

# Participation of Morocco and Tunisia in the European Research Area: Research-intense Collaborative Patterns Across the European Southern Neighbourhood

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The purpose of the study is to explore the research-intense collaborative patterns that weave the EU Southern Neighbourhood into the European Research Area through EU-funded projects. The task of this article is to test the straw-in-the-wind hypothesis which, as the results demonstrate, rightly argues that the EU Framework Programmes do not encourage very restrictive engagement in projects among Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities. The study design entails explaining-outcome process-tracing performed with data-set observations of the collaborative patterns engaging Morocco and Tunisia. Despite taking part in projects coordinated primarily by managers from the European Mediterranean littoral countries, many European centres of expertise located elsewhere included Morocco and Tunisia in their consortiums. As a result, both countries are exposed to very rich European scientific expertise, including diverse subfields, habitus and capital transactions of the European Research Area facilitated by various project management styles. The Moroccan National Institute for Agricultural Research and the Tunisian Pasteur Institute stand out because, when comparing Framework Programme 7 and Horizon 2020 project portfolios, both sustain increasing engagement. Research cooperation addresses the pressing challenges of the neighbourhood, especially in environmental and agricultural domains and the capacity to engage in international collaboration. The article commences filling the gap in the literature on the EU Southern Neighbourhood.

**KEYWORDS:** European Research Area, European Southern Neighbourhood, research cooperation, Morocco, Tunisia.

The article explores the research-intense collaborative patterns that weave the European Southern Neighbourhood (ESN) into the European Research Area (ERA) through EU-funded projects. The importance of studying the diverse engagement of the ESN countries with the EU is motivated by the acknowledgement that the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a composite policy. ENP assembles a selection of features of EU internal policies and main traits of the external action (Schunz, 2016, p. 268). The aim is to bring new empirical findings to the overall literature on the European neighbourhood.

This article examines the participation of a historical pair of countries of the ESN in the ERA, Morocco and Tunisia. The two chosen countries maintain close ties to the EU (Šime, 2021a). When compared to the rest of the ESN from a methodological standpoint, these countries are selected as cases that are 'as causally homogenous as possible' (Beach & Pedersen, 2018, p. 846).

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## Abstract

## Introduction



The article is guided by the following research question: How does research cooperation help achieve the overarching goals of the ESN and the ERA? The term 'research cooperation' refers to the collaborative projects involving Europe-based and Morocco-, Tunisia-based institutions funded by the Framework Programmes (FPs). Focus on projects follows the recent observation that the 'projectification' of research and an academic career attracts attention as an object of enquiry (Cointe, 2021, p. 7; Matthies & Torka, 2019, p. 351; von Wülfingen, 2021, p. 264). This article attests to the diversity of approaches that enrich this research direction.

The article seeks to test the following straw-in-the-wind hypothesis: The FPs aimed at funding cutting-edge science do not encourage very elitist 'only the best-of-the-best' engagement of Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities. A notable diversity of Europe-based coordinators incorporated in the project consortiums various Moroccan and Tunisian institution(/-s). The hypothesis is tested by explaining-outcome process-tracing through data observations. The article studies the engagement patterns of Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions in the FPs projects that were implemented throughout 2014-2017.

The article is structured into five main sections. The first part encompasses a literature review on practice theory with a focus on the scholarly output on European integration, including the role of academic and research cooperation in it, the ERA and the role of FPs. The second part explains the methodological aspects of translating the selected elements of practice theory into the process-tracing approach. The third part presents the results of the research and the nuances of the data-set observations. The fourth part discusses the identified dynamics of the ERA framework field, exposure to habitus and capital transactions among Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities. The final part elaborates on the main findings of the study. Namely, research cooperation helps achieve the overarching goals of the ESN and the ERA by offering membership in research-intense consortiums to a great variety of Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities to improve their research capacities and mastery of international cooperation.

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### Practice theory in the context of the European Research Area

Practice theory is chosen because, firstly, it allows for setting more nuanced conceptual grounds for the examination of the context-specific environment, including its established routines. It is conducive to a study of the expert community, and the way it operates and unleashes certain relational dynamics through the implementation of EU projects. Secondly, the existing body on the research domain and its international dimensions guided by the practice theory offers a valuable body of knowledge that is highly relevant to this study.

Practice theory is a paradigm that has reached only a decade after being assessed as 'still a relatively unsettled intellectual landscape' without a definite canon (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1241). There seem to be as many 'Bourdieu's' as there are interpretations and appropriations of some of his ideas on the concepts of field, capital and habitus to various empirical material (Mu, 2020). Adler-Nissen's rather intergovernmentalist application of Bourdieu to international relations results in a reading of strong power structures and pronounced hierarchies (Adler-Nissen et al., 2013; Schindler & Wille, 2019). To contrast, Bourdieusian influences directed toward science and research cooperation result in diverse outcomes. Dichotomies juxtaposing centralities and peripheries (Capponi & Frenken, 2021; Hamati-Ataya, 2012; Shih, 2020; Zelnio, 2012). More networked and less hierarchical patterns are identified (Šime, 2021a). Since this article focuses on institutions based in specific countries rather than states themselves, then the subsequent paragraphs are less preoccupied with intergovernmentalist reading of Bourdieu. Instead, the focus is on Bourdieu's inspired perspectives on research cooperation with specific institutions interpreted as nationally and internationally versatile agents.

