RODIN

RObotics Digital Innovation Network

Deliverable 2.2 – Initial alignment plan with best practice and timeline for all DIH-IAs

Marco Rosa
Lead contractor for this deliverable: euRobotics aisbl
Due date of deliverable: 30 April 2019
Actual submission date: 12 July 2019
Dissemination level: Public (only final version)

Revision: TNO

Executive Summary

All Innovation Actions funded under the H2020 call DT-ICT-02-2018 (Robotics Digital Innovation Hubs) are expected to use financial support to third parties (FSTP) to support industry, in particular SMEs, in their digital transformation, through for instance, demonstrators and platforms development, technology transfer experiments, or other services.

The RODIN CSA aims to support the cooperation among the Innovation Actions, to network them, and provides a common ground for certain activities, especially FSTP. In particular, RODIN has established direct contact with all IA project representatives and is facilitating the discussion around common FSTP-related topics, where a single approach is necessary.

This report examines all FSTP alignment plans put in place via the RODIN CSA, and it aims to provide an up-to-date overview around FSTP terminology, calls, timelines, highlighting exclusively the topics all parties agreed to review.

This report follows-up on the findings of *D2.1 - Overview of planned FSTP activities in the DIH-IAs*, and it will be updated throughout the project implementation phase when necessary to describe new initiatives related to FSTP alignment plans.

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1 Introduction

This Deliverable provides a comprehensive overview of FSTP alignment plans put in place across the DIHs – Innovation Actions (IAs) - DIH-HERO, DIH2, RIMA, TRINITY and, as from June 2019, agROBOfood - with the support of the RODIN consortium, and follow-up on the findings of D2.1.

The biweekly catch-up call RODIN – IAs is the place where all alignment activities are defined. FSTP alignment is a standard agenda item, and this slot allows all parties to discuss and define emerging needs around FSTP topics.

During those calls, up until June 2019, an agreement was reached to investigate and come up with a single approach and/or definition of the following FSTP terminology, activities, timeline:
- "SME and Slightly Bigger" definition;
- Guide for Applicants: Ethical impact and Gender Balance;
- Database of Reviewers;
- Clarification around the EUR 300k threshold as described in the original call for proposals;
- Cross-Border Dimension;
- Share calls timeline and IAs info-days on a common and public calendar.

Additionally, a discussion was open and further alignment may be required in the future on the definition of "financial and technical audit", "FSTP Instruments", "Key Performance Indicators" (KPIs).

Once a priority is agreed, RODIN takes the task over and, together with all the IAs, defines a clear timeline in order to reach a unanimous compromise on that specific subject. This process has allowed all parties to be actively involved in the definition and implementation of concrete alignment plans.

2   Coordinating FSTP Delivery across DIH-IAs

All DIH-IAs, apart from agROBOfood, whose Grant Agreement was signed only mid-2019, were asked to present their FSTP plans and to start defining alignment needs at the beginning of the RODIN CSA.

A first workshop to share best practices with RODIN and the IAs was held in Warsaw, Poland in November 2018, during the Digital Innovation Hubs Annual Event 2018, and a second workshop was organized in Bucharest, Romania at the European Robotics Forum 2019 (ERF2019) in March 2019. In the course of the project, further workshops or other suitable activities to share best practices will be organized.
Regular "catch-up" calls have been put in place since April 2019 and, as already described in *Deliverable 2.1 - Overview of planned FSTP activities in the DIH-IAs*, this process helped to streamline communication and set priorities.

Once information is collected and FSTP alignment needs are agreed and defined by all IAs via Working Groups (see WP3), RODIN coordinates the follow up activities by:
* making sure each topic is addressed according to each IA request;
* finding workable compromises around e.g. terminology, timeline, definition;
* bringing the topic back to the table once a compromise has been reached with all IAs;
* ensuring enough time for further discussion around the topic, and bringing the proposed solution to a vote with all IAs;
* if necessary, coordinating with the European Commission (EC) to make sure a topic is addressed according to EC requirements and provisions.

