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Zane Šime

Dijver 11 | BE-8000 Bruges, Belgium | Tel. +32 (0)50 477 251 | Fax +32 (0)50 477 250 |
E-mail info.ird@coleurope.eu | www.coleurope.eu/ird

About the Author

Zane Šime is an Affiliated Researcher at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) focusing on the European Union's (EU) science diplomacy towards the Southern Neighbourhood. Among her other research interests are the EU's macro-regional governance and the EU-India educational diplomacy in a broader context of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Recently, she has completed research at the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) and the Academy of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Prior to that she has worked at the Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Latvian Ministries of Defence and Finance. She is a graduate of KU Leuven and the University of Latvia.

Dijver 11 | BE-8000 Bruges, Belgium | Tel. +32 (0)50 477 251 | Fax +32 (0)50 477 250 | E-mail ird.info@coleurope.eu | www.coleurope.eu/ird

Abstract

A better understanding of the multifaceted forms of European science diplomacy requires delving into understudied empirical material. While the Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation of the European Union (EU) have received considerable scholarly attention, their role in supporting both the formation of the European Research Area (ERA), as a framework with foreign policy value, and diplomatic aspirations of the Union requires more nuanced analysis. This paper examines how research cooperation between the EU and Morocco and Tunisia helps achieve the overarching goals of the European Southern Neighbourhood (ESN) policy and of the ERA. It draws on practice theory to shed light on understudied routines that contribute to EU foreign policy. A systematic analysis of EU-funded research projects implemented throughout 2014-2017 leads to the conclusion that the ESN is well integrated into the ERA. The research cooperation between the EU and Morocco and Tunisia helps achieve the overarching goals of the EU's policy towards its Southern Neighbourhood and of the ERA under the coordination of diverse hubs of expertise located in various parts of Europe. Resilience-building is not led solely by the Mediterranean littoral states.

Introduction: Research cooperation in the Southern Neighbourhood context

This paper responds to the call for more empirical case studies of science diplomacy (Ruffini, 2020c, 4) by focusing on research projects funded under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for research and technological development of the European Union (EU). Research project consortiums are examined as collaborative research engagements that have an implicit 'science for diplomacy' value in the context of the European Southern Neighbourhood (ESN). This paper looks at some of the existing EU-funded measures to explore what recent programming and allocation of EU funds are revealing about the EU implicit science diplomacy practices when engaging with the historically renowned frontrunner states of the EU neighbourhood, namely, Morocco and Tunisia (Bicchi, 2007, 54-55; Hill, 2018, 408; Huber & Paciello, 2015, 5). Both ESN countries are rather similar in terms of having developed multifaceted and close ties with the EU (Burlyuk, 2017, 1019; Trobbiani & Kirjazovaite, 2021, 95). They are among the most actively involved non-EU states in some of the FP7 specific programmes (European Commission, 2014a, 72, 2015, 26).

This paper examines how research cooperation between the EU and Morocco and Tunisia helps achieve the overarching goals of the ESN policy and of the European Research Area (ERA). The goal of the ESN policy is to build the capacities of the neighbouring countries to address various volatilities of internal and external origins. The goal of the ERA is to help countries to jointly reach higher levels of effectiveness by a coordination of research policies and programmes, including a seamless circulation of knowledge and talent.

The EU aspires to assist the ESN countries in building resilience and addressing the persisting socio-economic challenges. Resilience refers to the EU-promoted approach towards the countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of recovery from endogenous or exogenous shocks with the help of diverse socio-economic assistance measures that complement political consultations to promote adaptive capacities of the targeted country and/or society (Marino, 2021; Stollenwerk, Börzel, & Risse, 2021). "The European Global Strategy […] explicitly spells out that the EU seeks to foster resilience in its neighbourhood with the hope of ensuring a peaceful environment and effective governance" (Stollenwerk, 2021, 2). Such ambitions require knowledge-intensive solutions. The vast offer of multilateral cooperation structured by the ERA is

instrumental. Members of project consortiums are in this paper considered to be resilience-builders of the ESN. Implicit science diplomacy unfolds through the incorporation of ESN-based entities in FP7-funded projects without explicitly postulating these opportunities as expressions of diplomacy or primarily diplomatically motivated ones.

The guiding 'straw-in-the-wind' hypothesis is that research cooperation between the EU and Morocco and Tunisia helps achieve the overarching goals of the ESN policy and of the ERA through a handful of institutional pairs that form the key collaborative research-intense ties across Europe and the ESN frontrunner states. There is a need to clarify whether the earlier detected 'oligarchic' networks (Breschi & Cusmano, 2003) and 'closed clubs' (Enger, 2018) are the prevailing interactive patterns that incorporate the ESN into the ERA. The hypothesised ties are in this paper considered as implicit forms of science diplomacy. The paper maps competence centres in Europe and the two selected ESN countries to clarify the interactive patterns of research cooperation in the form of project consortiums. Their interaction through multiple forms of project implementation should be considered as research-intensive links that continuously strengthen their scientific excellence and positioning within the ERA. Additionally, these institutions deliver tangible results to support the EU's aspiration of resilience-building.

To test the hypothesis and answer the research question, the academic literature on the 'practice turn', secondary literature on the ESN, the ERA and the FPs is combined with a quantitative mapping relying on the EU's open-access database "Community Research and Development Information Service" (CORDIS) to obtain a systematic picture of collaborative patterns during the 2014-2017 time frame. The four years capture the post-volatile phase after the Arab Spring. Additionally, this time frame coincides with an enthusiasm expressed about research and innovation as promising means to bring to life the renewed upswing for the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation (Rossetti di Valdalbero, Schunz, & Liberatore, 2015, 157). In so doing, this paper not only contributes to bringing more empirical insights into the debate on European science diplomacy, but also provides a detailed mapping of EU-funded initiatives that in a comprehensive manner aspired to strengthen the much-desired resilience on the Southern coasts of the Mediterranean (Hanau Santini, 2020, 137). However, the choice of the time frame should not mislead the reader into assuming that there were no

implicit science diplomacy dynamics occurring before 2014. Generally, earlier time frames should not be considered as less worthy for the study of implicit science diplomacy and the overall need to acquire a more comprehensive picture about the collaborative research patterns throughout longer time frames, even several FPs.

With its focus on collaborative research patterns, this paper attempts to free the ENP scholarship from an overwhelming propensity towards the study of *la crisologie européenne* (Dehousse, 2015, 289; Hassenteufel & Surel, 2015, 207; Perchoc, 2016; Rozenberg, 2015, 9), 'crisisification' (Vaagland, 2021) and criticism about a supposedly failed policy (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2015, 45; Mény, Chabanet, & Rozenberg, 2015, 132; Pedi, 2019, 47). Likewise, following earlier reflections of prolific academic voices (Bigo, 2017, 311), this paper is not primarily preoccupied with territoriality. Instead, it shifts a focus on the network patterns of the ERA and the way two ESN countries are incorporated in it. Without going into the overall examination of unity and fault lines (Bicchi, 2018), the paper provides a snapshot of collaboration patterns that build capacities across the Mediterranean to strengthen vital elements of a knowledge-based economy, sustainable solutions and promote the integration of the ERA (Amoroso, Coad, & Grassano, 2018, 405).

The first part of the paper presents a contemporary reading of practice theory with a focus on the field and explains the chosen methodology. The second part describes the dynamics of the ERA and science diplomacy. The third section walks the reader through the mapping of the partnerships established between the European coordinating institutions and entities based in Morocco and Tunisia via collaboration in FP7-funded projects. The subsequent part discusses the findings and points out the limitations and sets some boundaries for a generalisation of the findings. The final part sums up the key conclusions and identifies some directions for the future exploration of European science diplomacy.

Analytical framework

This section sketches out the richness of practice theory. It focuses on the field and temporally captured relational patterns. Methodological details of the mapping exercise follow the process tracing approach with particular attention paid to explaining the selection results of the examined pool of projects.

Field in the context of practice theory

This paper contributes to the Bourdieu-inspired scholarship of the 'practice turn' in European Studies. Without questioning the role of Bourdieu in defining the initial foundations of practice theory, it focuses on recent authors and their reflections on the contemporary traits of various variations of practice theory (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015). The present-day authors should not be positioned in an eternal shadow of Bourdieu because they have managed to consolidate a noteworthy allure around the practice theory (Holthaus, 2020).

