls for proposals. Special incentives are in place in the main FP7 Specific Programmes that funded the largest share of the projects engaging Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities.

DISCUSSION

Two pathways should be highlighted in addressing this intriguing finding of two not altogether similar contexts – Mediterranean and neighbourhood – that have proven to be the most conducive ones for incorporating entities from Morocco and Tunisia in successful project consortiums.

Firstly, the six examined Specific Programmes together with the earlier analysed KBBE fund most of the projects involving Morocco and Tunisia, but not all of them. Other FP7 Specific Programmes have funded one or more projects. These programmes were not considered compelling enough to include in this study because of their small role in offering access to Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities to FP7-funded projects. The findings caution against generalisation. The patterns obtained for the study period revolving around projects implemented throughout 2014-2017 might not be generalisable to the whole duration of the implementation of all studied FP7 Specific Programmes. Undoubtedly, it is out of the question to conclude that the findings could be relevant for more recent periods, meaning in the context of FP7 successors – Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. Each Framework Programme echoes the political and thematic priorities of its time⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ Šime 2021, pp. 13-14.

These characteristics need to be attentively studied. At this point, there is a lack of empirical findings similar to those captured in this article that would allow drawing more generalised conclusions. Additionally, findings obtained with a focus on Morocco and Tunisia should not be generalised as valid in the case of other ENP countries, for example, Algeria or Egypt. Other ENP countries deserve a nuanced analysis before making any claims of portability of findings across the southern flank. A comparison between several ESN countries is worth further consideration.

The methodological considerations of studying documents applied for specific years reinforce the scholarly pinpointed notion of the EU as a process, not an end in itself⁵⁵. The findings captured in this article present a snapshot of thematic steering measures taken at one point in time of the overall evolution of the EU and the ERA in particular. The analysed annual work programmes do not cover the whole duration of the FP7 time frame of seven years (2007-2013).

Secondly, the methodological toolbox needs to be expanded in future research to identify the other determining factors (besides the geographical location in a prioritised area) for the inclusion of Morocco and Tunisia in many successful project applications. The project-specific necessities of expertise and other factors as the critical determinants for Morocco and Tunisia membership in the consortiums should not be neglected. The existing literature on research collaboration briefly sketched out in the subsequent paragraphs offers just some contextual guidance on the potential factors, such as institution's expertise, that could help broaden the picture and find more nuances about the contributing elements to the external positive differentiation and segmentation of the ERA.

The non-static character is noteworthy. The fluidity or temporary nature of the networks formed by project consortiums is shaped by the ever-evolving pathways of individual mobility and journeys through various institutional, intellectual and geographic spaces internationally, frequently facilitated by time-bound support measures⁵⁶. Some of these encounters are hampered by administrative obstacles⁵⁷. Overall, during the FP7 implementation, many initially Mediterranean-based researchers engaged in brain circulation, returned to their countries of origin on the southern Mediterranean shores or headed northwards in the pursuit of career promotion and international mobility⁵⁸. Such professional journeys might leave an imprint on consortium formation.

⁵⁵ Colomina 2020, p. 46.

⁵⁶ Fernández-Zubieta, Geuna, Lawson 2015a, 2015b; Veugelers, Van Bouwel 2015.

⁵⁷ Arvanitis, Rodríguez-Clemente, El-Zoheiry 2013, p. 33.

⁵⁸ Fresco, Martinuzzi, Wiman 2015, p. 53; Gaillard, Gaillard 2017.

Thus, differentiated integration and positive differentiation in the research, science and innovation policy domains could be analysed, paying more attention to the fact that these processes are far from static due to the (varied level of) turnover of human resources (among institutions assembled by the consortium). As is shown by historical⁵⁹ and personal⁶⁰ accounts, individuals have a pivotal role in establishing, shaping and sustaining temporary or more extended collaborative ties across expert circles, institutions and countries. Besides the EU prioritisation of this geographic area for the internationalised European research initiatives through tailored incentives towards a very specific type of external positive differentiation patterns, it remains to be explored whether research mobility or prior networking encounters (before the finalisation of the project grant agreement), understood as influential segmentation facilitators, could be among the proven conducive factors to the involvement of Morocco and Tunisia.

Looking even more broadly at the contribution of this study, the empirical examination guided by the differentiated integration, positive external differentiation and segmentation helps to better grasp the contemporary collaborative knowledge generation patterns that uphold the European positioning not only in the research, science and technology domain. Drawing inspiration from the global regulatory power of the EU captured by the Brussels Effect⁶¹, research funding programmes are relevant in the context of external projection of the European perspective on the international order⁶², not only the ESN. The positive external differentiation and segmentation patterns should be examined to compare those with the findings captured in this article.