The field is a rather autonomous area of social activity (Boncourt & Calligaro, 2017, p. 71; Kauppi, 2003, p. 778). The field may constitute subfields. Unlike Bourdieu himself, contemporary reading leans toward an emerging field gaining from constant interaction with a broader environment (Raimbault & Joly, 2021, p. 88). Agents are the ones who put in motion the ever-evolving and diverse dynamics. While being constrained by specific material and symbolic structures, agents act and interact in the pursuit of maximising their capital (Kauppi, 2003, p. 777).

Besides being treated as a temporary institution (Šime, 2021a, p. 26), in this article, the project is considered as equalling a historiographical concept of a 'moving locality'. The primary host of a project or 'moving locality' is the principal project coordinator, manager or lead investigator supported by the increasingly influential research administrators (Acker, McGinn, & Campisi, 2019). 'Moving locality' refers to the detachment of the intellectual process from a specific geographical place by prioritising the importance of connections, allegiances and commitments that travel with people and create interconnected intellectual spaces internationally (Simões, Carneiro, & Diogo, 2017, pp. 628-629), including digitally (Jarke, 2021). This interpretation of the project manager tallies with an understanding that 'the agent is the field itself' (Georgakakis, 2011, p. 332). This is one of the factors for the continuous transformations of the field, evolution of habitus and changing patterns of capital transactions.

Capital is a social resource that is specific to each of the fields (Kauppi, 2003, p. 778). The volume of the embodied and acquired capital, the composition of that capital and the trajectory in the form of 'shifting distributions of tokens of capital' add further nuances to the understanding of capital maximisation pursuits (Atkinson, 2021, p. 65; Lueg, 2018, p. 55). The project as a temporary institution is a space where recognition, so highly praised by academics (Raimbault & Joly, 2021, p. 89), can be obtained, exchanged and traded.

Project acquisition is a basic capital acquisition itself. However, the choice of navigation and interactions strategies of an agent during the implementation of a project have an important role in the way capital is acquired and traded. This is one of the factors why capital is not associated simply with an endless accumulation of it. Instead, the capital is exchanged and transfigured or attempts are made toward exerting these actions through 'legitimation circuits' that stand for relational interdependence between individuals and entities seeking mutual recognition (Atkinson, 2019, p. 959; Warren, 2012). 'As a kind of investor, the researcher engages in conversions of credibility, where the currently held form of credibility is converted to another form, which allows the researcher to engage in further conversions.' (Hansen, 2020, p. 84) In very broad strokes, recognition for excellence in science derives from diverse activities, such as contribution to large surveys, publishing in top-ranked journals, acquiring large, competitive or prestigious grants and so forth (Heilbron, Bedecarré, & Timans, 2017; Heilbron et al., 2017; Scholten, Franssen, Drooge, Rijcke, & Hessels, 2021; Vanderstraeten & Eykens, 2018). All these scientific activities can be (and as literature shows have been) an intrinsic part or associated with EU project implementation (Heilbron, Thibaud, & Timans, 2017).

The ERA is a framework field. The ERA is considered a receptive space for transactions of various capital due to its aspirations to strengthen economic competitiveness and respond to societal challenges (Paasi, 2010; Ulnicane, 2015). Following the earlier efforts of the European Commission to make the policy process more accessible to its implementers (Sbragia, 2002, p. 12), the receptiveness toward the interpretation of the field offered by Raimbault and Joly (2021) matches the particularities of the examined empirical material, namely, the eligibility of diverse entities for participation in FPs projects. Additionally, it is instrumental for a more nuanced examination of the hybrid 'regulation by networks' beyond the study of the role of EU agencies in creating and

nurturing expert circles (Boussaguet, Deshousse, & Jacquot, 2010; Dehousse, 1997, pp. 256, 259). Consequently, it is assumed in this article that the more diverse the expertise crowded into the ERA, the more potential there is for the multiplication of diverse capital transactions.

Concentrating solely on the scientific capital would be misleading, especially in attempts to understand the complexity of dynamics that characterise the ERA as a receptive space to various values added and ventures coupling several scientific disciplines. Moreover, studying capital transactions beyond the scientific dynamics tallies well with the observation that besides achievements in research and mentorship, scientists have to meet multiple expectations and requirements (Åm, Solbu, & Sørensen, 2020, pp. 16–18; Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron, 1981; Holst & Molander, 2020; Saga, 2019; Spurling, 2009). Thus, scientists as agents who operate in a field and subfields and various contexts should be well-positioned to engage in transactions of diverse forms of capital, conversion from one capital to another.

These are excellent points of departure for studying such ever-evolving policy constructs as the ERA and the FPs that are subject to regular discussions, consultations and alterations introduced via co-decision. The overall research project is not aimed at being integrated into or coordinated with a specific constellation of the many existing levels of evaluations (Milzow, Reinhardt, Söderberg, & Zinöcker, 2019, p. 99). Instead, it suggests a direction toward one more way how to draw some lessons about the diverse dynamics unleashed by the EU instruments with a focus on the engagement of the entities located in the ESN.

