

Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia

Tapping the potential for synergies between different EU funding programmes for research and innovation and profiting to a maximum degree in the process from all available funding instruments holds new opportunities for scientists and researchers from North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and at the same time confronts them with major challenges. Horizon Europe (until 2021 Horizon 2020), the EU's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (R&I), and the European Structural and Investment Funds are the most important European sources of finance for research and innovation and there are many possibilities to dovetail the two programme worlds. Synergies are therefore not an end in themselves: Instead, it is rather the case that by using individual measures strategically these can be mutually reinforcing.

The purpose of the "Synergien.NRW" project is to further boost research and innovation especially in the thematic fields of "Healthy Living and Sustainable Energy". It supports the planning and implementation of NRW's innovation policy. Strategies, methods and information products related to the use of synergy potential between the EU's research and innovation programmes on the one hand and the support measures in place in NRW on the other are developed, tested and disseminated to the corresponding target groups through an effective communication strategy. The intention is also to involve interested citizens in the discussion on synergies and inform them about NRW's technology development strategies.

"Synergien.NRW" complements already established support structures for funding programmes in NRW. These include, among others, the Leitmarktagentur.NRW (NRW Lead Market Agency) for the ERDF lead market competitions, regional cluster structures, the Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs), NRW.Europa and the National Contact Points for Horizon Europe, alongside the many sources of advice and information at higher education and research institutions as well as the chambers of commerce, industry and skilled crafts in NRW.

The results from the pilot project "Brückenbildung NRW" (www.brueckenbildung-nrw.de) show by means of good practice examples, such as ZBT GmbH (the Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Centre in Duisburg) or Aachen University Hospital, that the positive impact of targeted synergies between the different EU programme worlds is extensive. This includes the establishment of infrastructures or the procurement of R&I solutions and – building on this – suitable business models that meet the respective requirements in regional and global markets.

Looking at "Horizon Europe 2021-2027", the "European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027" and other EU programmes, it is clear that synergies are playing an increasingly important role. For NRW, the funds from Horizon Europe awarded through competitive calls for proposals will gain further significance. By contrast, NRW will have less fixed income from the structural funds at its disposal. This requires a customised strategy for securing funding and an even more efficient use of funds.

An important focus of the "Synergien.NRW" project is support for public authorities in NRW, in particular the programme planners for ERDF, EAFRD and INTERREG in the design of funding programmes, in order to use and optimise the framework parameters of regional and European funding systems for synergies.

To date, raising the efficiency and effectiveness of the use of funds for qualitatively high-value innovations through synergies has not been taken into consideration EU-wide in long-term planning from a strategic perspective – neither in science, research or the economic sector nor by the programme planners in the regions. A reason for this is the lack of alignment and content-related and temporal coordination in programme planning.

One of the project's core tasks is to set up web-based, target group-specific "Synergy Kits" for public authorities (programme planners) and the various innovation stakeholders (proposers / project

managers) in companies, research and higher education institutions and other organisations. The purpose of these kits is to give all stakeholders the tools they need to identify synergy potential by themselves and to use it in the best possible way. The “Synergy Kits” are modular in design and derive their contents from the results of further central measures. These include detailed analyses of programme structures, funding and innovation strategies, advice on how to set up support structures, policy recommendations, concepts for the strategic support of innovation stakeholders as well as training curricula and much more.

The aim – through targeted networking and a process of exchange at EU, national and regional level – is to mobilise and train innovation stakeholders as well as multipliers and thus empower them to better harness the potential for synergies. This creates the framework for higher participation by NRW in EU funding programmes and for the necessary transfer of results. Another important aspect will be the fostering of interregional cooperation between NRW and other EU regions, along with the European Commission, on the topic of synergy building.

The project is set in the context of North Rhine-Westphalia’s current regional innovation policy and in line with the state government’s Action Plan for North Rhine-Westphalia’s participation in EU research funding.

The contracting authority for the “Synergien.NRW” project is the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

In charge of its implementation is ZENIT GmbH as the innovation and internationalisation agency in North Rhine-Westphalia, in cooperation with DLR Project Management Agency (DLR-PT) at the German Aerospace Center.

The project will last three years (15.11.2019 to 31.03.2023) and has a budget of € 1.25 million (Ministry of Culture and Science/ERDF NRW 2014-2020).