Broadly speaking, there is a specific need for alignment on specific FSTP topics across the IAs, that is to avoid the robotics community to become saturated with different FSTP deadlines and a resulting loss of quality. While some FSTP calls are likely to be addressing specific vertical markets, it is possible that some may have a more cross cutting remit. In these cases, it is important to try and modulate the impact on the community. RODIN is in the position to observe and align FSTP actions between the DIH networks. This approach and resulting outcomes are always discussed within the Working Groups (see WP3), to find a harmonized way to present the project to potential FSTP beneficiaries and to enhance transparency in the scattered field of calls.

3 Alignment Plans – Definition of Priorities

As already described in Deliverable 2.1, RODIN and the IAs hold regular Webex calls every other week to set priorities and define steps and action points. This report analyzes all FSTP related discussions and follow-up actions, describing the processes implemented so far and including all relevant documents that were approved by all parties in order to come up with a common view and/or definition.

A concrete form of support RODIN can provide the IAs with concerns the provisions and obligations on FSTP calls as outlined in the related H2020 ICT Work Programme. "SMEs and Slightly Bigger" definition, "Cross-Border" interpretation, a common approach towards Ethical Guidelines and Gender Balance requirements, as well as the interpretation and definition of the maximum established limit of 300.000 Euros per beneficiary, are all FSTP related issues where neither the Work Programme nor the call for proposals helped to shed light and where RODIN stepped in to provide assistance and support to all IAs in order to find common ground, in agreement with the European Commission.

The following chapters highlight the main FSTP topics which were discussed between RODIN and the IAs. Since additional contributions will be necessary in the near future, this report will be constantly updated in the next years in order to become a complete and reliable document, for future reference.

4 "SMEs and Slightly Bigger" Definition

The following is a background description of this subject, pointing to *why* a common approach was necessary, and outlining what was missing in the Work Programme. The "SMEs and Slightly Bigger" definition and supporting materials, as reported below, were produced by David Bisset (iTechnic), then analyzed, reviewed and discussed by all RODIN partners and all IAs.

4.1 Introduction

There is a formal need to have a definition of "*SME or slightly bigger*" approved by the European Commission since its definition impacts on the accountability and auditing of the IAs under the DT-ICT-02-2018 call. This document sets out the rational for defining the phrase with regard to the Digital Innovation Hub IAs funded under that call.

This document has been developed by the RODIN Coordination and Support Action with the approval of each of the four current robotics IAs, RIMA, DIH-HERO, DIH[2] and TRINITY.

4.2 Context

The DIH call "DT-ICT-02-2018: Robotics - Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH) a)" specifies that:

> *"Proposals are expected to use financial support to third parties (FSTP) to support industry, in particular SMEs, in their digital transformation, through for instance, demonstrators and platforms development, technology transfer experiments, or other services (technical or non- technical), as appropriate"*

While this might appear not to set a specification on the proportion of funding to go to SMEs the following:

> *"For innovation actions of this topic, the four requirements described in the introductory section 'Support to Hubs' have to be applied."*

Clearly indicates that the four requirements of support have to be applied, the relevant requirement contains the following text:

> *"At least 50% of the budget should directly benefit SMEs or slightly bigger companies."*
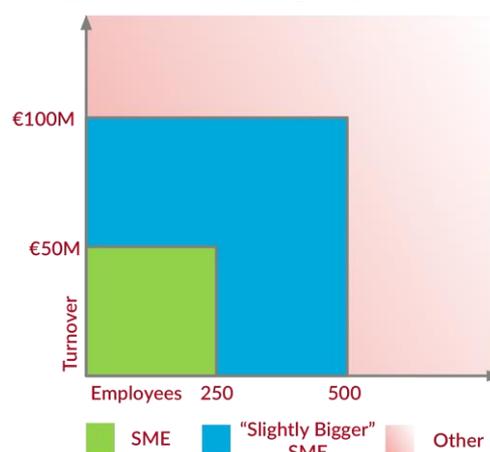
From this the proportion of funds from the project allocated to "*SMEs or slightly bigger*" becomes a contractual obligation set out in the Work Programme and the Grant Agreement it is therefore necessary to have a clear definition of "*SMEs or slightly bigger*" to ensure that IAs can show that they have adhered to their contractual obligations.