The theoretical structure of practice theory is defined by a field and interconnected subfields. A field is an overall macro-structure that captures dispositions, relational patterns and properties of agents (Caro, 1980). A field has a set of specific rules to ensure its relative autonomy. These rules enable a structuring of the position of the participating agents (Warren, 2014, 10). The conceptual point of departure is the EU as a post-Westphalian entity that facilitates multilateral cooperation in its neighbourhood along the lines of certain integrationist goals which are characteristic of the EU internal policy frameworks. The examined field offers a glimpse into these integrationist developments.

Practices are understood as "socially meaningful patterns of action, which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world" (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, 4). This builds on the earlier acknowledgment that "it is the unfolding of everyday practices that produce bigger phenomena and social realities of our world" (Adler-Nissen, 2016, 9). Practices capture relations and not a set of interactions (Bigo, 2011, 235). Scholars have discouraged a study design that would start off by exploring the individuals who are at each end of the relational link (Bigo, 2011, 235). "Agency is a property of practice" and a relational achievement (Bueger, 2016, 408). This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on such relational achievements in European Studies.

Methodology

Besides a brief secondary literature review on the ERA, the ENP and FPs, this paper includes a 'diagnostic evidence' (Bennett et al., 2015, 7; Collier, 2011, 824) obtained through a data-set observation from CORDIS. The data base was used to identify FP7-

funded projects which were implemented throughout 2014-2017. Selected projects had Morocco- and/or Tunisia-based institutions among the consortium members in a coordinator, participant or partner status.

The diagnostic evidence "indicates the kind of process taking place, but does not transmit any independent effects to the dependent variable" (Bennett et al., 2015, 7). The paper captures a very short period of time. Nevertheless, as some of the subsequent paragraphs explaining the empirical findings demonstrate, even within this time frame it is possible to trace consecutive collaborative patterns between consortium members.

The research question aims explaining how research cooperation contributes to achieving the ESN and the ERA overarching goals. Attention is paid to the relational patterns that are established between Europe-based project coordinators and Morocco- and Tunisia-based consortium members. This interlink captures the dependence of Morocco- and Tunisia-based consortium member on the European coordinator as the entity that has a considerable (but not exclusive say) on the composition of the project partnership, including the membership of ESN-based entities in this partnership.

Data-set observation refers to scores on variables for the two selected country cases (Bennett et al., 2015, 8). However, in this paper, these are not obtained only for the purpose of statistical analyses. A more qualitative examination displays relational patterns characterising ERA during the selected time frame. Additionally, attention is paid to tracing a link to the explicit science diplomacy, namely, how the science diplomacy hubs are positioned within this broader context of collaborative ties. It is done with caution against making any too far-fetched conclusions about the implications of previous FP7-funded collaboration on the current science diplomacy motivated outreach of European entities towards both studied ESN countries.

The initial hypothesis states that a handful of institutional pairs form the key collaborative research-intense ties across Europe and the ESN frontrunner states. The hypothesised constellation portrays the European coordinators as a very selective community that displays readiness to collaborate in projects with very few Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities. This hypothesis captures the 'straw-in-the-wind' test. This

process-tracing hypothesis provides "weak or circumstantial evidence" (Bennett et al., 2015, 17). Although this type of hypothesis is neither highly unique, nor certain (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, 102), it is a good starting point to examine potential complementary variables,[1] such as the role of the funding authority to offer guidance in the consortium composition during various stages of the project, for a consecutive study beyond this paper. The directions of the straw are explored in terms of institutional representation among the examined pool of projects. Attention is paid to identifying the country and institutional representation of Europe-based project managers and Morocco- and Tunisia-based consortium members.

Since only a handful of projects strictly correspond to the implementation period of 2014-2017,[2] the search was broadened to include all those CORDIS registered projects that commenced earlier than 2014 or concluded after 2017. As long as the project covers one of the years examined and entails at least one institution from Morocco and/or Tunisia as a coordinator, participant or partner within the consortium, the project is considered to be eligible to be included in the selected sample of projects for analysis.

As the annex with a list of project portfolios of Moroccan and Tunisian leading institutions demonstrates, the two countries have been involved in a thematically wide variety of collaborative consortiums. What should be kept in mind when considering the findings of this paper in a broader context of the existing body of literature is that the set of reviewed projects does not offer a complete picture of all FPs'-funded projects that thematically address the ESN. The selection criteria for the mapping of the consortiums do not allow to argue that this paper provides a complete picture. A more extensive search in CORDIS following different search parameters proves that there are projects that thematically cover the selected geographical area. However, those projects do not count entities located in Morocco or/and Tunisia among the consortium members. Such projects as MEDYNA, WATEREUS-MED, TRANSOLAR, BIR AL-NAS, MEMOQUAT would be some of the illustrative examples (CORDIS, 2020ag, 2020be, 2020bb, 2020e, 2020ah), far from a complete list.

[1] "Complementary variables are those that add to or subtract from the effects of the main variables of interest, but do so independently, or without interaction effects related to the main variables" (Bennett et al., 2015, 7).
[2] Namely, ARIMNET2 (CORDIS, 2020b), SAHWA (CORDIS, 2020aw), POWER2YOUTH (CORDIS, 2020at), INCONET-GCC2 (CORDIS, 2020aa).

Many Horizon 2020-funded projects that correspond to the selection parameters adopted in this paper were implemented simultaneously with FP7 projects throughout the 2014-2017 time frame. Thus, attention should be paid to concurrent, not only consecutive relational patterns supported by two FPs. This is another call for caution against over-generalisation of the results obtained through the systematic selection adopted in this paper. Horizon 2020 projects might not provide the same statistical and thematic patterns.

Dynamics of the ERA as a framework field

This section clarifies how the subsequently presented empirical findings contribute to a wider area of scholarly enquiry.

Practices of the ERA and consortiums

The ERA is translated in this paper into a framework field with its subfields steered by various EU programmes. The ERA as a framework field with international outreach incorporates the neighbourhood in the overall European integrationist dynamics. EU-funded project consortiums are treated as everyday relational routines in the higher education and research domain. In this paper, collaborative research engagements encapsulated in projects are understood as practices that establish relational patterns among consortium members. Projects as facilitators of practices embody the daily routines of implicit EU science diplomacy and interconnections that shape the on-going ERA integration, including the incorporation of ENP-based entities in the ERA as the framework field.

The importance of studying past collaborative patterns should be viewed along the lines of past practices serving (to a certain degree) as an explanation of the present ones. Practices facilitate the strategic directions among actors by offering a similar range of mutually recognised scripts or frames (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, 20). The paper is written with an awareness of earlier findings that a considerable number of contemporary consortium structures are building on the past joint track record, thus providing some hints about potential future interactive patterns (Breschi & Cusmano, 2003; Calvo-Gallardo, Arranz, & Fernández de Arroyabe, 2021, 13; Enger, 2018; Gallo, Seniori Costantini, Puglisi, & Barton, 2020, 20; Heller-Schuh et al., 2011, 18; Scherngell & Lata, 2013, 570). Since there are various 'constellations of practices' existing

simultaneously (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, 27), the heterogeneity of EU-funded consortiums covering many scientific disciplines is a fitting object of analysis.

This choice of the subject of study follows Adler-Nissen's suggested turn away from the key headquarters of national bureaucracies (Adler-Nissen, 2016, 16) that are no strangers to the science diplomacy scholarship (Huang, 2019). Likewise, following observations made in EU Studies (Adler-Nissen & Kropp, 2015, 163-164), the influential role these interactions have on shaping the future of various scientific disciplines is acknowledged.

"Fields are both the building blocks of society and areas of social activity that are relatively autonomous and that have developed their own set of rules and organizational arrangements" (Carter & Spence, 2020, 2). The collaborative ties between European and Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions are not treated as a unique field. It is considered as a peripheral fragment that reveals a multitude of subfields of the ERA as the framework field. The identified relational patterns display frequency, thematic propensity and the way the framework field and its subfields incorporate ESN entities through connecting them to more centrally positioned entities in Europe (Breschi & Cusmano, 2003, 30).[3] ESN-based entities are considered to be in a peripheral position of the ERA framework field.