Diverse approaches toward the engagement and steering of the project further enrich the multitude of value added that a masterful approach to a project delivers within and beyond its time frame. This richness of benefits is captured by Schikowitz's (2021) elaboration on four engagement modes in transdisciplinary research projects – explorer, caring broker, moral manager and polymath. The gains are diverse, the approach taken by the agent determines what benefits are reaped from a project and expertise hosted by a consortium.

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## Habitus

Habitus is a shared culture or accustomed principles of sayings, doings and set of evaluative criteria (Glevarec, 2018, 2020; Kauppi, 2003, p. 778; Wolf, 2014, pp. 506–508; Zolberg, 1989, p. 78). Also referred to as the *ars inveniendi* (Maeschalck, 2001, p. 282), it is a system of durable and transposable dispositions (Atkinson, 2011, 2013; Matthies & Torka, 2019, p. 348; Pudelko, 2012). Nevertheless, habitus 'is not fate' (Tampakis, 2016, p. 816). The project which includes several project partners is an excellent embodiment of an evolving habitus formed by multiple components and anchored in a broader ERA habitus. Raimbault and Joly (2021, p. 90) point toward epistemic rules that facilitate the establishment of a more or less unified understanding and approach to the joint research agenda, as well as social rules that refer to a unified approach to various collaboration partners and other disciplines. Research on shared routines in the laboratories solidifies the role of this joint intellectual fabric or habitus that weaves in physical infrastructure (Wylie, 2021, p. 148). Furthermore, Davies (2021a, p. 208) notion of 'epistemic living spaces' is conducive to translating habitus into the multilateral project-specific setting. It refers to both individually and collectively held perceptions and narratives that distil the viability of certain actions as opposed to alternative ones.

The European Security and Defence Policy has been estimated to create a 'common European strategic thinking and shared action options' and 'Brusselisation' (Breuer, 2010, p. 11; Fossum, 2015, p. 805; Mérand, Hofmann, & Irondelle, 2010, p. 4). Following this example, it is suggested in this article that it should be further explored whether interaction weaved by the ERA leads to an 'Eranetisation'. The term is inspired by the systematic bias analysed by the organisational approach (Trondal & Kühn, 2020, p. 166). Coined in this article, 'Eranetisation' refers to an incre-

mental and multidimensional socialisation process that leads to a growing competence, more actively shared expertise and with it an emergence of shared understandings and assessments of viable options for action among the beneficiaries of various funding instruments supporting the ERA. Participation in a project may be considered as the first step toward 'going ERA', in other words, a propensity toward future engagement options offered by the ERA.

The elements borrowed from recent research findings prove that EU projects and other more institutionalised milieus of the EU should be considered as dynamic intellectual constructs that are promising acculturation (von Wülfingen, 2021, p. 273) and re-socialisation (Trondal, Murdoch, & Geys, 2015, p. 32) environments. This article argues that this applies to non-EU entities in relation to the EU integrationist dynamics captured by the ERA as a framework field. However, the impact of habitus across the consortium is not even throughout the project duration. Earlier research on investment- and resource-wise more demanding inter-, cross-, trans- or multi-disciplinary projects (Gibson, Stutchbury, Ikutegbe, & Michielin, 2019, p. 78; Ulnicane, 2021, p. 119; von Wülfingen, 2021, p. 279; Walakira & Wright, 2017, pp. 57-58) shows that a project reaches the most pronounced proximity across the network, as well as in cognitive and social terms during its third year (Roelofs, Edwards, Viehbeck, & Anderson, 2019, p. 46). Thus, the exposure to and incorporation of the ERA habitus and versatile operation within this framework field might increase throughout the duration of the project and through participation in several simultaneous and/or consecutive projects or other initiatives supporting the ERA.

An explaining-outcome process tracing captures the ambition 'to craft a minimally sufficient explanation of a particular outcome, with sufficiency defined as an explanation that accounts for all of the important aspects of an outcome with no redundant parts being present' (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 18). This article is part of a broader project aimed at devising an analysis comprising 'an eclectic conglomerate mechanism' to explain a historical outcome (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 19). Process-tracing is known for being messy (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 107). Such an acknowledgment adequately captures the complete set of research stages. It embraces the explorative process that is not always linear. Instead, it may at times generate unforeseen findings and nuances.

The examined historical outcome is the collaborative research patterns that characterise the engagement of the ESN entities in the ERA framework field during the post-volatile phase, in other words, the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. This episode is studied to acquire a better understanding and contextualise what is the role of European research-intensive cooperation with the ESN entities in supporting the EU diplomatic ambitions.

This is a study of 'stand-alone single case studies' (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 144). However, the examination of two countries, Morocco and Tunisia, from the same neighbourhood context prevents erroneously considering the European neighbourhood as a homogenous space. The selected methodological framework does not allow the development of nested analysis because of the inclusion of non-systematic, case-specific mechanisms in explanations (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 144). It respects intricacies of comparison, such as sensibility toward various contexts (Hess, 2016). Additionally, recent findings caution against generalisations of the ESN context (Keukeleire, Lecocq & Volpi, 2020).

