From Research to Impact: Institutional Support for Research-based Innovation

Community for Educational Innovation (CEI)

October 22, 2025

European Commission | CEI

CEI Community for Educational innovation

Community of practice created by the **Directorate General for Education, Youth Sport and Culture (DG EAC)** of the European Commission.

Aims to advance educational innovation and develop the mindsets needed to navigate and contribute to Europe's innovation landscape.

Developed under the **HEInnovate** initiative and part of the **EHESO** (European Higher Education Sector Observatory) **Strategic Transformation Toolbox.**

Brings together representatives from higher education, industry, the public sector, and civil society.

Thematic strands

2025 - I

Thematic Strand 1
Entrepreneurial Skills and Mindsets in Education

2025 - II

Thematic Strand 2
Bridging the Innovation Gap in Higher Education

2026 - I

Thematic Strand 3
Education for Green and Digital Innovation

2026 - II

Thematic Strand 4
Lifelong Learning for an Innovative Workforce

Coming soon:
Report on Thematic Strand 1

Thematic strand 2

From Research to Impact: Bridging the innovation gap in higher education

Webinar topics:

- Partnerships between universities and non-academic stakeholders (Sep. 24),
- Institutional support for knowledge valorisation (Oct. 22),
- Capacity-building for researchers (Nov. 18).

Calls for good practices & polls

- Share your **good practices** on Bridging the innovation gap in higher education.
- Take our quick semester **poll** and share your insights.

Study visit

- St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences, St. Pölten, Austria (Nov. 2025).

Thematic report

- Summarises thematic strand activities.

Agenda

15:30	Welcome
15:40	**Intervention 1**: An exploratory analysis of barriers to knowledge valorisation among applied researchers, *Verena Régent*
16:00	**Intervention 2**: It's all about people: Empowering research-based innovation through institutional support, *Bernhard Weber*
16:20	**Intervention 3** – From research to impact – A practical tool for valorising your research idea, *Charlotte Norrman*
16:40	Interactive Debate
16:55	Closing Remarks

OBJECTIVE

Explores how higher education institutions support researchers in turning their discoveries into research-based innovations and societal impact.

KEY TOPICS

- Challenges researchers encounter in knowledge exploitation,
- Facilitation of knowledge valorisation,
- Strategies for fostering research-based innovation.

Verena Régent

Scientific Associate at WPZ Research GmbH, Austria.

Intervention 1

Harnessing research and innovation for societal, economic, and ecological impact: An exploratory analysis of barriers to knowledge valorisation among applied researchers

- Senior Researcher and Evaluator at the Centre for Economic Policy (WPZ Research) in Vienna, Austria.
- Her work focuses on the Austrian and European research and innovation landscape, emphasising the higher education sector.
- She also serves as an external expert for the European Commission's Research Executive Agency and teaches at a University of Applied Sciences and a College for Teacher Education.

Harnessing Research and Innovation for Societal, Economic, and Ecological Impact

An exploratory Analysis of Barriers to Knowledge Valorisation among Applied Researchers