"[T]he field is not the institution; it is always what creates institutions" (Bigo, 2011, 248). This principle is translated in the research design as the ERA not being an institution. The ERA is the grand framework field where temporal institutions in the form of FPs-funded projects are established and facilitate interactions within and across subfields. Projects as temporal institutions develop their own dynamics (Bulmer & Joseph, 2016, 733). Depending on the sustainability potential of each project as an institution, active

[3] With all due respect to the inseparability of habitus from the field and the capital, this paper does not take up the much more resource-demanding task to explore in great detail the whole triad (Bigo, 2011, 238; Townley, 2015, 21). Instead, this paper offers a mapping exercise aimed at identifying the key institutions operating in the field to obtain a temporal snapshot of the structure of the field (Swedberg, 2008, 6). The features of habitus, just as the earlier suggested holistic approach of field-capital-agency-doxa and attention to the doxic battles (Berling, 2012, 459), are left outside the scope of this paper. Although "Bourdieu's research question was often how actors were related—rather than if they were related" (Berling, 2012, 466), such nuances of interactions remain to be addressed in greater detail in subsequent research stages. This paper focuses on indicating the central institutions that steer the collaborative ties between EU-based and ESN-based entities.

interrelations are maintained until the end of the project or longer. Organisational fields attract attention among contemporary European diplomacy researchers (Navrátil, 2020, 5-6). This paper delivers new insights obtained from the understudied aspect of the way ERA contributes to the diplomatic aspirations of the EU without a constant involvement of the traditional national diplomatic corps or the European External Action Service.

Science for diplomacy conveyed by academic institutions

Generally, the existing body of literature on the research institutions as foreign policy resources is rather scarce (Adams, 2006, 41-46; Åkerlund, 2016, 34; Graham, 2012, 13; Lowe, 2013, 12). Nevertheless, the role of universities and research institutions in international relations is shown, revisited and brought to the fore in several recent studies spanning well beyond the research founded on practice theory. Some of the topics explored are the allocation of certain supraregional and supranational rights to academic institutions (Flink, 2020b, 2), the transnational outreach of universities (Bertelsen, 2014a, 2014b; Moutsios, 2012, 16), international strategies of renown research centres (Ruffini, 2018, 107) and the role of universities in serving as laboratories for future foreign policy directions and initiatives (Gee, Patman, & Rudd, 2017; Šime, 2020). The era of higher education internationalisation over the past three decades sets a conducive background as well (Chan & Dimmock, 2008; Leijten, 2019, 9). There is a continuing academic interest in examining certain visions, such as the Humboldtian one, and how it travels throughout decades, centuries and places to shape the idealistic aspirations of a university (de Boer & Huismans, 2020, 347-348; Hokka, 2019, 24-26; Joamets & Solarte Vasquez, 2020, 112; Moutsios, 2012, 9-10; Östling, 2018). This body of literature proves that these institutions are influential actors and promising subjects for a study of implicit science diplomacy practices.

'Science diplomacy' is a term used to explore the relations between science and diplomacy through (traditionally three but more recently four) taxonomies, varieties or dimensions, namely, diplomacy for science, science for diplomacy, science in diplomacy and diplomacy in science (Šime, 2021b, 1-2). Implicit science diplomacy refers to relational practices which implementers themselves do not define, name or identify as science diplomacy. Instead, it is the interpretation of the analyst that seeks to explore these practices via the science diplomacy lens. 'Science for diplomacy' is one of the four taxonomies. It stands for the use of science to foster conducive relations

between states and/or supranational, intergovernmental or international entities. This paper explores the EU 'science for diplomacy' approach towards two ESN frontrunner states by examining FP7 project consortiums. A focus on the ERA and the way it incorporates the ENP provides a new angle to the existing body of literature. The focus is on contemporary supranationally steered integrationist dynamics and the role relational ties between research-oriented institutions play in putting these integrationist developments in action.

Academic institutions put the ERA in motion

The study of the FPs is an excellent way to dwell on some of the details of the ERA framework field and multifaceted dynamics. The FP1 was launched in 1984 to tackle the lagging European research performance compared to the globally leading positions of the US and some other nations (Barajas, Huergo, & Moreno, 2012, 921; Breschi & Malerba, 2011, 239; Hughes-Wilson, 2004, 323; Le Boulay, 2010, 107; McCarthy, 2000, 1; Muldur et al., 2006, 95; Nepelski & Van Roy, 2020, 1; Robert & Vauchez, 2010, 24). Since then FPs have generated a wealth of insights into the dynamics of research cooperation in Europe and internationally (Balland, Boschma, & Ravet, 2019, 1815; Ortega & Aguillo, 2010; Pinheiro, Serôdio, Pinho, & Lucas, 2016, 1519; Scherngell & Barber, 2009). While an innovation deficit remains a persisting challenge (European Commission, 2020b, 122-123; Jaekel, Wallin, & Isomursu, 2015, 627; Renda, 2015, 20; Veugelers & Cincera, 2015, 9), in this paper it is not considered as a major obstacle for research to be a conducive means for resilience-building. Even if a lot has been learned about the way multilateral cooperation shapes interaction patterns between various actors across Europe and beyond, there are nuances that remain understudied. Incorporation of the ESN in the ERA would be one of the aspects that deserve more attention.

The complexity of estimating the overall value delivered by the FPs has been discussed for decades (Barajas et al., 2012, 937; Breschi & Malerba, 2011; Fayl, 1999; Ledoux, 1999; Scherngell & Barber, 2011, 248). One of the reasons why it is challenging to fully appraise this value is that over the years consecutive FPs have added multiple layers of contributions. FP6 introduced new instruments for enhancing networks (Breschi & Malerba, 2011, 240). FP7 explicitly supported cooperation with third countries (Tomellini & Tondelli, 2010, 1249). Horizon 2020 encouraged interdisciplinarity (Schindler-Daniels, 2014, 190). Horizon Europe brings missions and their destinations into the EU parlance

and thinking on how to direct scientific advancement (Ricciardiello, Leja, & Ollivier, 2021; Rubbini, 2019). FPs are testimonies of the priorities of their time. Each was launched in a slightly different and ever-evolving context that to a certain extent may affect the way non-European entities are involved in the consortiums.

The time frame of FP7 spans across the Arab Spring. FP7-funded projects were implemented during the post-volatile years. Furthermore, FP7 focus on cooperation with third countries reinforces it as a promising point of departure for the study of how the ERA incorporates the ESN in its networked patterns and what value it brings to the EU diplomatic aspirations.

Empirical analysis of science diplomacy hubs

This section presents a detailed elaboration of the empirical findings of the study of the pool of selected projects. Attention is paid to highlight project partnerships with countries, cities or institutions that today are known for their recently defined science diplomacy profile.

General observations

Practices as relations is a convenient point of departure to explore the collaborative patterns that characterise cooperation between the EU-funded projects' coordinators and entities based in Morocco and Tunisia. The prevailing links between European coordinating entities and institutions located in Morocco and Tunisia display an overall propensity towards Mediterranean interconnections. The coordinators of FP7-funded projects throughout 2014-2017 that entail participants or partners from Morocco and Tunisia are mostly institutions based in France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Germany is the only non-littoral Mediterranean country that is among the top three leading positions in coordinating projects. Additionally, Morocco and Tunisia benefit from interactions and expertise of a notable variety of countries, including Denmark, Ireland, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland among others. Overall, there is no considerable concentration of coordination responsibilities among specific institutions. Hence, the initial hypothesis that a handful of institutional pairs dominate the cooperation does not prove to be accurate. The straw is not bending. This observation translates into an empirical finding that there is no one or several overwhelmingly prepotent collaborative institutional pairs. There are no dominant European countries detected among the studied pool of projects. Subsequent

elaboration on the project and institutional nuances is supported by key information displayed in the annex in a form of concise tables of project portfolios.

Among key countries that host most of the Europe-based coordinators, the Autonomous University of Barcelona excels with having coordinated four projects (MEDSEA, MOSAIC, PEGASO, FP4BATIW). Nevertheless, this institution does not represent pronounced domination as a key hub that would hold an unparalleled role in facilitating collaborative ties with the ESN. Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions benefit from close interaction and work under the leadership of various institutions. It should be noted as a positive sign in terms of building a broad awareness about the expertise hosted by various Europe-based hubs of research excellence among Morocco- and Tunisia-based institutions.

Before elaborating on the collaborative ties between Europe and two selected ESN countries, the outlier items identified in the acquired pool of projects should be addressed. Within the identified set of projects both ESN countries have coordinated a handful of FP7-funded projects. Among the coordinators are not only research and/or higher education institutions but also national managing authorities.[4] This paper focuses on research and/or higher education institutions as implicit enablers of EU science diplomacy. Therefore, the analysis in this paper covers consortiums that involve research and higher education institutions from Morocco and/or Tunisia. Private, non-governmental organisations and government offices from Morocco and Tunisia are left outside of the analytical scope.