In this specific example of 'macro-micro level mechanism' (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 42) attention is paid to the agents – in this case, project implementing entities – and what collaborative patterns structure their interactions in the framework field – the ERA – on the basis of the FPs provided financial support for a specific project. Entities assembled by the FPs funded consortiums are the agents that actively engage in projects. Following the terminology of the practice theory,

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## Methodology

projects are temporary institutions. Whereas, according to the terminology of process-tracing, projects should be understood as manipulable ‘institutional mechanisms’ (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 53). Projects encapsulate distinct activities that transmit causal forces (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 49). These dynamics are channelled according to the viability defined by the ERA. According to the terminology of the practice theory, the ERA is the framework field constituting subfields. Whereas, following the terminology employed by process tracing scholars, the ERA is the overarching ‘structural mechanism’ (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 53). The chosen conceptual and methodological underpinnings are considered compatible.

The straw-in-the-wind test captured by the hypothesis is an empirical prediction that has ‘a low level of uniqueness and a low level of certainty’ (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 102; Punton, Melanie, and Welle, 2015, p. 3). Examination of consortiums of FP7 and Horizon 2020 (H2020) projects with at least one participant from Morocco and/or Tunisia is a test to explore which specific entities in both ESN countries, as well as in Europe, were collaborating and what was the intensity of this collaboration in terms of a number of acquired memberships in projects. It is a test that examines whether the straw bends toward any championing institutions with an outstanding track record in the number of acquired projects. Moreover, the test captures the dynamism of the bending directions of the straw. The test explores the track record of project acquisition throughout two consecutive FPs to identify changes of the leading positions among institutions that acquired most participant positions in project consortiums. A study of two consecutive but simultaneously implemented FPs ensures that the ERA is examined as a dynamic and evolving space with temporary alliances built on the basis of two thematically distinct incentive initiatives rather than a static constellation of permanent interlinks between institutions.

This straw-in-the-wind test is constructed on a previous evaluation of ‘diagnostic evidence’ (Bennett et al., 2015, p. 7; Collier, 2011, p. 824) performed on the basis of the FP7 sample (Šime, 2021a). The diagnostic evidence provides a static snapshot of interlinks between entities approved and implemented with the support of one FP with a focus on research and higher education institutions. Evidence obtained via this ‘probabilistic test’ (Mahoney, 2012) led to ‘eclectic theorization’ (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 64), namely, a shift away from the steep power structures modelled by Adler-Nissen’s reading of Bourdieu and toward the incorporation of other readings of practice guided findings from the research sector and beyond.

Testing the hypothesis does not provide a clear answer or certainty. One test does not ensure decisive findings. However, a series of such tests performed beyond the scope of this article can solidify confidence about one specific explanation as opposed to others in case all or majority of test results indicate the same direction (Bennett et al., 2015, p. 17). The hypothesis of two country contexts capturing ‘cross-case inference’ (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 73) is tested twice, namely, on a data sample of the FP7 projects and the data sample of the H2020 projects. Since this is not a micro-level examination, then collaborative patterns obtained via the ‘data-set observations’ (Bennett et al., 2015, p. 8) are considered pieces of evidence that have a rather equal inferential weight (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 87). Both the earlier obtained ‘diagnostic evidence’ (Bennett et al., 2015, pp. 226–227) based on the analysis of project portfolios and ‘pattern evidence’ (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 99) captured in this article ensures that the consecutive stages of research (beyond this article) will dwell into the intricacies on the basis of a sound knowledge of the general trends of the relevant evidence (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 131).

The FP7 and H2020 serve as independent variables. The engagement of Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions in projects funded by the two selected FPs serve as dependent variables. While that might often be a choice of the Europe-based project coordinator to include or not

welcome certain entities, including Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities in the consortium, it is not the causality that is explored in this article. Nevertheless, the Europe-based coordinators are kept into the picture as an intervening variable that helps to unpack the causal mechanism. It is instrumental for gathering information about the EU national research sectors that open doors to both ESN countries toward Europe's hosted international consortiums and the wealth of expertise pooled by these multilateral partnerships.

Data-set observations (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 72) were performed by identifying Europe-based coordinators and Morocco- and Tunisia-based members of consortiums implemented throughout 2014-2017. Consortium composition was retrieved from the open access data base 'Community Research and Development Information Service' (CORDIS). The chosen process-tracing approach elucidates the role of a specific time and context (Trampusch & Palier, 2016, p. 15). Most projects are completed<sup>1</sup>, rather than work in progress that is still subject to finalisation.

### General trends

Data observations of project consortiums show that many institutions located in Morocco and Tunisia are involved in the FPs projects throughout 2014-2017. In specific numbers, slightly more than 60 projects with an engagement of at least one Morocco-based entity per project funded by the FP7. More than 50 projects with an engagement of at least one Tunisia-based entity per project were funded by the FP7. 40 projects with an engagement of at least one Morocco-based entity were funded by H2020. 30 projects with an engagement of at least one Tunisia-based entity per project were funded by H2020.