Adherence to the definition by the individual IAs will be a matter for periodic financial assessment and audit. It is therefore critical that IAs are able to correctly identify companies that fulfil the "slightly bigger" criteria in addition to the SME criteria.

No official definition of "*SMEs or slightly bigger*" exists although a definition of "*small Mid-Cap*" is provided by the European Investment Fund (EIF):

https://www.eif.org/what_we_do/guarantees/single_eu_debt_instrument/innovfin-guarantee-facility/call/innovfin-sme-guarantee-frequently-asked-questions.pdf

Question 3 of the above FAQ provides a definition of "small Mid-Cap". However, this definition is only concerned with headcount and defines "small Mid-Cap" as any organisation with less than 500 employees that is not an SME by the normal definition. It is considered that this definition is too broad and that an upper threshold on turnover should be added to create a consistent definition for "SMEs or slightly bigger". The following diagram sets out this definition:

4.3   Definition

It is therefore agreed with the IAs that the phrase "*SMEs or slightly bigger"* is defined by extending the current European Commission definition of SME to increase the Employee Threshold by 100% to 500 and the Turnover by 100% to €100M. No other changes to the definition should be made.

In the event that the formally adopted definition of SME is updated during the lifetime of the IAs this extension should be reviewed.

5   Ethical Principles and Gender Balance Provisions

After a meeting in June 2019 with the RODIN Project Officer, a decision was taken to propose to all DIH–IAs a common set of definitions for both Ethical and Gender Guidelines, to be implemented in all FSTP Guide for Applicants. As of July 2019, all IAs were provided with the following document, produced by euRobotics and reviewed by RURobots, and asked to provide feedback.

5.1   Introduction

The European Commission requires a common approach and phrasing to define Ethical Principles and Gender Balance provisions for FSTP actions across the DIH –IAs funded under the DT-ICT-02-2018 call.

In particular, all provisions listed below are applied to all FSTP Guide for Applicants and applies to all FSTP beneficiaries.

This document is submitted to all IAs and requires their approval to be officially implemented.

5.2   Context

The DIH call "DT-ICT-02-2018: Robotics - Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH) a)" aims to redistribute via FSTP calls c.a. 32 million Euros (8 million Euros per IAs funded) to "SMEs and Slightly Bigger" organisations. This implies that a relevant number of third parties/beneficiaries will have to adhere to ethical principles and gender balance requirements as outlined in the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme.

In order to guarantee a common approach towards Ethical Principles and Gender Requirements, we decided to extract the most relevant definitions from European Union documents, H2020 Grant Agreement templates, and EU Regulations. This guarantees that all definitions are in line with current EU requirements and respectful of EU law. Additionally, it will provide all applicants with a comprehensive and clear overview on both ethical principles and gender requirements.

5.3   Definition

It is therefore suggested to introduce in the FSTP Guide for Applicants the following phrasing with regard to Ethical Principles:

"All the Research and Innovation activities carried out under Horizon 2020 shall comply with ethical principles and relevant national, Union and international legislation, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights and its Supplementary Protocols.

Particular attention shall be paid to the principle of proportionality, the right to privacy, the right to the protection of personal data, the right to the physical and mental integrity of a person, the right to non-discrimination and the need to ensure high levels of human health protection.

FSTP beneficiaries must carry out the action in compliance with:
   a) ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity), and
   b) applicable international, EU and national law.

Funding will not be granted for activities carried out outside the EU if they are prohibited in all Member States or for activities which destroy human embryos.

The beneficiaries must ensure that the activities under the action have a primary focus on civil applications.

