

**SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY: ERA-NET
Coordination of National and Regional Activities (ERA-NET scheme)**



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Climate Impact Research Coordination for a Larger Europe

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1 Introduction

CIRCLE's vision gives a strategic perspective for the project's life beyond 2009 and for a continued European collaboration in the field of Climate Change Impacts and Responses (CCIR)¹ research coordination. Furthermore, it addresses a strategy and tentative action plan for the remaining year of the current CIRCLE ERA-Net.

In bringing together research funding and managing institutions across Europe, CIRCLE has been able to involve many of the most pertinent national research programmes in Europe. Since its establishment in 2005, CIRCLE's consortium has grown to 23 partner and 13 observing institutions as of 2008, including new EU Member States and their respective CCIR research programmes.



Figure 1: CIRCLE ERA-Net partner and observer countries.

During the lifetime of CIRCLE, the international and European Climate Change research and policy landscape has changed and will, presumably, remain dynamic in the future as it responds to the development of the global climate and political agendas. National and European climate research intensified in the early 1990s, reacting to the global climate developments in terms of better integrated CCIR research.

¹ In this document, CCIR is used to describe Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, usually referred as CCIIV.

The reality of Climate Change has been widely acknowledged² and an increasing number of impacts on physical, biological and social systems are already observed. The demand for knowledge and more detailed information on potential Climate Change Impacts at the local and regional level is increasing, in particular from policy makers wishing to respond accordingly. Adaptation is being added to the Mitigation agenda owing to a recent demand for national/regional Adaptation strategies and policies with the international and European research landscape moving in tandem with these developments. Therefore a shift in the research priorities in several CCIR areas can be observed from fundamental climate change predictions to more applied topics addressing e.g. vulnerabilities both sectoral and regional, assessing adaptive capacity and identifying appropriate courses of adaptation for the most vulnerable areas.

Due to the complexity and urgency of problems arising from climate change impacts, an efficient use of research resources and collaboration between research programmes at the national and European level is crucial. This also implies that in many countries the CCIR research funding institutions are becoming more diverse. Current and future CIRCLE partners need to react in order to strengthen the research communication and coordination at the national and European level.

Several projects from CIRCLE “pilot” joint calls and topical collaboration work programmes are in progress, thus CIRCLE is becoming a powerful means for systematic European CCIR related research coordination. CIRCLE’s mandate in the area of CCIR requires that CIRCLE evolves further in order to consolidate and strengthen its position as the definitive platform for research coordination and knowledge sharing on CCIR both at the national and European level.

The broad composition of the CIRCLE consortium and the continuous information exchange regarding national developments enables CIRCLE to serve as a nucleus of existing and upcoming research needs as well as remaining knowledge gaps. Common needs, problems and interests will be explored and covered jointly via transnational research activities and joint calls.

² The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2007) documented for the first time wide ranging impacts of changes in current climate such as “retreating glaciers, longer growing seasons, shifts of species ranges, and health impacts due to heat waves. The observed changes described above are consistent with those projected for future climate change.”(Part WGII-AR4 of the IPCC document).

CIRCLE is currently operating on a GROUP approach that clusters countries with similar sets of CCIR programmes and problems (e.g. MEDiterranean, NORdic, CEE countries, Atlantic/coastal, Mountain and developing countries).

This GROUP approach enables CIRCLE to undertake a complementary and gap-filling function within the European research funding landscape placing its initiatives among the European Commission’s Framework Programme (FP), INTERREG and the various national partner programmes. In this regard a continuation of CIRCLE ERA-Net shall add value and capitalise on synergies through transnational research activities.

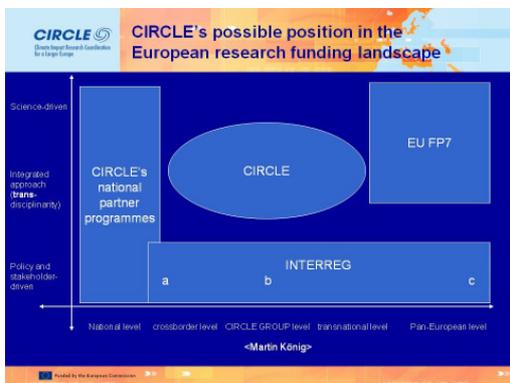


Figure 2: Positioning of CIRCLE ERA-Net within the European research landscape

2 Vision of CIRCLE

CIRCLE aims to further strengthen the **exchange of knowledge** on key research questions regarding CCIR throughout Europe. An open forum of discussion shall promote an active definition of research priorities and needs across various sectors and areas of interest, bringing together relevant stakeholder groups (e.g. scientific community and policymakers) and end-users of scientific results.