There is a general propensity toward engagement of Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities in projects funded by the specific programmes on food, agriculture and biotechnology (FP7-KB-BE), the environment (FP7-ENVIRONMENT) and capacity-building for international cooperation (FP7-INCO). To a lesser degree, Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions participated in projects funded by the specific programmes for health (FP7-HEALTH) and information and communication technologies (FP7-ICT). This thematic propensity corresponds to the earlier acknowledged most pressing needs of the geographic area (explained in, for example, Drine, 2021; Roehrkasten & Quitzow, 2016).

H2020 funded engagement is much more dispersed across its specific programmes. The only unique thematic concentration emerging from the observation of the H2020 dataset is Moroccan more active participation with several projects funded by the specific programme 'Low-cost, low-carbon energy supply'. Overall, the increasingly overarching (or pluridisciplinary) topics chosen for many specific programmes make it very challenging to pinpoint specific research domains addressed. Only Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions have granted significantly more opportunities than other specific programmes for the Moroccan and Tunisian engagement. Due to the particularities of Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, it is challenging to pinpoint specific research domains that were represented among the implemented actions. Thus, in contrast with the FP7 dataset observations, H2020 data-set observations do not offer equally clear thematic coverage.

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<sup>1</sup> The selection includes projects that commenced before 2014 and finished after 2017. As long as the project was implemented in one of the years studied (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017) and among the participants included at least one entity from Morocco- and/or Tunisia, the project was included in the overall pool of projects selected for the data-set observations. Such a choice was motivated by the fact that very few projects were implemented strictly within the 2014-2017 time frame. For example, ClusMED (CORDIS, 2020b), MED-Dialogue (CORDIS, 2020g) besides other earlier listed FP7 examples (Šime, 2021a, p. 9). The H2020 projects were MyOcean FO (CORDIS, 2020h) and BEYOND (CORDIS, 2020a).

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Identified  
interlinks across  
the project  
consortiums

## Moroccan and Tunisian leading entities

In Morocco, an outstanding track record is displayed by the Hassan II Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine with participation in 10 FP7 projects. The second leading position is taken by the National Fisheries Research Institute with six projects, the third position is shared between the Mohammed V University of Rabat and Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University with five projects each. The Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Cadi Ayyad University were part of four consortiums each. Three project engagements reached the Pasteur Institute of Morocco and the National Institute for Agricultural Research. Besides these frontrunners, most of the other beneficiaries with fewer project acquisitions were either research centres or universities.

H2020 shows that the overall picture is dynamic. When compared to FP7, the frontrunners in project participation do not remain the same. Cadi Ayyad University is the champion but with five projects. The National Institute of Agricultural Research was in a leading position in the FP7 project participation and remains the second most engaged entity with four H2020 projects. It is the only front-running institution in Morocco that succeeded in increasing its overall project participation from FP7 to H2020. The Mohammed V University of Rabat remains in the third position but with engagement in only three H2020 projects. It shares this track record with a newcomer to the front-runner positions – Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane – with participation in three H2020 projects, as well as the University Hassan II of Casablanca. In addition, almost 20 other entities located in Morocco were engaged in one or two H2020 projects. Most of these are research centres and universities. However, there are also national and non-governmental entities among the overall pool of beneficiaries. In sum, the concentration of projects decreased from FP7 to H2020. Being a widely engaged champion is a temporary position. The opportunities from EU funded research intense projects are widely dispersed and made accessible to a significant number of beneficiaries.

The overall volumes of participation intensity in Tunisia are even more dispersed than in Morocco. The leading entity with participation in six FP7 projects was the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Two institutions reach an engagement in four FP7 projects each – the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology (INSTM) and the Centre of Biotechnology of Sfax (Šime, 2021a). The third position is shared by four entities each benefiting from an engagement in three projects – the Pasteur Institute of Tunisia, the National Research Institute of Rural Engineering, Water and Forestry, the Water Research and Technologies Centre (CERTE) and the Agricultural Research and Higher-Education Institute (Šime, 2021a). More than 20 other entities have been involved in one or two FP7 projects<sup>2</sup>.

In contrast to Morocco, the leading positions remain more stable in the overall project engagement from FP7 to H2020 across Tunisia-based institutions. The Pasteur Institute of Tunisia takes the first position with six H2020 projects. It is an exceptional case of showing progress not only in comparison to other Tunisia-based institutions but also in terms of increasing the overall engagement in projects from FP7 to H2020.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is in the second position with three engagements in H2020 projects. Most of the institutions that have leading positions in terms of their engagement in H2020 projects were already among the most actively participating in FP7 projects. In addition, more than 20 other entities participated in one or two H2020 projects each. Among these, a majority are research or higher education institutions, but associations, national authorities and private entities are also represented. Overall, in Tunisia, EU funded research intense col-

<sup>2</sup> Formal separation of Sfax-affiliated entities results in all FP7 projects with Sfax engagement not being counted together. Among other entities with a much lower engagement level than the championing centre for biotechnology were the Faculty of Sciences of Sfax and the University of Sfax. Institutional description from a recent project of Sfax entities: MICAfrica (2021). This is a telling episode of the technical challenge encapsulated in the chosen methodological approach, and its limitations to pinpoint engagement volumes due to variations of legal entities involved across consortiums.



laborations were available to various institutions. However, unlike in the case of Morocco, Tunisia shows a more stable track record of the overall leading performers in terms of the number of project participations. However, the overall participation intensity among the Tunisia-based frontrunners is lower than among the Moroccan-based entities. No further explanation or interpretation can be made without a more in-depth qualitative examination of specific projects.