FSTP beneficiaries are required to assess the ethical implications of their proposed work at the proposal submission stage, particularly with regard to:

 * The use of data that is potentially traceable to a person;
 * The use of, or interaction with, vulnerable individuals and groups;
 * Potential physical or mental harm to operators, users and / or third parties;
 * The development of systems liable to maintain or amplify societal disadvantage or discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, social class or economic standing.

Where potential issues are identified the proposer is required to detail any mitigating actions that will be implemented".

It is recommended to introduce in the FSTP Guide for Applicants the following phrasing with regard to Gender Balance:

"FSTP beneficiaries must take all reasonable measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women in the implementation of the action. They must aim, to the extent possible, for a gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action, including at supervisory and managerial level".

6 Maximum amount of 300.000 Euros per third party for the entire action duration

According to the H2020 DT-ICT-02-2018 call for proposal "At least 50% of the budget is expected to be dedicated to FSTP and the *maximum amount of FSTP is EUR 300.000 per third party for the entire action duration*". Therefore, there was a need to better frame the meaning of the 300k threshold, in order to define if it applies either to each organization for each single Innovation Actions, or to each organization across all IAs.

The EC clarified this point, stating that *the EUR 300k limit applies to each organization for each Innovation Action.*
Despite being part of the same Application Area (PAA) – Agile Production – the same rule applies to both TRINITY and DIH[2].
An organisation cannot receive funding twice with the same proposal.
Example: an organisation can receive 200k from RIMA, 300k from DIH², and 200k from TRINITY, provided it does not submit the same proposal in more than one call.

This information was disseminated to all IA coordinators and FSTP representatives on the 4th of July 2019.

7 Cross-Border Dimension

In order to respect the Cross-Border dimension as outlined in the related Work Programme, an alignment plan was put in place by RODIN. Each IA was asked to provide information on their Cross-Border activities within their FSTP calls. As soon as all details were collected, RODIN concluded that no single definition can encapsulate the meaning of "Cross-Border" across the IAs.

However, it has been established that in order to adhere to the Cross-Border dimension is important to ensure that a FSTP consortium composed of one or more organisations from the same region or country receive training /coaching/support from a DIH-IA project partner from another country.
Example: a FSTP consortium of two SMEs or slightly bigger organizations from Spain receive training support from a DIH-IA project partner from Finland. This suffice the requirements.

This does not preclude each IA to grant Travel Voucher at an initial stage to promote and support networking activities and stimulate the creation of pan-European networks.

8 Next Steps and Conclusions

The first FSTP calls will be launched in 2019, according to the timelines set by each DIH-IAs. As of June 2019, RODIN ensured alignments and agreed definitions across all IAs on topics considered relevant but that were not properly addressed and/or clarified in the DT-ICT-02-2018 call, such as "SMEs and Slightly Bigger", Ethical and Gender provisions, EUR 300k limit, Cross-Border dimension.

In the next months, as soon as the first calls are published, RODIN will continue this alignment process. The following is the current, not exhaustive list of topics that will be analysed together with the IAs in order to define a common approach and/or workable compromises on targeted definitions:
- *Shared Database of Reviewers*, with the aim to ensure all IAs can rely on a comprehensive list of experts to choose from;
- *Shared Calls Timeline*, Info-Days/Events information in a common calendar – this was recently set up by RODIN's partner CIVITTA and will be further analysed in WP4. The objective is to provide all IAs with a single access point to all IAs activities in order to avoid both overlapping and a split of the robotics community;
- Development and collection of a Common set of *Key Performance indicators (KPIs)* which are suitable for comparison of different funding types for the FSTP processes (not the individual FSTP projects);
- Development and implementation of a *Common set of reporting criteria* and tools to measure the outcome of FSTP activities; Examining the scope of the funded actions, the geographic spread and a classification of outcomes.

This deliverable will be updated and resubmitted in the near future, as soon as additional alignment processes are agreed, to guarantee a comprehensive overview of all alignment plans put in place throughout the projects implementation phase, and for future reference.