Through the identification of critical research topics and relevant policy needs on CCIR, CIRCLE will develop and maintain an up-to-date **transnational research agenda**³. This agenda shall serve as a decision-aid basis for joint research funding initiatives.

CIRCLE will furthermore concentrate on **funding coordination** initiatives in order to provide an appropriate framework for research activities addressing emerging issues in the field of CCIR.

3 Strategic Direction of CIRCLE

In accordance with the European Research Area (ERA)^{4,5} concept, CIRCLE will provide added value over nationally-funded research activities by identifying and facilitating transnational research topics in the field of CCIR.

CIRCLE will pursue and implement its vision through the development of two main areas of collaboration among its partners and between CIRCLE and the European CCIR relevant stakeholders.

CIRCLE's strategic direction will therefore be committed to the implementation of:

1. CIRCLE Research Coordination Platform (RCP); and
2. CIRCLE Research Knowledge Platform (RKP).

This will allow CIRCLE to support the development of a coordinated set of policy-relevant transnational research topics and support policy development for climate change mitigation and adaptation by sharing CCIR information between researchers, stakeholders and policy-makers.

³ With transnational research agenda we understand a research agenda both covering generic research coordination between countries (topical approach) and research collaboration between groups of countries (group approach).

⁴ <http://cordis.europa.eu/era/>

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/consultation-era_en.html#greenpaper

Both platforms shall serve the purpose of a sound identification of the most relevant research topics in terms of a mutual benefit for the transnational level and also supporting the prioritisation of topics within national research agendas.

Taking this into consideration means that the CIRCLE consortium will set up appropriate mechanisms to manage the key features of its agenda, namely:

- Definition of the highest priority research needs/topics and main foci in CCIR issues;
- Structuring the main topics to best support national adaptation activities;
- Assessment of the main knowledge gaps according to CIRCLE's surrounding research and climate policy landscape (e.g. national programmes, IPCC, IGBP/IHDP, UNFCCC, EU,...);
- Definition of flexible criteria (e.g. critical importance) as a decision-basis for preparing joint calls in order to acknowledge politically relevant topics and sectors and to allow partners to adjust to new developments.

Such topics must necessarily have a two-fold perspective under the CCIR framework:

- A basic knowledge-driven research focus (e.g. climate system, integrated impact assessment, downscaling...); and
- A policy-driven (or user-driven) research focus (e.g. adaptation strategies, communication, policy support and knowledge-sharing)

To cope with CCIR research needs requires applying both of these approaches.

All of the above mentioned processes, including the tools developed for identifying research needs, will support the implementation of joint calls.

4 Implementation of the Vision

CIRCLE's added value is seen in its joint efforts for concerted funding of transnational research on CCIR, its strategic positioning as a competent platform for climate change knowledge and its outreach actions under the ERA concept.

In order to fulfill its vision CIRCLE will jointly plan, develop and deploy a series of instruments that will consolidate its role as a strategic European platform on CCIR.

Under its two main activities (i.e. RCP and RKP), CIRCLE will reshape existing instruments, infrastructure and work-frames developed under the current CIRCLE network as a basis for further cooperation.

4.1 CIRCLE Research Coordination Platform (RCP)

CIRCLE will pursue the ERA's goal of enhancing national, transnational and European research collaboration by continuously developing a strong and trustful cooperation among its partners.

By realizing its vision, CIRCLE RCP is expected to achieve the following outcomes:

- Setting up a flexible learning mechanism between partners to exchange knowledge and information on (e.g.):
 - ways to set up national research programmes on CCIR;
 - options to overcome barriers and promote transnational research cooperation;
 - possibilities to better assist new countries not yet involved in CIRCLE (e.g. Central Eastern European States (CEES)) in establishing CC research funding, knowledge platforms and management of research programmes;
 - target-oriented use of existing CCIR knowledge (i.e. scientific results and knowledge gained in the RKP) as an aid to decision-making in research management.
- Implementation of common agendas by funding interdisciplinary competitive research at the transnational level;
- Establishment of an independent and flexible funding mechanism that has the capacity to address identified problems in research coordination at European, transnational and national levels;
- Increasing Europe's scientific excellence in the CCIR community by fostering competition and providing the mechanisms for a fair evaluation of proposals;

- Fostering a close relationship between researchers, stakeholders and policy-makers at national and transnational levels, leading to a better dissemination and use of research outcomes;
- Enhancing the implementation of the “Joint Programming Strategy”⁶.