While most of the FP7 project coordinators were from geographically close Mediterranean countries – France, Italy, Spain – and Germany as well, the complete list is much longer. Among other countries whose centres of expertise coordinated projects are other Mediterranean littoral states, Nordic countries, Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

The data-set observations and previously obtained diagnostic evidence show that the intervening variable – the Europe-based project coordinators – as a heterogeneous pool of centres of competence from various countries – contributes to the vast engagement of Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions in the ERA framework field. The FPs support a diverse pool of beneficiaries with dispersed coverage discussed in greater detail in the subsequent paragraphs.

The overall H2020 picture is slightly different. France increases its overall prominent position and volume of coordinated projects. Italy and Spain retain their leading positions as hosts of coordinators of H2020 projects as well. Additionally, even with an overall decrease in the number of coordinated projects, Greece and the United Kingdom increase their overall role in comparison to other European countries. Some countries, such as Belgium, Switzerland and Norway represented among the coordinators of FP7 projects are absent from the H2020 picture. New coordination hubs emerge from Iceland and Finland which were absent from the FP7 statistical picture.

A notable diversity of Europe-based institutions has performed coordinator roles with no overall dominance or widespread repetitive patterns of the same entity assigned with these tasks across the represented countries. Seldom same Europe-based coordinators had the same Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities in the consortium throughout several projects. Namely, among the FP7 projects, consecutive collaboration was established between the University of Bergen and the Moroccan National Institute of Fisheries Research, as well as the Barcelona-based Ecological and Forestry Applications Research Centre and the Tunisian National Research Institute for Rural Engineering, Water and Forestry (Šime, 2021a). Furthermore, consecutive collaboration does not occur only among the research and higher education entities. It took place between Ireland-based International Information Management Corporation Ltd and the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research during FP7 funded IST-Africa 2012-13 and IST-Africa 2014-2015, as well as H2020 funded IST-Africa 2016-2018 projects (CORDIS, 2020d, 2020f, 2020e). Generally, the so-called ‘new’ member states or EU-15 are not represented among the coordinators. FP7 funded SOIMON led by Oikon Ltd. – Institute of Applied Ecology from Croatia – is an extremely rare exception (CORDIS, 2022).

### **ERA as an accessible framework field**

Projectification directs consortium members toward detailed steps to fulfil their responsibilities toward the funding authority and other relevant institutions. It applies to all project entities irrespective of the thematic affiliation of the project or types of institutions – public, private, governmental, non-governmental – involved. Such routine requirements form the bedrock for smooth and sustainable maintenance of the ERA framework, its subfields and the formation of some minimal common reference points for a jointly shared habitus and basic capital transaction patterns.

For newcomers, it comes as a learning-by-doing path. Whereas, for more experienced FPs project implementers (outlined in this article as the leading institutions) it is presumed to be a mat-

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## European coordinators

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## Contextualising project engagement patterns

ter of repeating familiar patterns of navigation and interaction. Participation in several projects is assumed as an enabler to make the most of the institutional familiarity with the ERA habitus, capital transaction techniques within and across projects and mastery of navigating across the framework field, meaning, beyond the mere scope of the implemented project. The observed dispersion of project participation encourages thinking that many entities from Morocco and Tunisia are relative newcomers to the ERA or have obtained a limited familiarity with this framework field, its habitus and capital transaction dynamics. Although this assumption cannot be claimed with complete certainty. The data observations span across a limited set of years. Likewise, the rotation of human resources within an institution plays a role in defining the overall institutional memory and versatility of an institution in the ERA subfields, habitus and capital transaction patterns, as well as project implementation.

The intervening variable proves that the research and networking capacities of the selected ESN countries are strengthened by tapping into not only thematically but also geographically diverse European expertise, as well as managerial practices and organisational principles<sup>3</sup>. The exposure to the ERA habitus that is obtained through each project comes with particular national and institutional traits toward the project management and enculturation routines brought by the coordinating entity. This is a noteworthy nuance that cautions against perceiving the ERA habitus as a homogenous one. It shows that while the Mediterranean dimension remains pronounced in the research collaboration, wider opportunities offered by the broad ERA coverage are tapped into and made accessible to various entities in Morocco and Tunisia. This characteristic of the intervening variable is treated as an advantageous factor not only in terms of institutions from Morocco and Tunisia gaining exposure to diverse internationally excelling hubs of expertise but also to various approaches and styles of project implementation and steering that feed into the overall moulding of the ERA habitus and diverse European routines of capital transactions.