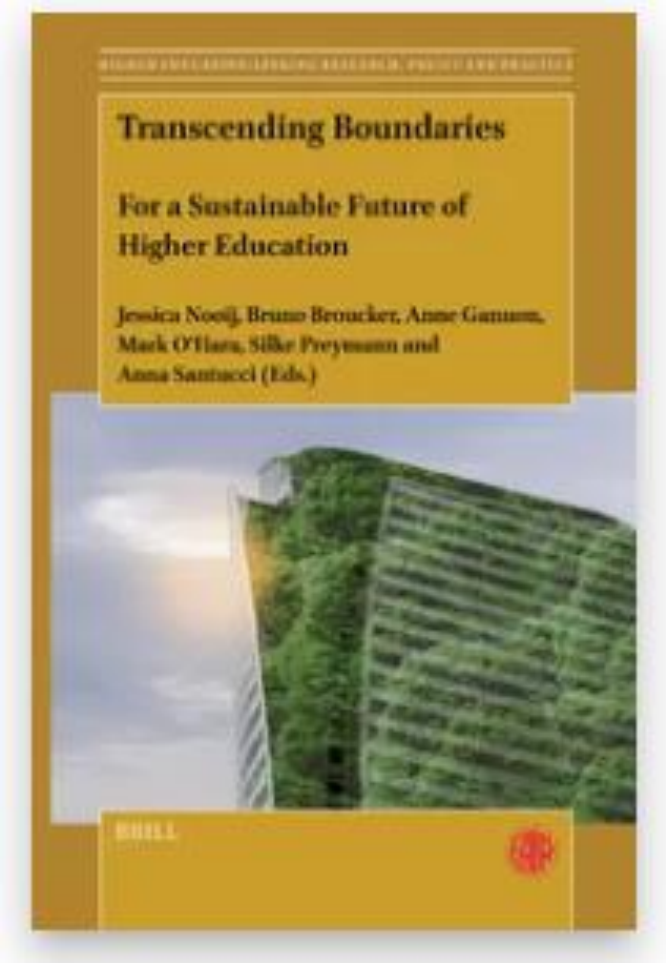
CEI Webinar “From Research to Impact: Institutional Support for Research-based Innovation”

October 22, 2025

Verena Régent, WPZ Research, Vienna

Disclaimer

This presentation is based on:



Régent, Verena & Ecker, Brigitte (2025):

Chapter 6 Harnessing Research and Innovation for Societal, Economic, and Ecological Impact in: Transcending Boundaries

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Introduction

- **Public grant givers strive to maximise the return on public investment in R&I**
  - H2020 and Horizon Europe programmes have included various measures to support innovation and valorisation of research results
    - ➢ Stronger focus on “Impact”, “Pathways to impact”, dissemination and exploitation plans
  - EU Valorisation Directive (2022): Research output and knowledge should contribute meaningfully to society / economy / environment
  - Initiative “Horizon Results Booster” for all projects funded under FP7 or younger
- **Still nowadays, the exploitation potential of (funded) R&I results is not utilised**

The purpose of R&I – changing expectations

➤ 1980s – Commercialisation Focus

Push for entrepreneurial universities

Establishment of Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs)

Innovation = linear, one-way flow (lab → market)

➤ Late 2000s – Social Contribution & Broader Innovation

Third Mission expands to include societal engagement

Shift to Knowledge Transfer (beyond technology)

Innovation = multi-actor, non-linear process

➤ As of 2020 – Co-Creation & Valorisation

Emphasis on co-creation with society

Knowledge Valorisation replaces mere transfer

Innovation = broad, transformative & inclusive (economic, social, environmental)

(Ekowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Berghäuser & Hölschel, 2020; Carayannis & Campbell, 2009; Radauer & Dudenbostel, 2024; Henke et al., 2016)

Knowledge valorisation in funding programmes

- **„Impact“-section formally introduced in EU-FP7 (2007-2013)**
  - But primary focus mainly on academic outputs
- **Horizon 2020 (2014-2020): „Impact“ as core evaluation criterion**
  - Equally weighted with “scientific excellence” and “implementation”
  - Focus on real-world applications
- **Horizon Europe (2021-2027): Knowledge transfer / valorisation**
  - Promotion of knowledge valorisation across sectors
  - Practical application to address societal challenges
  - Partnerships with non-academic actors and practitioners

(Bruno & Kadunc, 2019; Archibugi et al., 2014; Ma et al., 2010)

A challenge for researchers

„Impact“ as broad concept, comprising aspects such as:

- Dissemination & communication of research results
- Participatory approaches to increase positive impact for end-users
- Turn research results into market applications/businesses (e.g. academic spin-offs)
- Partnerships with industry/political decision-makers
- Contribution to economic growth, job creation
- Addressing societal challenges such as climate change, health and digital transformation

Researchers often overwhelmed by exploitation demands:

- “General incompatibility” between science and business development/market application *(Pomp & Zundel, 2020)*
- But: Excellent researchers can be economically successful *(Bonnacorsi, 2017)*
- Their motivation is rather of a reputation-oriented nature than economic *(Kempton, 2019)*

Purpose of this contribution

To provide an exploratory analysis:

- What are researchers‘ needs with a view to valorisation?
- Good practices of exploitation support

Methodology

- 2 focus groups with 2 sub-groups each (25 participants in total) and 5 semi-structured interviews with **(mostly female) Austrian researchers interested in support for exploitation** in December 2023*; transcription and qualitative data analyses
- Desk research on good practices

* Conducted as part of an evaluation study by WPZ Research on the Austrian programme “INNOVATORINNEN“, initiated by the Austrian by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) to promote female application-oriented researchers.

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Focus group and interview results

Exploitation challenges (examples)

- “Unclear HOW to exploit, there are many challenges and barriers”
- “Different languages are spoken in science and in business; I‘m lacking the competences”
- “Exploitable outcomes often not clear after the end of a project, so some fall by the wayside”
- “Exploitation phase is not well accompanied by Austrian funding system”

Multifaceted expectations, activities and outcomes

… that often go beyond a researcher's actual job:

- Communicating research results to academic & non-academic audiences
- Engaging non-academic actors & stakeholders
- Making knowledge accessible for practical use
- Building partnerships (industry, policy, practitioners, etc.)
- Translating research into tangible outputs (products, policies, processes)
- Creating market applications & spin-offs
- Contributing to public policy
- Tackling societal challenges (climate, health, digital, economy, jobs)
- "Using results in follow-up projects"
- "Using unexpected results in new markets"

A question of skills (and interest)

- **Exploitation often seen as “additional burden” for which researchers lack qualification (esp. in business and legal aspects, e.g. patents)**
- **Skill needs:**
  - Where to start?
  - Calculation, business plan
  - How to get seed capital, funders, sponsors, investors, …
  - Communication skills:
    - How to “sell” research to decision-makers/practitioners
    - How to engage in binding interactions
  - Methodological skills:
    - How to engage non-academics?
- **Sometimes it‘s also a question of interest** (“not each and every researcher wants to exploit”)
- **Much potential is left at the intersection between research and business development** (“not enough time for working on a common understanding”)

Challenges in project-based research

- **Convincing “impact-section” vs. real impact**
- **Problems after the end of projects:**
  - Parts of the consortium no longer available/interested ➔ unclear legal situation with a view to project foreground
  - Industry partners “stop acting in the interest of the project once the budget is consumed and their strategic objectives are achieved”
- **Exploitation shall be considered as of the beginning of projects to ensure societal impact**

Lacking support in a critical phase

- **Transition phase between research results and their dissemination/exploitation insufficiently addressed**
  - Lack of financial resources & consultancy
  - Sensitive phase involving life-changing decisions
- **Startup incubators & spin-off support increased, but are specific for founders and fail to help in evaluating the valorisation potential of research results**
- **Most services focused on commercial exploitation only**
  - “Exploitation-sensitive career counselling” for further forms of exploitation (e.g. transiting to a field of application as specialist)

Cultural challenges

- Being socialised in a research discipline binds researchers to a certain work practice / exclusive culture that is difficult to abandon
- Fear to leave familiar territory
- Fear of unacceptance among fellow-researchers when turning to non-academic stakeholders / fields of work

Selected good practices of researcher support

Horizon Results Booster at European level

- **Initiative by the European Commission** (as of 2020)
- **All former and running projects funded by FP7, Horizon2020 or Horizon Europe are eligible** (non-competitive application)
- **All services free of charge**
- **3 modules:**
  - Portfolio Dissemination & Exploitation Strategy (180 days)
  - Business Plan Development (120 days)
  - Go to Market (315 days)
- **1.550 serviced projects in total** (currently 600)
- **HEIs are ¼ of all serviced organisations**

INNOVATORINNEN Lab (pilot)

