



European Comparisons in Regional Cohesion, Dynamics and Expressions (EuroCORECODE)

Review Panel Final Evaluation

The Review Panel of the EuroCORECODE research programme would like to note that – for purely administrative reasons – the final evaluation of the programme was conducted far too early for a truly scientific assessment. Moreover, the fruits of the programme may not be fully grasped for quite some time, as publications will continue to emerge and cooperation to develop long after the formal end date in September 2013.

Nevertheless, the Review Panel made use of the occasion of the final evaluation not only to consider the progress of the EuroCORECODE programme to date, but also to draw some formative conclusions for research funders, research administrators and research leaders more generally.

1. Progress in the Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs)

The three CRPs have been largely successful in achieving their objectives and maintaining a good level of collaboration and integration between individual IPs. The volume of output of the CRPs, both published and planned, is impressive and the joint outputs, although mainly still under preparation or in press, are a good testimony to the level of integration in the projects. However, their full contribution to knowledge is hard to judge at this moment, for reasons mentioned above.

The most significant scientific contribution of the various CRPs seems to be on conceptual and methodological levels. The extensive reflection on and the application of those concepts and methodologies to a vast array of subjects and areas allowed the CRPs to develop far beyond the general theme of the EuroCORECODE programme.

The coordination and integration of multinational, interdisciplinary teams is very time- and energy consuming, meaning that three years is generally not enough to develop truly collaborative work. It would require four years to complete and harvest the knowledge from the publications still in press and under preparation. Notwithstanding, all CRPs have announced future joint activities.

2. Programme Integration

Integration and cooperation was clearly more evident and efficient within rather than between CRPs, but good efforts were made to undertake common activities and joint reflection across the three projects, mainly through cross-CRP workshops and conferences. The social scientists have benefited from the time depth offered by the historians and the historians from the conceptual suggestions made by the social scientists. The cross-CRP activities have created opportunities for the fruitful confrontation of the frameworks, assumptions and discourses that develop and may ossify within disciplines. A joint publication is planned, building on but going beyond the themes and contributions of the Final Conference in Arnhem on 29-31 August 2013.

It would have been useful for the CRPs to engage in more frequent teleconferencing and to establish common platforms and a common website to share ideas and methodologies, as a means of opening outwards and improving communication among the CRPs.

3. Networking, training and dissemination

The cross-CRP networking activities of the programme were very good, with each CRP actively involved in organising and participating in meetings. Each CRP also held a series of internal workshops/conferences to coordinate the work of the individual IPs. A fourth year of the EuroCORECODE programme would have allowed for even more intense and fruitful networking and dialogue between these diverse, multinational and interdisciplinary teams.

Academic dissemination has been extensive, both through conferences and publications, with genuine attempts to draw together the IPs within each CRP and to a certain extent to cross the boundaries between the CRPs. However, there are clear asymmetries between the different CRPs in regard to the scientific production in English, and in prestigious and relevant journals.

One area of weakness in the programme was the failure to realise the potential of using public CRP websites as a research resource and medium for public outreach. The fruits of publicly-funded research such as the EuroCORECODE programme should be made freely available online wherever possible. On the whole, the CRPs undertook only a modest amount of public outreach, i.e. beyond the academic world. Not only was each of the CRPs investigating topics which are of intrinsic public interest but a greater emphasis on such activity would have helped to demonstrate the public value of research carried out under EUROCORECODE.

Coordinated training of the next generation of researchers was not a strong feature of the programme. The Master Thesis award was nevertheless appreciated by the Review Panel as an effort to encourage and motivate interest from early career scholars.

4. General comments and other feedback

International, interdisciplinary research is challenging to coordinate and conduct, and EUROCORES programmes are very ambitious in demanding integration at an even higher level than that of the Collaborative Research Projects. Bearing this in mind, structures such as EUROCORES have an important role to play in enabling cross-disciplinary and international research, and the expected achievements and longer-term value of the EuroCORECODE programme are significant.

CRPs in EUROCORES programmes should be strongly encouraged from the outset to undertake joint (cross-IP) publications as a spur to greater integration. At this stage in EuroCORECODE, the CRPs should devote their energy to finalising and producing CRP publications, preferably in English, and to aim for high-ranking journals and prestigious publishing houses. The Review Panel is pleased with the plans for a cross-CRP publication, recommending that the CRPs produce at the least a joint methodological statement demonstrating the progress made as a result of collaboration across the CRPs.

As an aid to the evaluation process, the CRP report forms should ask more explicitly for a description of the CRPs' contribution to knowledge with respect to the state of knowledge and hypotheses as described in the original project proposals, rather than an enumeration of meetings and activities.

The ESF should also request that samples of the scholarly output be provided where these are not already publically accessible (see above recommendation on making outputs publically available). In many cases, an English translation of the title of the publication would have been useful. The Panel could suggest that the CRPs be asked to provide an annotated but select bibliography rather than complete lists of all publications, and to make this select bibliography available to the Panel.

Most importantly, the Review Panel would recommend to the ESF and the funding organisations to undertake a final evaluation two years after the formal end of the three-year life cycle, in order to collect and properly evaluate the outputs.