Such a selective approach results in further consideration of three examples. First, the Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University was a Morocco-based coordinator of

[4] FETRIC was coordinated by the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and included the Tunisian National Agency for the Promotion of Scientific Research among the consortium members (CORDIS, 2020q). 4PRIMA was coordinated by the Italian Ministry of Scientific Research and Education and included the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Professional Training and the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (CORDIS, 2020a). Another exceptional FP7-funded case is MOBILISE coordinated by the professional association established in Casablanca entitled "Association R&D Maroc" (CORDIS, 2020aj). The MOBILISE consortium includes the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Professional Training and the Moroccan National Centre for Scientific and Technical Research. This is not an exceptional trait of FP7-funded projects. To outline that this is not a FP7 unique characteristic, ForestValue is a Horizon 2020-funded example of a project coordinated and assembling several national authorities (CORDIS, 2020s).

MOICT(CORDIS, 2020ak), a project focused on the solutions of information and communication technologies for water research. Second, the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology (INSTM) was a Tunisia-based coordinator of INCOMMET (CORDIS, 2020z) a project focused on the coordinator's capacity to engage in future EU programmes. Third, the Pasteur Institute of Tunis, an independent governmental research institution, coordinated GM_NCD_IN_CO(CORDIS, 2020v), a project focused on genomic medicine and non-communicable diseases. The coordination role of a project is an opportunity granted to an ESN entity to go beyond the role of a recipient of capacity building which would be the typical benefits of a participant or partner of an EU-funded project. A coordination role grants more initiative and additional responsibility to manage the planned actions.

Earlier studies showing visualisations of networked patterns across geographical maps or schematic nodes are significant contributions to the study of FPs and mapping of the ERA as the framework field (Scherngell & Barber, 2009, 539, 2011, 256; Scherngell & Lata, 2013, 263). Nevertheless, this paper does not replicate these earlier applied methods. The identified dispersed relations between Morocco, Tunisia and Europe require to go beyond a mere country-level schematic visualisation. A qualitative elaboration on the rich and diverse exposure of leading Morocco- and Tunisia-based higher education and research institutions to multiple European centres of expertise strengthens the argument that FPs are resourceful and truly versatile means supporting the EU external aspirations and resilience-building efforts across the ESN. Projects analysed in the subsequent paragraphs prove the value of approaching FP-funded projects as diverse and context-rich relational practices among a great variety of institutions.

Morocco

Most of the Morocco-based organisations have been involved in FP7-funded projects one or two times.[5] Several outliers or institutions with considerably more active engagement in projects deserve more attention. When compared to the overall statistical picture among the Tunisian peers, three top beneficiaries of the FP7 activities remain unrivalled. The number of memberships in consortiums led by various Europe-based institutions shows that the four most actively engaged Moroccan institutions

[5] No less than 15 institutions participated in two or one project consortium each.

have been exposed to considerably more collaborative research opportunities than their Tunisian peers.

Agronomic and Veterinary Institute Hassan II is the uncontested champion with a membership of 10 FP7-funded consortiums that were coordinated by various EU-based managers. Two project coordinators from each of the following three countries: Spain, the United Kingdom, France. And one coordinator from each of the following countries led one project: Italy, Belgium, Denmark and Greece. It is a good starting point to argue about the rich exposure of the institute to the European hubs of expertise.

Seven of these consortiums were funded by the specific programme for food, agriculture and biotechnology. SIRRIMED was coordinated by the Spanish National Research Council to address water management and irrigation strategies with an eye on the issues faced across the Mediterranean (CORDIS, 2020ay). PARAVAC was coordinated by the Moredun Research Institute to focus on vaccines against live-stock parasites (CORDIS, 2020aq). ARIMNET2 was coordinated by France's National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment to address sustainable agricultural production in the Mediterranean region (CORDIS, 2020b). OH-NEXTGEN was coordinated by the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp to develop a web-based modular training course accessible worldwide through the European Tropical Health Education Network (CORDIS, 2020ao). BIOWASTE4SP was coordinated by the Danish Technological Institute to tackle the management of biowaste (CORDIS, 2020d). ICONZ was coordinated by the University of Edinburgh to improve human health and animal production in developing countries by addressing the disease burden (CORDIS, 2020x).

VMERGE is an exceptional case. It was coordinated by the French Agricultural Research and International Cooperation Organisation to address losses in food production (CORDIS, 2020bc). The Organisation is a noteworthy example of a Europe-based institution that is positioned to support "French science diplomacy operations" (CIRAD, 2021). Thus, this is not an example of implicit science diplomacy. It is an explicit one led by an entity tasked to perform national science diplomacy. Overall, France's science diplomacy is "oriented towards the global South" (Ruffini, 2020c). Estimating from the conceptual lens adopted in this paper, an FP7 project helped to project this

tasking in a multilateral cooperation setting. National initiative to promote science diplomacy was projected towards the ESN as well.

Moving on to the specific programme for the environment, GLOBAQUA was coordinated by the Spanish National Research Council to focus on water management in the context of multiple stressors (CORDIS, 2020u). LEDDRA was coordinated by the University of Aegean to develop integrated methodologies for tailoring responses to land and ecosystem degradation and desertification (CORDIS, 2020ab). Such collaborative experience proves that one FP7 specific programme and a small number of its projects alone offers an immersion in diverse expert circles of the ERA each addressing an overall different environmental issue. MED-SPRING was funded by the specific programme for international cooperation and coordinated by the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies from Italy. MED-SPRING promoted the Euro-Mediterranean research area with a focus on three societal challenges: energy, high-quality affordable food, scarcity of resources (CORDIS, 2020ad).

The second most actively engaged institution was the National Institute of Fisheries Research with membership in six FP7-funded consortiums, four of which were funded by the specific programme for the environment and climate change. To list the projects funded by the specific programme of environment, MEDSEA was coordinated by the Autonomous University of Barcelona to focus on the anthropogenic acidification and warming of the Mediterranean Sea (CORDIS, 2020af). PERSEUS was coordinated by the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research to contribute to improving the environmental status of the Mediterranean and Black Seas(CORDIS, 2020as). These projects display a thematic propensity towards addressing challenges of the Mediterranean basin.

Both led by the University of Bergen, CARBOCHANGE quantified net ocean carbon uptake to predict future trends (CORDIS, 2020f). PREFACE improved climate prediction of the Tropical Atlantic (CORDIS, 2020au). This experience of having the same Moroccan institution engaged in a consortium coordinated by the same European entity and covering research topics of a thematic affinity is an exception rather than the rule across the mapped projects. It is a rare case of consecutive cooperation within two projects funded by the specific programme for the environment. A more in-

depth qualitative analysis of what the role of such prolonged ties have been on the sustainability of projects' results and research partnership would be a valuable consecutive research topic. Additionally, these two projects and the University of Bergen as a coordinator are compelling instances for further study of another explicit institutional science diplomacy example from Europe. The University of Bergen is one of the Norwegian higher education institutions which specialises in science diplomacy (SDG Bergen, 2021). Bergen's science diplomacy focuses on Sustainable Development Goals (Mjaaland, 2019).

MYOCEAN2 was coordinated by Mercator Ocean and funded by the specific programme of space to contribute to ocean monitoring and forecasting (CORDIS, 2020am). CREAM was coordinated by the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza / International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies and funded by the specific programme of food, agriculture and biotechnology to improve fisheries management systems in the Mediterranean and Black Seas (CORDIS, 2020k). The National Institute of Fisheries Research is among the key beneficiaries of the European implicit science diplomacy and emerging hubs of explicit science diplomacy. The institute benefited from a rich exposure to centres of expertise located across Europe.

The position of the third most actively engaged institution was, with five FP7-funded projects each, shared by the Mohammed V University in Rabat and Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University. Besides the previously mentioned coordination of MOICT, Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University participated in ClusMED funded by the specific programme for information communication technologies to develop regulations for the Mediterranean countries under the guidance of the Italian Agency for the Promotion of the European Research (CORDIS, 2020i). The same specific programme funded Idealist2014 to reinforce the network of national contact points coordinated by the German Aerospace Centre (CORDIS, 2020y). Another project funded by the specific programme for information communication technologies was MED-Dialogue that aimed to prepare interested entities for participation in Horizon 2020 (CORDIS, 2020ac). It was coordinated by IT Consult GmbH. CINEA promoted innovation in food and agriculture with the support of the specific programme for international cooperation (CORDIS, 2021b). It was managed by GIRAF PM Services GmbH. The university displays a propensity towards technological development topics.

