



SCIENCE WITH AND FOR SOCIETY

SUCCESS STORY: **NEWHORIZON**



NewHoRRizon consortium, © NewHoRRizon

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N **NEW** **H** **HORIZON**

SiS.net interviewed Erich Griessler, the coordinator of NewHoRRizon to learn more about the project's valuable work.

PROJECT DETAILS

Title: Excellence in science and innovation for Europe by adopting the concept of Responsible Research and Innovation

Acronym: NewHoRRizon

Website: <https://newhorizon.eu/>

Coordinator: Dr. Erich Griessler, Institute for Advanced Studies in Austria

Contact: contact@newhorizon.eu

Duration: 01/05/2017 – 30/04/2021

Partners: 18 institutions from Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain as well as Jamaica and Colombia



SiS.net: Let us know more about the NewHoRRizon project. What are its main objectives?

Erich Griessler: The main goal of NewHoRRizon is to implement the concept of Responsible Research and Innovation, RRI, which is a European concept promoted by the European Commission and others, in the Framework Programme Horizon 2020; thus to actually apply and implement RRI into research funded by the European Commission.

We started from the assumption that the RRI concept might be new for many people. They may be familiar with the concepts of public engagement, gender equality, open access, science literacy, science education, and ethics but not with the concept of RRI, which involves all these aspects. **So we thought that in order to implement RRI, you have to take the stakeholders on board.** You have to convince them, you have to make them see that RRI is not something additional they have to do, an additional effort in their already busy life, but rather something they can benefit from or which may meet their own aspirations for how science and innovation should be perceived. So our approach was participatory.

Another goal was to change something - with no predetermined direction. We decided that we needed a format, a method, which allows for interaction, exchange and experimentation. **We therefore created what we call „social labs“.** The Horizon 2020 Framework Programme is very diverse and so are its stakeholders: researchers, research funding organisations, policy makers, civil society organisations, industry, etc. Some programme lines, like the Marie-Sklódowska-Curie actions or the European Research Council, focus on basic research, others more on the business side and some on societal challenges. We brought these stakeholders together in the social labs to think about the questions „What do you know about RRI?“, „Do you have experience with RRI?“, „Is RRI possible and would you like to do RRI in your research?“, and „What would you like to do and what prevents you from doing it?“. Together with the stakeholders we developed about 60 pilot actions which address certain aspects of RRI.

To summarise our approach: We wanted to implement RRI in Horizon 2020 and beyond - “beyond” meaning in the next Framework Programme but also in countries from outside the EU. We wanted to involve the stakeholders using a participatory approach, and to experiment with certain pilot actions which could be adopted later. Additionally, we created something called the “society readiness thinking tool” which will help organisations do RRI in a research project.



EXCELLENT SCIENCE

- SOCIAL LAB 1**
European Research Council
- SOCIAL LAB 2**
Future and Emerging Technologies
- SOCIAL LAB 3**
Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions
- SOCIAL LAB 4**
Research Infrastructures, including e-Infrastructures

INDUSTRIAL LEADERSHIP

- SOCIAL LAB 5**
Leadership in Enabling Industrial Technologies
- SOCIAL LAB 6**
Access to Risk Finance & Innovation in SMEs

SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

- SOCIAL LAB 7**
Health, Demographic Change and Wellbeing
- SOCIAL LAB 8**
Food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine and maritime and inland water research and the bioeconomy
- SOCIAL LAB 9**
Secure, Clean and Efficient Energy
- SOCIAL LAB 10**
Smart, Green and Integrated Transport
- SOCIAL LAB 11**
Climate Action, Environment, Resource Efficiency and Raw Materials
- SOCIAL LAB 12**
Europe in a changing world - Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies
- SOCIAL LAB 13**
Secure societies – Protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens

DIVERSITY OF APPROACHES

- SOCIAL LAB 14**
Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation
- SOCIAL LAB 15**
Science with and for Society
- SOCIAL LAB 16**
European Institute of Innovation and Technology
- SOCIAL LAB 17**
Non-Nuclear direct actions of the JRC
- SOCIAL LAB 18**
Instruments of H2020
- SOCIAL LAB 19**
EURATOM

Social labs list, © NewHoRRizon

SiS.net: A main objective of NewHoRRizon is to increase the acceptance of RRI. What challenges do you face when promoting the acceptance of RRI?

Erich Griessler: Coming from sociology, and from science and technology studies, I would say acceptance is not sufficient. We are not aiming for acceptance but for the implementation of RRI in research funding, in research performing organisations, in civil society organisations, and in policy making. We do not want them to implement RRI because of accepting it – I can accept things which I don't like, I accept them because I have to. **What we really want is to build awareness that RRI could change the way research and innovation is done.** And that it could result in a different system and different outcomes. That's the idea.