### Dispersed and temporary capital acquisition

The picture of the ERA obtained in this study display inclusive, diverse, dispersed and dynamic interlinks. The examined project-based collaborative patterns show that the capital, in other words, the participatory or coordinator role of FP7 or H2020 projects is loose and fleeting. The 'local charisma of sorts' (Georgakakis & Weisbein, 2010, p. 99) obtained through European credibility that is captured in the status of being affiliated with an FP project (Senocak, 2018, p. 20) is far from hegemonically concentrated. While Morocco quantitatively displays a more intense engagement, there is a notable change of engagement champions and an overall wide involvement of institutions with less outstanding participation intensity. Tunisia, even with an overall smaller number of engagements in FPs projects, demonstrates a more stable set of leading participatory institutions. The National Institute for Agricultural Research of Morocco and the Pasteur Institute of Tunisia are outstanding institutions because both remain highly competitive in comparison to their peers in their respective countries in terms of sustaining an increasing level of engagement in projects from FP7 to H2020. The determining factors of success require a more in-depth examination.

The basic capital granted in a form of participation in a consortium is widely dispersed. Generally, this capital does not remain hegemonically concentrated among very few beneficiaries. Nevertheless, there are rare examples of exceptionally nimble institutions that sustain a nationally excelling level of engagement. These exceptions benefit from a more sustained and intense exposure toward the ERA habitus and engagement in capital transactions.

However, it is challenging to make any definite conclusions about whether such more intense involvement generates a continuous propensity to 'go ERA'. One minor encouraging indication

<sup>3</sup> This diversity is explored in such research agendas revolving around European integration as differentiation (Bátora & Fossum, 2020, p. 2). Findings of differentiation studies enrich the analysis crafted in this article as well.

of promoting 'Eranetisation' is FP7 funded MED-Dialogue. It worked toward preparing interested entities for participation in H2020 (CORDIS, 2020g). However, a more in-depth study is required to identify whether membership of a consortium contributes to prioritising European strategic directions for the future development of each respective institution instead of other geopolitically steered allegiances (indicated in Schumacher, 2018, p. 47; Schunz, Gstöhl, & Van Langenhove, 2018, p. 4). The data-set observations and inferences made based on the conceptual foundations and reviewed literature offer too few nuances to provide a convincing answer to this theorised perspective. But it is a question worth further consideration beyond the scope of this article.

Generally, the data-set observations do not allow discerning what exact type of capital has been acquired, exchanged and traded by the identified institutions. The further qualitative examination would help to find answers. However, the mere fact of participation in a project is considered as temporary obtained capital, access to further capital transactions and a highly reputable attribute of being part of an EU project. Being associated with a specific project consortium is valued when it comes to estimating the level of engagement, track record and status within ERA. Being part of a project that puts the ERA in motion and even having multiple such encounters via several projects generates a certain level of familiarity with the habitus of the European integrationist research landscape and the ERA subfields.

Country	Morocco (FP7)		Tunisia (FP7)		Morocco (H2020)		Tunisia (H2020)	
	Number of coordinated projects	Leading position	Number of coordinated projects	Leading position	Number of coordinated projects	Leading position	Number of coordinated projects	Leading position
AT	1		1		1		1	
BE	5	4 <sup>th</sup>	3		0		0	
CH	1		1		0		0	
DE	7	3 <sup>rd</sup>	8	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2		0	
DK	1		1		1		0	
IE	0		2		0		1	
EL	5	4 <sup>th</sup>	2		3	4 <sup>th</sup>	4	3 <sup>rd</sup>
ES	14	1 <sup>st</sup>	9	1 <sup>st</sup>	7	3 <sup>rd</sup>	7	1 <sup>st</sup>
FI	0		0		1		2	4 <sup>th</sup>
FR	7	3 <sup>rd</sup>	6	3 <sup>rd</sup>	11	1 <sup>st</sup>	5	2 <sup>nd</sup>
HR	0		1		0		0	
IS	0		0		1		0	
IT	9	2 <sup>nd</sup>	9	1 <sup>st</sup>	8	2 <sup>nd</sup>	5	2 <sup>nd</sup>
MA*	2		0		0		0	
NL	1		3	5 <sup>th</sup>	0		0	
NO	2		0		0		0	
PT	2		1		1		1	
SE	0		0		1		1	
UK	4	5 <sup>th</sup>	4	4 <sup>th</sup>	3	4 <sup>th</sup>	2	4 <sup>th</sup>
TN*	0		3	5 <sup>th</sup>	0		1	

\*Morocco and Tunisia are not considered European countries but are included in the table to put the numbers in a European context

Source: Adapted from the open-access Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS) database <https://cordis.europa.eu>

**Table 1**

Intervening variable. Europe-based coordinators of the observed dataset of projects

**Table 1** depicts that there are exceptions to the intervening variable. In rare cases, a coordinator role is awarded to Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities<sup>4</sup>. These are atypical episodes of coordinator roles that fall outside of the hypothesised mechanism because it does not involve the Europe-based coordinator. These are examples of entities located in the ESN displaying more autonomous mastery of certain practices, capital conversions, as well as exposure to and immersion in the overall ERA habitus, including potential 'Eranetisation' dynamics.