The Mohammed V University in Rabat benefited from diverse thematic coverage, each funded by a different specific programme with a distinctively Mediterranean group of EU-based coordinators. PEGASO was coordinated by the Autonomous University of Barcelona to develop integrated policies of the Mediterranean coastal management (CORDIS, 2020ar). MOSAIC was coordinated by the Autonomous University of Barcelona to strengthen cooperation in the domain of information and communication technologies among European and ESN entities(CORDIS, 2020al).

EUROSUNMED developed new technologies for three types of renewable energies with the financial support of the specific programme for energy. It was coordinated by France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CORDIS, 2020p). EUROSUNMED is noteworthy for its wide engagement of Moroccan entities. Besides the Mohammed V University in Rabat, it had four more consortium members from Morocco.[6]

COCONET, funded by the specific programme for food, agriculture and biotechnology and coordinated by the Italian National Research Council, fostered a network of marine protected areas (CORDIS, 2020j). It is praised for having an impact on the Habitats Directive (European Commission, 2014, 77). It is a good example of research input in the policy preparations. POWER2YOUTH was coordinated by the Italian Institute of International Affairs and funded by the specific programme of socio-economic sciences and humanities to contribute to youth studies with a focus on the South-Eastern Mediterranean area (CORDIS, 2020at). These two projects capture a thematically diverse exposure to the Italian centres of expertise and their management practices.

Cadi Ayyad University is the fourth Moroccan champion with four FP7-funded projects, two projects coordinated by an entity from Spain, one from Italy and one from Germany. STAGE-STE was funded by the specific programme for energy and coordinated by the Spanish Centre for Energy, Environment and Technology Research to advance solar research in Europe (CORDIS, 2020ba). ETRERA_2020 was funded by the specific programme for international cooperation and coordinated by the

[6] Namely, the National Centre for Nuclear Energy, Science and Technology (CNESTEN), Moroccan Foundation for Advanced Science Innovation and Research Fondation (MAScIR), Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane and Moroccan Agency for Solar Energy.

Innovation and Business Centre from Italy to establish a Euro-Mediterranean research alliance specialised in renewable energy sources (CORDIS, 2020n). WATERBIOTECH was funded by the specific programme for food, agriculture and biotechnology and coordinated by an entity of the University of Applied Sciences Bremerhaven to focus on affordable biotechnologies for water cleaning for Africa (CORDIS, 2020bd). SEARCH was funded by the specific programme for socio-economic and social sciences and coordinated by the University of Barcelona. SEARCH promoted state of the art of the ENP research(CORDIS, 2020ax). Cadi Ayyad University is another example of thematically diverse engagement in the ERA through various FP7-funded projects with a focus on solutions tailored for the North African and African contexts.

The next noteworthy institutions are the Pasteur Institute of Morocco and the National Institute of Agricultural Research (which is a public research organisation). Both participated in three FP7 projects. The Pasteur Institute was funded by the specific programme for a medical domain with two coordinators from Germany and one from France. EUNAM was coordinated by Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum Heidelberg and studied health aspects of the full cycle of migration of several Mediterranean North African countries (CORDIS, 2020o). HEPACUTE was coordinated by the hospital of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich to "develop biomarkers predicting the outcome of acute hepatitis C, improving the management of the related patients and thus decreasing the health burden of hepatitis C in Europe and Mediterranean partner countries" (CORDIS, 2020w). The project paid specific attention to integrating Moroccan and Egyptian partners in pre-existing research collaborations and scientific research programmes of European partners (CORDIS, 2020w).

MEDIGENE was coordinated by the University of Montpellier to "study genetic and environmental […] determinants of the metabolic syndrome […] in recent immigrants in Europe" (CORDIS, 2020ae). A focus on the ancestry of Mediterranean populations shows that similarly to the other two projects MEDIGENE have a clear geographic focus on addressing medical research topics characteristic to the Mediterranean setting. The portfolio of the Pasteur Institute of Morocco proves that a Mediterranean focus in international research does not restrict the offer of leading collaboration partners solely to the Mediterranean littoral states.

The National Institute of Agricultural Research was engaged in two projects funded by the specific programme for food, agriculture and biotechnology and one for information and communication technologies. E-AGRI was coordinated by the Flemish Institute for Technological Research to set up an advanced European e-agriculture service in Morocco and China for crop monitoring (CORDIS, 2020l). OSCAR was coordinated by the University of Kassel to address sustainability in farming systems (CORDIS, 2020ap). NEXTGEN was coordinated by the French National Scientific Research Centre to work towards the conservation genetic management of livestock diversity (CORDIS, 2020an).

Overall, with the exception of the Mohammed V University in Rabat, the Moroccan higher education and research institutions benefited from exposure to a notable diversity of managerial styles and leading centres of competence located well beyond the littoral states of the Mediterranean. It demonstrates that specialisation in specific Mediterranean issues in the ERA framework is not restricted solely to the consortiums led by coordinators based in the northern Mediterranean littoral countries. Moreover, two leading institutions, namely, the Agronomic and Veterinary Institute Hassan II and the National Institute of Fisheries Research benefited from relations with explicit European science diplomacy hubs from France, Spain and Norway. Except for the Pasteur Institute of Morocco, the rest of analysed institutions participated in consortiums funded by various FP7 specific programmes but with an overall domination of the specific programmes for environment and food.

Tunisia

In comparison to Morocco, the involvement of institutions located in Tunisia in the FP7-funded projects is much more dispersed. There are fewer champions that have been involved in more than one or two projects throughout the examined time frame.[7] Since key national executive authorities are not the focus of this paper, the champion in terms of engagement in FP7-funded projects, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, is not examined in greater detail.

Two leading research institutions are the Centre of Biotechnology of Sfax and the INSTM. The Centre of Biotechnology of Sfax participated in four projects funded by

[7] More than 20 institutions were part of one consortium and four institutions participated in two consortiums each.

various specific programmes. CLARA was funded by the specific programme for the environment and coordinated by the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, to address water supply and sanitation issues (CORDIS, 2021c). CINEA was funded by the specific programme for international cooperation and coordinated by GIRAF PM Services GmbH to promote innovation in the food and agricultural sector (CORDIS, 2021b). BIONEXGEN was funded by the specific programme for nanosciences and coordinated by Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences to address existing challenges in wastewater reclamation and reuse schemes (CORDIS, 2021a). The centre took part in WATERBIOTECH together with the earlier mentioned Cadi Ayyad University(CORDIS, 2020bd).[8] To sum up, the Centre of Biotechnology of Sfax was exposed to implicit European science diplomacy with a clear propensity towards managerial styles characteristic for the two biggest EU German-speaking countries.

The Centre of Biotechnology of Sfax stands out of all examined Moroccan and Tunisian frontrunners as the only institution that participated in more than two projects steered by entities from the same European country. However, even in this case, it was not a narrow thematic engagement. Each of the three projects is coordinated by a different entity located in Germany. It is considered as a diversified exposure to expertise. The Centre of Biotechnology of Sfax is an exceptional example of having no ties with coordinators from the Mediterranean littoral states. It strengthens the overall argument that the ESN resilience-building is a truly European endeavour with many hubs of expertise across Europe playing a prominent role.

Besides its own coordinated INCOMMET that was mentioned earlier, INSTM participated in three projects funded by the specific programme for food, agriculture and biotechnology and coordinated by institutions from Denmark, France and Spain. CREAM was coordinated by the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza(CORDIS, 2020k). PRO-EEL was coordinated by the Technical University of Denmark (CORDIS, 2020av). Both CREAM and PRO-EEL dealt with topics relevant to the sustainable management of fisheries. CHIBIO was coordinated by Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft to develop a sustainable solution for biowaste processing(CORDIS,

[8] WATERBIOTECH was coordinated by an entity of the University of Applied Sciences Bremerhaven to focus on affordable biotechnologies for water cleaning for Africa (CORDIS, 2020bd).

2020g). The INSTM's portfolio of projects is another example of how funding from one specific programme does not restrict the beneficiary to a narrow thematic scope of specialisation or access to a variety of project coordinators Europe-wide.