And there are many, many challenges. First of all, one challenge is the complexity of the issue. Another challenge is that organisations have a long tradition of how to deal with some of these questions, and instruments are already in place. So when you turn up with this new concept of RRI, people say that this is something they have been doing all along. But there are slight differences actually. For instance, there is the concept of corporate social responsibility. Corporate social responsibility overlaps with RRI in certain aspects. But often corporate social responsibility is seen more in terms of integrity and compliance – not taking bribes or doing something for the local community. In contrast, RRI takes the question of ethics and participation into the research process itself, which is not covered by corporate social responsibility. Or take the concept of ethics, which is very strong in the biomedical field and in the life sciences. There, it means research ethics and bio-ethics, how you treat people who are involved in clinical trials for instance. This doesn't completely cover what is meant by ethics in RRI. So one challenge is to find a shared understanding of what we mean by RRI.

Another challenge is this myth that technology will generate the best solutions by itself. That you don't need RRI because if you let the engineers do what they want and what they think is best, you will get the best technological solutions. We believe that a societal debate should be part of the process of determining goals and means.

There is a similar myth in basic research, that if scientists alone decide what is done in science, you will get the best science and the best innovations and that this will lead to the solution of societal problems, and that you don't actually need society for this. What makes this difficult is that everything that is considered alien to these norms – topics such as gender or ethics – are not considered important or in a very limited way only, only pure science is.

These are the challenges we face. I think you just have to take on the challenge and push on.

SiS.net: You mentioned a Societal Readiness Level NewHoRRizon is working on. Why do we need a Societal Readiness Level and what is the current state?

Erich Griessler: We call it the “societal readiness thinking tool” now because it already reflects a change in our approach. The idea came from the European Commission actually; a societal readiness level was already mentioned in the call. It can be compared somewhat to the Technology Readiness Level, which is used to determine the stage of a technology.

There seems to be this simplistic idea that there is something like whether society is ready for a certain technology or not. I think it is simplistic because very often society doesn't know anything about a technology that is being developed, and how should society be ready for something it doesn't know about? For instance, how would you know about the societal readiness level for a pandemic? We don't know what the challenges are and have to slowly adapt; we need to observe what is accepted by society and what we should point our attention to.

Therefore we – our colleagues in Aarhus and Leiden – transformed it into a societal readiness thinking tool which makes researchers ask themselves reflective questions at certain points in the research and innovation process, specifically at the very beginning of the research project when you develop your research

question, next when you collect the data, and finally when you interpret the data.

These reflective questions focus on the RRI keys – do we engage the public; do we involve the relevant stakeholders at the three stages; do we consider gender aspects in our research; do we contribute to science education; do we take ethical questions into account in our research; do we consider aspects of science literacy and science education; do we consider governance aspects? And if you say „ok, we didn't take into account what our research means for women“, then it takes you back to your research question and you have to incorporate it there.

We started out with a very complicated matrix of maybe one hundred questions and tried to boil it down to make it more user-friendly. You can find it on the web, on the the NewHoRRizon website, and there is also a video on YouTube which shows how it works. And that's the aim. It should be a user-friendly tool for researchers on how to integrate aspects of RRI into their research.

SiS.net: What are you hoping for the concept of RRI in the future?

Erich Griessler: The questions of RRI are much older than the concept itself. And they are pressing questions which won't go away. The question of gender equality in research and innovation, the question of who should know about what is done in research and innovation, the question of open access or the question of who can participate in research and innovation. Whether the concept of RRI, which is a policy concept developed by the European Commission, politically survives or not, these questions won't go away.

So, on the one hand my hope for the future of RRI is that there will be continuous funding from the European Commission and other funding organisations for this idea because it is important. But **I hope for much more than just promoting RRI. I hope that we will slowly be implementing RRI and raising the awareness of its importance within the different stakeholder groups.** I think with the sustainable development goals, with the Green Deal and with all the challenges we are facing – climate change, rising inequality, the crisis created by this pandemic – we will see the importance of RRI grow. So my hope is that it is seen as an opportunity or an instrument for facing these challenges and to have a more inclusive research and innovation system.

SiS.net: The last question is less about the project content but more about personal impressions. What is your personal NewHoRRizon highlight?

Erich Griessler: When you start a project, it is just a plan. But as you go along with the plan, it becomes alive. It manifests itself and develops in a way you didn't foresee when you first wrote it. I therefore think that the greatest accomplishment was that we were able to set up these social labs and to create almost 60 pilot actions. Some are small, some are big – but they were created by the stakeholders themselves and they really address the stakeholders' needs. And these pilot actions are also helpful for others who want to take up RRI.

Note: The mentioned links and the video for the societal readiness thinking tool can be found here:

- <https://www.thinkingtool.eu/> and
- <https://newhorizon.eu/thinking-tool/>

THREE NEWHORIZON KEY MESSAGES:

- **Greatest success:** Bringing together the stakeholders, letting them work on RRI and work together on creating pilot actions which help them to implement RRI in their own organisations.
- **Biggest challenge accomplished:** To make participants perceive that they have the power of agency, that they can change things.
- **Best recommendation for RRI newcomers:** Look at what already has been done, connect with people who have already done something in RRI. Use the wealth of material available and be persistent.