- Currently in its **pilot/experimental phase** (February to December 2024)
- Developed in the frame of **INNOVATORINNEN***, an Austrian programme for the promotion of women in R&I
- Competitive application based on individual **“dissemination/exploitation mission”**
- **Peer group of 20 female researchers** with different backgrounds/disciplines and missions
- **Mix of** formal workshops/formats, individual consultations and informal peer group learning and exchange
- **Focus on** systemic design methods to support societal relevance

* Operated by Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG), provided by Austrian Ministry of Economy, Energy & Tourism (BMWET)

NCP-IP

- Support for researchers with very concrete exploitation / commercialisation ideas
- Hosted by the Austrian Ministries for Women, Research & Science (BMFWF), Economy, Energy and Tourism (BMWET) and Innovation, Mobility and Infrastructure (BMIMI), managed by the Austrian Business Agency (aws)
- Equips researchers with business and legal skills
- Offers guidance on patent applications, licensing, and commercialising research results

Comparison of selected programmes

- Programmes differ in scope, focus and targeted stages of exploitation progresss
- HRB: focus on EU-funded project, tailored support for dissemination, communication and exploitation strategies, non-competitive application process ➔ post-project impact
- INNOVATORINNEN Lab: niche programme to serve carefully selected peer group with different types of valorisation ideas – broad focus ➔ nurtures early stage innovation & societal impact
- NCP-IP: services for clearly defined target group with concrete exploitation ideas and commercial interests ➔ end-to-end exploitation support

Summary and conclusion

- **Impact and (commercial) exploitation of research results are increasingly demanded**
- **For researchers/consortia this often comes as a burden**
- **Challenges/obstacles in lack of interest, relevant skills, support, funding, …**
- **Support measures such as HRB are heavily demanded**
- **More and targeted support by (funding) agencies and research institutions is needed, esp. with a view to**
  - Participatory approaches throughout the entire research process
  - Increasing societal impact (e.g. through systemic design approaches)
  - Conveying exploitation and dissemination skills

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Thank you for your attention!

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DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

Bernhard Weber

Managing Director at Unicorn Start-up & Innovation Hub, Austria

Intervention 2

It’s all about people: Empowering research-based innovation through institutional support

- Managing Director of ZWI – Centre for Knowledge and Innovation Transfer GmbH (Unicorn Start-up & Innovation Hub) in Graz, Austria.
- He has also served as the Head of course "Digital Innovation Modelling" at UNI for LIFE GmbH and is responsible for connecting local ecosystems within the Arqus Alliance at the University of Graz.
- Previously, he was the Managing Director at Science Park Graz GmbH, a deep tech incubator owned by universities in Graz.

It’s all about people: Empowering research-based innovation through institutional support.

Bernhard Weber,
Managing Director at Unicorn Start-up & Innovation Hub, Austria.

Bernhard Weber

Managing Director
Unicorn Start-up & Innovation Hub

20 years innovation
18 years support of academia based entrepreneurs
350+ supported start-ups /spin-offs
Ecosystembuilder & Innovationnerd

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Innovation Starts with People, Not Projects

Every spin-off story begins with a person – not a patent.
Technology transfer succeeds when people dare to cross boundaries.
Curiosity + Courage = The true seed of innovation.

The Challenge: Academic Innovation Gap

Risk-averse culture and perfectionism slow translation.
Innovation often seen as outside academic merit.
Fragmented support structures – lost momentum.
Only a small share of discoveries reach society.

The Shift: From Compliance to Empowerment

From managing IP → to developing innovators.
From valorisation offices → to innovation partners.
From programmes → to researcher journeys.
Focus on human potential, not administrative processes.

The Enablers: Empowering People to Innovate

Culture & Recognition – value entrepreneurial engagement.
Competence Building – spin-off labs, fellowships.
Community & Mentoring – connect researchers with entrepreneurs, alumni, investors.
Catalytic Support – hubs, pre-seed funds, IP guidance.

Empower People – Enable Impact

Innovation is human before it is institutional.
Invest in people with ideas, not just infrastructure.
When researchers feel empowered, impact follows naturally.