Four institutions have participated in three FP7-funded projects each. The Water Research and Technologies Centre (CERTE) participated in one project funded by the specific programme for the environment. CLIMB was coordinated by Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich to analyse climate risks and water issues of the Mediterranean area (CORDIS, 2020h). Two projects were funded by the specific programme for capacity tailored for international cooperation. MED-SPRING was coordinated by the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies to strengthen the Euro-Mediterranean research and innovation cooperation (CORDIS, 2020ad). FP4BATIW was coordinated by the Autonomous University of Barcelona to focus on water treatment technologies(CORDIS, 2020t). FP4BATIW is noteworthy for having the biggest number of Tunisian consortium members. Besides CERTE it assembled three more entities from Tunisia.[9] All in all, the centre benefited from exposure to the expertise of diverse Europe-based centres of excellence.

The National Research Institute for Rural Engineering, Water and Forestry took part in three FP7-funded projects. Two projects each funded by a different specific programme and implemented simultaneously were coordinated by the Barcelona-based Ecological and Forestry Applications Research Centre. MENFRI focused on forest management (CORDIS, 2020ai). BEWATER dealt with adaptive water management plans (CORDIS, 2020c). EAU4FOOD was coordinated by Stichting Wageningen Research to address environmentally considerate food production (CORDIS, 2020m).

Besides collaborative links between ESN entities and coordinators located at the universities of Barcelona, the Tunisian institute's two collaborative encounters with the Spanish research centre are another example that contributes to discerning Barcelona as a noteworthy resource of the European science diplomacy projection.[10]

[9] Namely, the Higher School of Sciences and Technologie of Hammam Sousse, the National Environmental Protection Agency (ANPE) and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Centre of Tunisia.

[10] Barcelona's science diplomacy is articulated in an internationalisation strategy (see Roig, Sun-Wang, & Manfredi-Sánchez, 2020).

Additionally, it is a rather exceptional case of the same Tunisia-based entity participating in two projects steered by the same European institution. The only other similar example with a consecutive rather than simultaneous project implementation was the collaborative ties established between the Moroccan National Institute of Fisheries Research and the University of Bergen. What is common in both collaborative examples is that the location of the coordinator is either in a city or at an institution with clearly defined science diplomacy positioning. To a certain degree, it encourages to think that earlier EU-funded research engagements strengthen the more recently defined science diplomacy profile of Barcelona and the University of Bergen, as well as have provided ESN-based entities with an opportunity to establish timely familiarity and relations to these hubs of the emerging European science diplomacy scene.

The Agricultural Research and Higher Education Institution participated in three projects funded by the specific programme for food, agriculture and biotechnology. FORESTERRA was coordinated by the Spanish Ministry of Economy to address the sustainable management of Mediterranean forests (CORDIS, 2020r). The earlier mentioned ARIMNET2 was coordinated by the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food, and Environment to focus on sustainable agricultural production in the Mediterranean region (CORDIS, 2020b). As elaborated in the previous section of the paper, VMERGE was coordinated by the French Agricultural Research and International Cooperation Organisation – the entity tasked to perform the French science diplomacy – to promote the prevention of losses in food production (CORDIS, 2020bc). All together this bundle of projects forms a clear-cut propensity of the institution not only towards topics relevant to the Mediterranean but also relations with centres of expertise located in the Mediterranean littoral countries that have explicit science diplomacy ambitions.

The Pasteur Institute of Tunis participated in two projects and, as mentioned earlier, coordinated the GM_NDC_IN_CO (CORDIS, 2020v). Two projects were funded by the specific programme for health. SPHINX, coordinated by the Pasteur Institute of Paris (CORDIS, 2020az),[11] and MEDIGENE, coordinated by the University of Montpellier

[11] To briefly illustrate cross-project interlinks and extended ties among Pasteur Institutes, SPHINX established ties with the FP7-funded HepaCute project (CORDIS, 2020az, 2020w). Among its consortium members, HepaCute had the Pasteur Institute of Morocco.

(CORDIS, 2020ae), addressed specialised medical issues. It is a rather rare example of participation in projects steered by entities based in only one European country. However, it should not be forgotten that these are projects with a broad country representation among the consortium members. Even if both projects are coordinated by French entities, it offers exposure to an international blend of expertise.

Overall, unlike Morocco, Tunisian participation in project consortiums does not feature the prominence of the specific programme for the environment. Tunisia shares with Morocco the major funding support offered by the specific programme for food. If compared to Morocco, the main Tunisian beneficiaries were much more often participants in the projects funded by the specific programme for international cooperation. In comparison to Morocco, Tunisia's work under the supervision of two hubs with science diplomacy ambition is more limited. It is restricted to Barcelona-based institutions and the French Agricultural Research and International Cooperation Organisation without a pronounced Northern European dimension.

Discussion of the findings

This section puts forward some considerations for positioning the findings in a broader context of the study of FPs and the ERA, its temporalities and continuities.

Dispersion of collaborative research engagements

This paper aims at identifying the FP7-supported science diplomacy strongholds and relational patterns between European, Morocco- and Tunisia-based beneficiaries structured by the project consortiums. It is guided by the interest to identify higher education and research institutions that through their engagement in the FP7-funded projects contribute to novel forms of diplomatic encounters. All examined FP7 projects are considered as temporary institutions of the ERA framework field. Projects are studied as embodiments of implicit European science diplomacy practices along the lines of 'science for diplomacy'.

The data-set observations show that many institutions located in Europe supported implicit science diplomacy towards Morocco and Tunisia throughout 2014-2017. There are rare occasions of explicit science diplomacy engagements as well. In contrast with the reviewed literature on earlier mapping of FPs, no dominating Europe-based institutions with an overwhelming proportion of project coordination roles were

identified. There were no prepotent institutional pairs with pronounced relational ties established through numerous projects. The answer to the research question is thus a densely and dispersedly networked pattern of relational ties established through projects among a considerable variety of Europe-, Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities. The hypothesised 'straw-in-the-wind' does not bend towards one or several dominant institutions. The research scope of this paper did not result in identifying any outstanding institutional nodes or interlinks between dominant institutions. The mapped projects show that cooperation was broadly dispersed across a notable variety of topics and engaged many different institutions.

The observation that Spain is among the leading countries hosting coordinators of projects that engaged Moroccan and/or Tunisian entities corresponds to the national prioritising of the Mediterranean as a research outreach area (Farrell, Kalpazidou Schmidt, Mourzelas, Warrington, & Wood, 2015, 37). Environmental research specialising in this basin was actively supported by the FP7, including the internationalisation of research consortiums to include non-Member States (European Commission, 2014b, 7, 52). Barcelona hosts several coordinators of projects, namely, the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the University of Barcelona and the Ecological and Forestry Applications Research Centre. However, that does not translate in any dominant position in purely quantitative terms in the number of projects or centrality as an outstanding node within the ERA for research cooperation with the ESN. Irrespective of its internationalisation strategy as a science diplomacy hub, Barcelona is one among many cities in Europe that host FP7 project coordinators. This share of engagement across the mapped projects does not indicate any prevalent leading or domination positions or overwhelming centrality in ERA.

One explanation for that is the fact that the focus was on analysing European engagement with a peripheral area of the ERA. Even if many examined projects are coordinated by the European littoral countries, Germany to a very considerable degree, and other European countries to a lesser degree, have led FP7 projects with consortium members from Morocco and Tunisia. Thus, the ESN frontrunner countries and their respective ERA engagement of most networked institutions have benefited from a remarkable diversity of expertise delivered mostly via implicit 'science for diplomacy' practices. However, in seldom cases, the identified relational ties are established with Europe-based explicit science diplomacy hubs.

Country- and institution-specific collaboration patterns

The historical forerunner countries show slight differences. Morocco displays more concentration of FP7 offered engagement opportunities among a handful of institutions, namely, the Agronomic and Veterinary Institute Hassan II, INSTM and the Mohammed V University in Rabat. Tunisia witnesses a more pronounced dispersion of FP7 project participation across various institutions.

It is important to stress that ESN resilience-building does not have a mere geographically confined Mediterranean or local character. The institutions, such as the Mohammed V University in Rabat, the Tunisian Agricultural Research and Higher Education Institution and the Pasteur Institute of Tunisia participated in consortiums coordinated only by institutions based in the Mediterranean littoral states. However, it is not a widespread pattern across the whole pool of analysed Morocco- and Tunisia-based entities. Research-intense solutions tailored for the Mediterranean pressing needs are developed Europe-wide. Both Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean do not form a siloed ERA subfield.

