WP3.1.2.1, WP3.1.3.1, WP3.1.3.2, WP3.1.3.3 & WP3.1.3.4- EUTOPIA Research networks : Justification for the amendment and the creation of Connected Research Communities (CRCs)

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1. Summary

The overall purpose of 3.1 is to identify research challenges suitable to collectively address within EUTOPIA and to build functional research networks capable of responding to them. While keeping the objectives proposed with the initially planned activities, we are adjusting the activities to fit the EUTOPIA alliance research strategy change in perspective: from a top-down approach to a more bottom-up approach. These changes in approach have taken place during the implementation of the 2050 project, and together with the COVID-19 pandemic the implementation of the initial activities have slowed down. As a means to speed up progress and to deliver on the project's objectives while, at the same time aligning with the long-term vision of EUTOPIA, we have designed the EUTOPIA Connected Research Community concept.

1. Summary

2. The pandemic has slowed down progress

The Covid-19 pandemic slowed down the implementation since all our activities required mobility. Many participating countries were in lock down for extensive periods of time without having the certainty of when the lock downs will be lifted. There have been discussions about the possibility of replacing physical mobility with virtual mobility. However, within the EUTOPIA alliance community, a desire to have physical meetings was articulated, if sustainable research networks are to be established. We therefore postponed the immediate implementation of the initially planned activities.

1.1 A bottom-up approach is favored by EUTOPIA

During the implementation of the 2050 project, EUTOPIA applied for, and was awarded, Horizon 2020 funding to develop a future joint common and research agenda (the TRAIN project). During the preparatory work for TRAIN, a more bottom-up approach to identify research challenges was favored by the individual partner universities in order to create more sustainable researcher networks. This was confirmed in deliverable 1.1 in TRAIN - a report on existing R&I strategies.

The alignment with this approach is not only the natural consequence of the continuous work with the development of the vision of the alliance but we also believe that this is more beneficial for the research communities as it is more inclusive, more responsive and more supportive while keeping the same focus on challenge-lead research and delivering of positive solutions to tackle global challenges. At the core of this alignment is the development of the Connected Research Communities concept. The CRCs are to be established as a follow up of an open call and aim at establishing new research teams that will work on collaborative projects.

1.2 No change in final deliverables

The networking workshops and sandpit events have not been removed but are included as suitable activities for the CRCs and will still be reported on at the end of the 2050 project as activities according to the original plan. We have designed the CRC concept so that CRCs include networking workshops and sandpits events putting in place an EUTOPIA strategy aligned model for creating sustainable research communities. The CRCs concept is directly connected to the research communities strengthening roadmap that is planned to be delivered as part of the WP3, while it also continues to include key elements initially proposed, such as supporting the engagement of external actors.

The overall objective remains therefore the same: to identify the thematic areas connected to global research challenges/SDGs. The only change concerns the method on how to reach that objective, from a top-down to a bottom-up approach.

3. Budget

The budget for 3.1 mainly consists of two items:

- Funding for travelling, to meet physically and to network;
- Seed funding directly from the Vice-Chancellors. To cover additional costs apart from mobility.

We still plan to use the funds for the CRCs according to the original plan, i. e. networking workshops (mobility funding) and seed money directly to each CRC.

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