CONCLUSIONS

EU open calls clearly display positive external differentiation and segmentation. While FP7 is in principle open to different actors, the European Commission is able to attract crucial entities from key partners. The examined calls encourage partnering across and focusing on specific geographic areas to address particular issues in close partnership between the EU and non-EU countries. Open calls for project applications encapsulate a formula to bring together various experiences and approaches within a broader ERA framework that is governed by a pronounced integrationist logic. Mediterranean-specific issues have the potential to form a segment of the ERA. However, more certainty about this identified pattern

⁵⁹ For example, Ruud 2018.

⁶⁰ For example, Mays 2021.

⁶¹ Bátora, Fossum 2022, p. 136; Bradford 2012, 2015; Bradford et al. 2019.

⁶² Acharya 2022, p. 268.

could be obtained only by employing additional research methods to study project consortiums and performing focused research on other ENP countries.

To answer the research question, positive external differentiation and segmentation incentives enshrined in the FP7 Specific Programmes are not unified. Not all open calls invite to incorporate Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities in the projects that are parts of the ERA following the same thematic prioritisation. KBBE, ENVIRONMENT, ICT, HEALTH, ENERGY and SSH Specific Programmes emphasise involving Mediterranean partner countries in projects. This thematic propensity is less pronounced in the annual planning of the INCO Specific Programme. The INCO emphasis is on engaging entities from the European neighbourhood. The top-down steering measures for specific patterns of positive external differentiation and segmentation are not applied uniformly across all Specific Programmes. However, Morocco and Tunisia have this advantageous position of gaining project consortium memberships because entities located in both countries were eligible for both of the incentivised geographic contexts.

The ENVIRONMENT, ICT, HEALTH, ENERGY and SSH Specific Programmes passed the hoop test and confirmed earlier findings based on the analysis of the documentation of the KBBE Specific Programme. The examined programmes clearly indicate that the fact that Morocco and Tunisia are situated on the shores of the Mediterranean is the key advantageous factor for benefiting from thematically relevant projects tailored for this geographic area. The Southern neighbourhood has a secondary role in the guidance prepared by the European Commission to welcome entities based in both countries in consortiums.

In contrast, the INCO Specific Programme passed the hoop test but in a slightly different configuration. The annual planning of the programme puts more emphasis on the European neighbourhood, and less on the Mediterranean area. The European neighbourhood context is clearly and succinctly factored into the ERA implementation through some FP7-funded projects. Considering that hoop is an overall weak test, this finding invites the expansion of the methodological inventory for studying positive external differentiation and segmentation dynamics in the EU research policy. Findings indicate that the top-down steering structures notably influence the development of specific positive external differentiation and segmentation patterns. This is a general indication of one factor that has contributed to the incorporation of Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities in the successful project applications. However, it does not uncover all the potential bottom-up segmentation dynamics that might play a role in choosing consortium members.

Besides the recommendations announced through the open call for project applications, other factors might contribute to the choice of partnering among European and Moroccan, Tunisian entities that deserve more attention beyond this article. The rich literature on the mobility of researchers encourages exploring

whether prior encounters during research visits, inter-institutional exchanges or networking occasions could be among the segmentation bottom-up enablers of partnering across the Mediterranean, not solely a recommendation expressed by the funding body to do so.

A study of seven FP7 thematic funding streams expands the awareness of the temporary factors and steering measures that have stimulated the inclusion of Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions in the selected project consortiums. FP7 proves that criteria designed to select project funding applicants are indispensable tools to translate the EU's overarching goals of external action and EU framework policies into tailored and tangible actions supported by specifically designed international teams of experts. However, it does not increase the overall certainty that the same logic of positive external differentiation and segmentation toward more active involvement of Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions are applicable in more recent selections of project consortiums. Therefore, a more nuanced study of successor Framework Programmes, namely, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, is instrumental for understanding whether the identified trends of positive external differentiation and segmentation are temporary or characteristic to a longer time of the ERA implementation. Nevertheless, even the obtained snapshot of patterns across a given period is a relevant insight into the way how the European Commission shapes contemporary collaborative ties and supranationally steers multi-level administration. These findings are an intrinsic part of a broader picture of the global research-intensive partnerships that deserve more scholarly attention in the future.

UNRAVELLING THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD DYNAMICS OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

Summary

The international dimension of the European Research Area and its means of integrating countries of the European Southern Neighbourhood is examined with a focus on the project consortiums funded by Framework Programme 7. Explaining-outcome process tracing is conducive to studying positive differentiation and segmentation in the EU research policy. The content analysis of the open calls issued for project applications demonstrates that the participation of Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions in project consortiums are incentivised through top-down steering measures.

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