Irrespective of ups and downs brought by diverse crises, FP7 projects provide a comprehensive network for diverse research interactions and the building of expertise in multiple domains vital for strengthening the ESN resilience. The participation of the Centre of Biotechnology of Sfax in projects coordinated by entities from German-speaking countries is a noteworthy illustration. The ERA offers vast expertise from different parts of Europe to the ESN entities.

The hypothesised collaborative institutional pairs are not a pronounced trend because all Morocco- and Tunisia-based frontrunners benefited from very diverse engagements. They were exposed to a great variety of project management styles and research expertise hosted by numerous Europe-based coordinators. Re-occurring institutional pairs are an exception rather than a rule. To be precise, there are few outstanding cases. Namely, the Morocco-based National Institute of Fisheries Research and the University of Bergen collaborated consecutively in projects CARBOCHANGE and PREFACE. Mohammed V University in Rabat participated in PEGASO and MOSAIC coordinated by the Autonomous University of Barcelona. The Tunisian National Research Institute for Rural Engineering, Water and Forestry

participated simultaneously in MENFRI and BEWATER coordinated the Barcelona-based Ecological and Forestry Applications Research Centre. In all three exceptional cases, the common trait is the recently defined science diplomacy orientation. Barcelona and the University of Bergen position themselves as science diplomacy hubs. Barcelona has chosen a comprehensive science diplomacy profile. The University of Bergen embraces a focus on Sustainable Development Goals.

By comparison, the French Agricultural Research and International Cooperation Organisation – an explicit French science diplomacy executing arm – represents a much more pronounced link with its FP7 engagement (VMERGE) and the French national position of directing science diplomacy towards the global South. It demonstrates a high level of compatibility between the national science-diplomacy position and its projection across the ERA via FP7-funded consortiums. On this occasion, the project as a temporal institution and a relational practice is a conducive means for linking national aspirations with European goals and the ERA as a framework field.

A snapshot of an evolving field and sub-fields

Due to the limited number of projects and the relatively short period of time examined, the collaborative patterns may not provide a definite picture of continuous cooperation and relational patterns throughout several projects. Even if on rare occasions there is the same Europe-based coordinator collaborating with an ESN-based institution in two projects that do not have a similar timeline, the topics covered are not the same. The institutional sub-entities involved might not be the same. Such an example would be the case of the Autonomous University of Barcelona coordinating PEGASO and MOSAIC that both had among the consortium members the University Mohammed V in Rabat. Each project worked on joint solutions for very different issues. Therefore, a qualitative enquiry transcending earlier quantitative visualisations of general country patterns of connections is important to advance a more nuanced understanding of the ERA dynamics and relational patterns between various research-oriented institutions.

Therefore, the theoretical notions of subfields are instrumental to avoid making oversimplified conclusions by only looking at reoccurring relations between universities. The specific programmes of FP7 encourage to reflect on the theoretical notions of

these funding streams in terms of unleashing unique dynamics among their funded consortiums to form subfields of ERA. Further attention to the FP7 specific programmes as facilitators for the creation of ERA subfields would be required to clarify this idea and draw more specific conclusions about the probability of this assumption of FP7 specific programmes encouraging a formation of distinct ERA subfields. Likewise, the sustainability of partnerships and the relational ties between Europe-based coordinators and entities located in Morocco and Tunisia would benefit from a follow-up study of later time periods and their corresponding consortium compositions of successor FPs. It would help to explore how project commitments, such as those expressed by HEPACUTE are implemented in practice. Additionally, it would increase the certainty about the relational patterns identified in this paper or guide towards examination of other relational patterns.

The CORDIS mapping exercise proves that the FP7 funded a notable diversity of beneficiaries. Universities and research centres form a considerable proportion but are not the sole beneficiaries. Among other types of FP7-funded consortium members were key national executive authorities both from the European and the ESN's side, as well as representatives of the private and non-governmental sectors. It confirms earlier observations that research-intensive multilateral ties are not an exclusive business of the higher education and research sectors. There are many other entities that shape ERA. Thus, the added value delivered to these different types of participants through FP7-funded consortiums may vary depending on the particular interests and priorities of each of the consortium members. This should be considered as an important backdrop against which conclusions are drawn in this paper with a sole focus on the institutions representing the higher education and research sectors. These conclusions cannot be generalised to all other types of consortium members.

ERA benefits from decades and longer research cooperation traditions and the rich history of renowned European centres of excellence. The Pasteur Institute in Paris and its ties to the first Pasteur Institutes established abroad, namely, in Morocco and Tunisia, via FP7-funded projects is an emblematic example. Besides its acclaimed historical legacy, the Pasteur Institute is a noteworthy entity of the ERA via its relational ties structured in the form of consortiums.

FP-funded projects are only one of the research-oriented instruments steered by the European Commission and its affiliated entities. A whole plethora of other multilateral research initiatives, funding and programming instruments shape the ERA framework field (Flink, 2020a), including its interlinks with the European Higher Education Area that also has its footprint in the ESN (Kohstall, 2015, 67). Moreover, projects facilitate mobility of individuals. For example, PARAVAC conducted short-term staff exchanges and training courses (European Commission, 2014a, 54). Overall, the international research collaboration and researcher mobility that contributes also to the European integration is supported by many nationally and regionally funded programmes and instruments. The examined institutions are not the only beneficiaries of EU-funded initiatives. This vast array of simultaneous dynamics should caution against an overgeneralisation of the findings obtained in this paper.

Conclusions: Bringing the research domain into the ESN study

This paper investigated how research cooperation between the EU and Morocco and Tunisia helped achieve the overarching goals of the ESN policy and of the ERA. It contributes to addressing the understudied role of the collaborative research patterns that incorporate the ESN into the ERA. The result clarifies that the earlier identified 'oligarchic' networks (Breschi & Cusmano, 2003) and 'closed clubs' (Enger, 2018) do not characterise the way in which the ESN is integrated into the ERA.

The resilience of the ESN was built in a multifaceted and inclusive manner, involving institutions that represent various sectors and covered diverse aspects, often issues important to the Mediterranean area. These findings echo the earlier observations that the EU has multiple voices which guide research-intense multilateral efforts and share their expertise. The vast array of European science hubs that have collaborated with the Moroccan and Tunisian institutions throughout the years after the Arab Spring add to this diversity of voices but in a positive way. It is their unique expertise and years of experience in a multilateral collaboration that the ESN is exposed to.

The data-set observations encourage to think that, if research-intense collaboration is brought into the picture, the ENP should be evaluated more positively. The ESN is a framework capable to respond to various volatilities (up to a certain degree). Of course, the ERA should not be considered as a silver bullet or a limitless framework ready to absorb the whole magnitude of various unprecedented shocks encountered

by the ESN. However, it offers a helpful resilience-building inventory that is important for the aspirations of EU external action. The ESN's resilience does not rest on the shoulders of very few partners of research excellence. However, the conclusions drawn from the two cases and limited time frame cannot be generalised towards the whole ESN, especially considering that the historical ties to the EU and the Arab Spring implications have not been the same across the whole grouping of ESN countries. Further study of other ESN countries would help to clarify this matter.

It is a widespread trend among the examined projects to have the Mediterranean Sea and its shores as a central theme. However, this is not the sole geographic element that unites Europe-, Morocco- and/or Tunisia-based institutions. Even given the prevalence of certain FP7 specific programmes, the thematic research scope is vast and involves entities with diverse specialisations to address a variety of topics. Moreover, as the concisely modelled project portfolios of the leading higher education and research institutions located in Morocco and Tunisia display, projects funded by the same FP7 specific programme cover various research-intense solutions, they do not contribute only to one very narrowly specialised profile of each major beneficiary.

The focus of this paper is on the institutional interlinkages structured through project consortiums. It provides a snapshot of relational constellations defined by consortium compositions within a limited time frame. This episode does not allow to make any definite generalisations about more longitudinal relations among the identified institutions in the context of the overall developments of the ERA as the framework field. However, even within such a limited time frame of four years, it is possible to trace some consecutive collaborative dynamics, such as CARBOCHANGE and PREFACE projects coordinated by the University of Bergen.

The FP7-generated project portfolios of the leading higher education and research institutions located in Morocco and Tunisia are informative. They further differentiate the earlier conclusions about country engagements in FPs-funded projects. Instead, the research results show the diversity of relational ties that span well beyond the Mediterranean coasts. The study of relational patterns across consortiums helps detect the unique specialisations and Europe-oriented international pathways of each higher education and research institution. Nevertheless, the results obtained do not include

simultaneously implemented Horizon 2020 projects. A study of Horizon 2020-funded projects should increase the certainty about the relational patterns identified in this paper, the specialisation of the leading higher education and research institutions in Morocco and Tunisia or guide towards an examination of other relational trends and thematic shifts in the scientific profiling.