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## Conclusion

Research cooperation helps achieve the overarching goals of the ESN policy and the ERA by offering membership in research-intense consortiums to a great variety and number of Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities. Moreover, such access to the ERA framework field, subfields, habitus and capital transactions is facilitated by a notable diversity of Europe-based project coordinators. The prominence of climate and environmentally considerate specific programmes proves responsiveness to the most pressing challenges of the ESN. Additionally, the active engagement in FP7-INCO projects and tailored project, such as MED-Dialogue, demonstrates that such broadly dispersed access to the ERA is instrumental for building research capacities and mastery of international cooperation for future engagements. It provides stimulus for 'Eranetisation'.

The evidence has passed the test captured by the hypothesis. The dispersion of participatory opportunities offered to the institutions located in Morocco and Tunisia shows that participation in the ERA is not restricted to very few hegemonic centres in certain ESN countries. There are no overwhelming hierarchies with clear centres and distinguished peripheries neither on the European nor on the examined two countries of the ESN side. Instead, the direct immersion in the habitus and capital transactions facilitated by European project coordinators offers access to rich and diverse European research excellence. Many Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions have obtained an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the ERA habitus in regular interaction with coordinators from across Europe except the so-called 'new' member states. Overall, the familiarity with the ERA habitus acquired by the selected ESN countries is not restricted only to the geographical vicinity and close ties with science hubs located across the Mediterranean Sea. European Mediterranean countries host a significant proportion of the coordinators of projects with Morocco- and Tunisia-based members. Additionally, both ESN countries benefit from collaboration with institutions from various parts of Europe. Institutions located in Germany and the United Kingdom are among the most widely represented non-littoral states.

The hypothesis passed the test. Data-set observations of the CORDIS projects' consortiums and a review of helpful sources of academic and grey literature form the outlined evidence. Straw-in-the-wind is a weak test. It generates a myriad of further study options to explore in a more nuanced manner the multifaceted engagements of Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities in the FPs projects as some of the key building blocks that introduce the selected entities to the ERA framework field and its dynamics captured by specific capital transactions and habitus. 'Projectification' and its role in addressing the challenges encountered by the ESN deserves more attention to better grasp the full diversity of integrationist developments that shape the ERA, its external extensions such as the involvement of the ESN. The thematic and country-specific coverage of research collaborations results in an explanation that, according to the devised process-tracing approach, the provided explanation accounts for all the important aspects of the outcome captured in this concluding section of the article.

The focus on the time period throughout 2014-2017 does not offer a panoramic picture. It displays a short period of specific collaboration intensity and its directions. It is a helpful caption

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<sup>4</sup> Besides earlier described FP7 projects (Šime, 2021a), among H2020 projects the Agency for the Promotion of Industry and Innovation of Tunisia managed H2020 WP2017-2018 (CORDIS, 2020c).

that portrays the ERA as a dispersed field with no overwhelmingly hegemonic central entities and peripheries. The partnerships are too diverse to argue for any major concentration of capital among specific Europe-based coordinators or the European neighbourhood-based consortium members. Morocco and Tunisia benefit from an immersive experience in the multiple traits of the ERA habitus. This exposure comes along via encounters with specific European national and institutional approaches to project steering, coordination of collaborative tasks, consultative routines and accumulated capitals. Multiple beneficiaries gained exposure toward the ERA subfields, habitus and capital transaction practices via FPs projects.

The overall dispersion of participatory opportunities among entities located in Morocco and Tunisia demonstrates a multitude of basic encounters with the ERA as a framework field, habitus with its supranational integrationist traits and capital transaction practices. However, since a small number of beneficiaries have been involved in more than two FPs projects, this exposure to the ERA habitus is short-lived. Thus, the full potential for integrating these entities in the ERA habitus and developing their overall propensity toward 'going ERA' or being 'Eranetised' is questionable.

The ERA capital in terms of membership in project consortiums proves to be fleeting and temporary for almost all European coordinators and Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions. The National Institute for Agricultural Research of Morocco and the Pasteur Institute of Tunisia are outstanding exceptions. Both remain highly competitive in comparison to their peers in their respective countries in terms of sustaining an increasing level of engagement in projects from FP7 to H2020. These are the only two institutions that show some potential of an upward acquisition of the basic ERA capital, more profound potential toward 'Eranetisation' with a more enduring exposure to the European project coordinators in their capacities of 'moving localities' who put the ERA field and its subfields in motion.

Further study should also pay attention to the exceptional cases that fall outside of the mechanism hypothesised in this article, namely, a handful of projects were coordinated by Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities. These projects present a different logic of engagement in the ERA framework field, its subfields, the ERA habitus and the trade of diverse forms of capital.

Two limitations ought to be mentioned. Firstly, a focus on one EU funding programme leaves out a whole mosaic of the ERA instruments, as well as other major assistance and capacity building donors. Turkey would be one donor example (Cianciara & Szymański, 2020, p. 193; Juncos, 2018, p. 567; Parlar Dal, 2013; Senocak, 2018, p. 4). This reminds that FPs beneficiaries located in the ESN are not engaged solely in consultations and collaboration with the EU supported entities. An assumption of an ever more pronounced integration in the ERA might prove to be a misleading one.

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