'Innovation doesn’t happen in institutions – it happens through them.'

unicorn
START-UP &
INNOVATION HUB

UNI GRAZ

Thank You!

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DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

Charlotte Norrman

Senior Associate Professor, Linköping University, Sweden.

Intervention 3

From research to impact – A practical tool for valorising your research idea

- Senior associate professor at the Department of Management and Engineering at Linköping University. She has been teaching hands-on entrepreneurship for 20 years and is a pioneer in using challenge-based learning as a pedagogical approach.
- Challenge-Based Learning expert at ECIU@LiU, Linköping University's connection to ECIU Alliance.
- She also works part-time at LiU Innovation as a business coach for researchers and PhD students striving to valorise their ideas.

From research to impact – idea valorisation

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50 år av fria tankar som formar framtiden

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LINKÖPINGS UNIVERSITET

Department for Management and Engineering
LiU Innovation

LiU Innovation supports idea development in the first and fragile stages!

Impact can be made in several ways …

Startup venture

Joint venture with established business partner

Licensing the idea to an established actor – if a patent exists

Implementation in the private and public sector – methods and models

Create arenas and concepts to make knowledge easily available in society

Policy and societal impact – new guidelines and recommendations

Open access and dissemination through publication

Education and skills enhancement by integrating research

Civic engagement and culture

Valorisation plan for:

Date:

1. Idea, approach, result, solution, to be utilized
What in your research can be offered to a target audience? A new product, service, concept, process, input material, or something else?

What can be offered to a target audience?

2. Target group, users & needs
Who do you target? What is the present needs related to your work/research?

Who is your target group?

3. Goals & vision
Your ambition and where you aim in short and long term with your idea.

What is your goal?

4. External environment
Who else work on similar ideas/projects? How is your idea different? What makes your idea unique?

Who else is out there?

10. Action plan
What do you need to do in short and long term to achieve your goals and vision?

Your impact action plan!

9. Risk & risk management
What risks can be identified, their impacts and remedies for research, performance, team, time, funding, law and regulations.

What risks are involved?

8. Responsible research & innovation
Investigate aspects related to ethics, social and environmental sustainability and gender.

Sustainability & ethics

7. IPR and regulatory
Can the idea be protected and how (patent, design, trademark, copyright, trade secret)? What regulatory to follow and what certificates are needed?

Regulations and protection?

6. External resources
What external network and resources such as financiers, co-funding, partners, and environments – do you need?

What outside resources are needed?

5. Internal team & competence
Identify the key competences, e.g. research team and future commercial constellation.

Who is in your team?

C. Norrman & A. Moshfegh (2024) – LiU Innovation


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DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

Debate

15-minute debate

If you prefer, write your question in the chat box.

Use the ‘raise your hand function’ to ask your question directly.

Developing activities

Thematic Strand 2: Bridging the innovation gap in higher education

Share your good practices on:
Bridging the innovation gap in higher education

Contribute your insights and inspire innovation!

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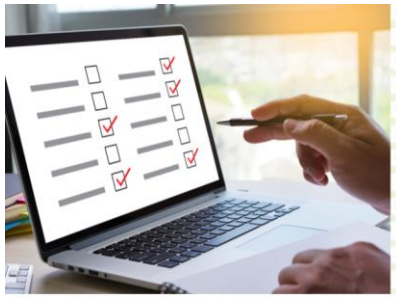
Initiatives, projects, programmes, or policies— that connect research with real-world innovation.



Thematic Strand 2: Bridging the innovation gap in higher education

CEI Poll:
Bridging the innovation gap in higher education

Contribute your insights and inspire innovation!

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Four questions on partnerships, support services, skills, and incentives for knowledge valorisation.

Upcoming webinar

Thematic Strand 2 - From research to impact: Bridging the innovation gap in higher education

Capacity-building for researchers: Fostering knowledge-based innovation

Join the webinar on 18 November!

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Thank you!

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