Diagnostic evidence proves to be a valuable source for obtaining some insight into previous collaborative research patterns without deriving overstretched conclusions about the implications of these relations or present-day science diplomacy profiles and science diplomacy outreach of Barcelona, the French Agricultural Research and International Cooperation Organisation and the University of Bergen towards Morocco and Tunisia. Tracing the role of the studied projects or the lack of their relevance towards building the science diplomacy profiles of these three European science diplomacy hubs would require another methodological approach.

Ruffini's (2020b, 7, 2020a, 7) hypothesis that science diplomacy evolves in the context of a cultural bias captured by the epistemic community of scientists should be brought into the picture. Consequently, a study of the mobility of individuals and epistemic interactions should be kept on the to-do list of European science diplomacy studies. Research on mobility would help to explore in greater detail how individuals as holders of tacit knowledge and institutional memory of a project (or projects) and their other intellectual engagements advance in a more long-term manner the goals and aspirations enshrined in each EU-funded project, FP7 specific programme, as well as ERA as the framework field. This paper with a focus on projects as implicit European science diplomacy expressions considered as part of a broader framework field of the ERA is just one angle how to study the contemporary developments steered by the European Commission.

The implementation of the European Science Diplomacy Agenda announced in 2021 (Council of the European Union, 2021, 13) can be built on a wealth of insights. The EU science diplomacy potential is not limited solely to hubs of expertise that have chosen to position themselves as specialised in science diplomacy. Implicit and explicit science diplomacy was put in motion by the predecessors of Horizon Europe. The findings of this paper and other research should be taken into consideration for future EU science diplomacy actions. There is a notable variety of hubs of expertise and

lessons learnt obtained across Europe that can be helpful for crafting impactful future actions of the EU science diplomacy towards or with a pronounced ESN dimension.

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Annex: Portfolios of projects of the leading institutions (listed following the order indcated in the paper)

Agronomic and Veterinary Institute Hassan II (Morocco)

Project abbre-viation	COR-DIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
SIRRIMED	245159	FP7-KBBE	National Research Council	Spain
MED-SPRING	311780	FP7-INCO	International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies	Italy
PARAVAC	265862	FP7-KBBE	Moredun Research Institute	the United Kingdom
ARIMNET2	618127	FP7-KBBE	National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment	France
OH-NEXTGEN	289412	FP7-KBBE	Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp	Belgium
BIOWASTE4SP	312111	FP7-KBBE	Danish Technological Institute	Denmark
ICONZ	221948	FP7-KBBE	University of Edinburgh	the United Kingdom
VMERGE	613996	FP7-KBBE	Agricultural Research and International Cooperation Organisation	France
GLOBAQUA	603629	FP7-ENVIRONMENT	National Research Council	Spain
LEDDRA	243857	FP7-ENVIRONMENT	University of Aegean	Greece

National Institute of Fisheries Research (Morocco)

Project abbre-viation	COR-DIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
MEDSEA	265103	FP7-ENVIRONMENT	Autonomous University of Barcelona	Spain
PERSEUS	287600	FP7-ENVIRONMENT	Hellenic Centre for Marine Research	Greece
CARBOCHANGE	264879	FP7-ENVIRONMENT	University of Bergen	Norway
PREFACE	603521	FP7-ENVIRONMENT	University of Bergen	Norway
MYOCEAN2	283367	FP7-SPACE	Mercator Ocean	France
CREAM	265648	FP7-KBBE	Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza / International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies	Spain

Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University (Morocco)

Project abbre-viation	COR-DIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
MOICT	295053	FP7-INCO	Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University	Morocco
ClusMED	611187	FP7-ICT	Agency for the Promotion of the European Research	Italy
CINEA	609495	FP7-INCO	GIRAF PM Services GmbH	Germany
MED-Dialogue	611433	FP7-ICT	IT Consult GmbH	Germany
Idealist2014	288598	FP7-ICT	German Aerospace Centre	Germany

Mohammed V University in Rabat (Morocco)

Project abbre-viation	COR-DIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
PEGASO	244170	FP7-ENVIRONMENT	Autonomous University of Barcelona	Spain
MOSAIC	612076	FP7-ICT	Autonomous University of Barcelona	Spain
EUROSUNMED	608593	FP7-ENERGY	National Centre for Scientific Research	France
COCONET	287844	FP7-KBBE	National Research Council	Italy
POWER2YOUTH	612782	FP7-SSH	Institute of International Affairs	Italy

Cadi Ayyad University (Morocco)

Project abbre-viation	COR-DIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
STAGE-STE	609837	FP7-ENERGY	Centre for Energy, Environment and Technology Research	Spain
ETRERA_2020	609543	FP7-INCO	Innovation and Business Centre	Italy
WATERBIOTECH	265972	FP7-KBBE	University of Applied Sciences Bremerhaven	Germany
SEARCH	266834	FP7-SSH	University of Barcelona	Spain

Pasteur Institute of Morocco (Morocco)

Project abbre-viation	COR-DIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
EUNAM	260715	FP7-HEALTH	Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum Heidelberg	Germany
HEPACUTE	260844	FP7-HEALTH	hospital of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich	Germany
MEDIGENE	279171	FP7-HEALTH	University of Montpellier	France

National Institute of Agricultural Research (Morocco)

Project abbre-viation	COR-DIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
E-AGRI	270351	FP7-ICT	Flemish Institute for Technological Research	Belgium
OSCAR	289277	FP7-KBBE	University of Kassel	Germany
NEXTGEN	244356	FP7-KBBE	National Scientific Research Centre	France

Centre of Biotechnology of Sfax (Tunisia)

Project abbre-viation	COR-DIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
CLARA	265676	FP7-ENVIRONMENT	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna	Austria
CINEA	609495	FP7-INCO	GIRAF PM Services GmbH	Germany
BIONEXGEN	246039	FP7-NMP	Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences	Germany
WATERBIOTECH	265972	FP7-KBBE	University of Applied Sciences Bremerhaven	Germany

National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology (INSTM, Tunisia)

Project abbre-viation	COR-DIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
INCOMMET	295009	FP7-INCO	INSTM	Tunisia
CREAM	265648	FP7-KBBE	Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza	Spain
PRO-EEL	245257	FP7-KBBE	Technical University of Denmark	Denmark
CHIBIO	289284	FP7-KBBE	Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft	Germany

The Water Research and Technologies Centre (CERTE, Tunisia)

Project abbreviation	CORDIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
CLIMB	244151	FP7-ENVIRONMENT	Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich	Germany
MED-SPRING	311780	FP7-INCO	Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies	Italy
FP4BATIW	609550	FP7-INCO	Autonomous University of Barcelona	Spain

National Research Institute for Rural Engineering, Water and Forestry (Tunisia)

Project abbreviation	CORDIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
MENFRI	609542	FP7-INCO	Ecological and Forestry Applications Research Centre	Spain
BEWATER	612385	FP7-SIS	Ecological and Forestry Applications Research Centre	Spain
EAU4FOOD	265471	FP7-KBBE	Stichting Wageningen Research	the Netherlands

Agricultural Research and Higher Education Institution (Tunisia)

Project abbreviation	CORDIS ID	FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation	Coordinating institution	Country of the coordinating institution
FORESTERRA	291832	FP7-KBBE	Ministry of Economy	Spain
ARIMNET2	618127	FP7-KBBE	National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment	France
VMERGE	613996	FP7-KBBE	Agricultural Research and International Cooperation Organisation	France

Pasteur Institute of Tunis (Tunisia)

Project abbre-viation	**COR-DIS ID**	**FP7 Specific Programme abbreviation**	**Coordinating institution**	**Country of the coordinating institution**
GM_NDC_IN_CO	295097	FP7-INCO	Pasteur Institute of Tunis	Tunisia
SPHINX	261365	FP7-HEALTH	Pasteur Institute of Paris	France
MEDIGENE	279171	FP7-HEALTH	University of Montpellier	France

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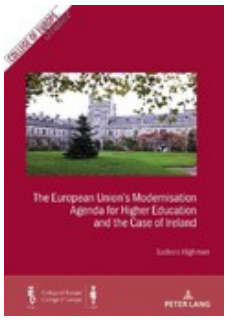

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