Under the RCP, CIRCLE will act as a **strategic forum** that derives CCIR national research needs from Climate Change policies both on the national and European level. Hereby it shall provide a platform for both the scientific community and stakeholders in order to better link research managers/funders, scientists and end-users (i.e. political and private stakeholders) across CIRCLE’s partner countries and beyond.

Partner countries represented in CIRCLE will share their national CC research agendas and policy priorities in this transnational forum and in doing so, will link their national research needs with those of other countries and regions that share common problems and interests.

This common alignment of agendas and exchange of knowledge will allow each country to further enhance its national CC research coordination through successfully using synergies, a clearer definition of research goals, project selection and review criteria, gap assessment and avoidance of duplication. Through fostering national programmes to “open up” to other countries it will also promote mobility among European researchers on CCIR.

CIRCLE consortium will be supported by an Advisory Board (AB) that will see its role and participation in the ERA-Net re-assessed to meet the needs of this strategic forum via:

- contribution to the definition of research priorities and joint call topics;
- contribution to the evaluation of applications to CIRCLE joint calls (e.g. science and policy);
- contribution to the evaluation of ongoing projects within CIRCLE;
- drafting of science-related material, such as a fast-track alerts on emerging issues;
- Analysis of the CCIR research landscape (e.g. drafting of material about existing projects and assessment of their results).

The AB interaction with the consortium will be fostered and renewed by:

- Re-defining the AB size, member’s specific background, knowledge and expertise to better mainstream the advice function to CIRCLE’s needs;
- Creating a more flexible AB meeting procedure;

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/research/press/2008/pdf/com_2008_468_en.pdf

- Assuring that its members are regularly updated with CIRCLE's project information.

The following tasks shall be performed under the RCP:

- **Research coordination on Climate Change Impacts and Responses**

CIRCLE will actively support research on CCIR. Among other issues it will:

- support the ERA by linking and coordinating national research agendas on CCIR and climate change strategies,
- facilitate decision making on and commitment to participate in joint common calls,
- plan, fund and launch joint research calls that are based on independent scientific evaluation and a coordinated funding system, by
 - identifying research hot-topics (priorities) on CCIR that can provide answers to national and European policy issues (supported by the Advisory Board – AB);
 - working jointly on emerging and novel research fields, local-scale analyses and cross-disciplinary/cross-sectoral studies;
 - exchanging information on the national research agendas and programmes/projects, by monitoring ongoing activities;
 - complementing partners' national research agenda via the creation of a CIRCLE transnational research agenda;
 - promoting a dialogue between stakeholders and scientists (supported by the AB);
 - sharing the call funding costs among as many partners as possible.
- enhance the "Joint Programming Strategy".

A series of **internal** research coordination workshops (CWS) with the goal to foster partner's networking, share experiences and knowledge as well as promote a clear shared identity in terms of commitment to CIRCLE's vision and direction, will be organised. These CWS will be aimed at the largest number of CIRCLE partners providing the opportunity to propose topics of common interest and/or specific needs that are considered pertinent. Also group and/or topic specific CSW will be organized to tackle priority or emerging issues that concern smaller groups of countries.

These CWS should aim at:

- Involving - to the extent possible - observer-status partner institutions;
- Support partner countries with fewer resources involved in CCIR research and thus facilitate capacity building;

- Convening key experts from each national partner institution to put forward CIRCLE's concepts and work plans. In specific workshops top-ranked experts (i.e. experts with decision clearance) should be invited to better understand funding strategies (e.g. Joint Programming Strategy);
 - Providing the basis for sharing CIRCLE-funded scientific results with funders and to develop an interactive community where European scientists and research managers can discuss research gaps and needs under the various CCIR fields;
 - Further enhancing the mechanisms set up under CIRCLE to safeguard smooth handling of joint calls;
 - Taking advantage of already programmed CIRCLE meetings (e.g. APM and EBM) and plan the CWS "back-to-back" to best manage resources.
- **Joint competitive calls (using the group and/or topical approach)**

Similarly to what has been already developed under CIRCLE, the group approach shall be further followed up for CCIR research funding. Grouping countries and institutions that share similar problems due to the same geographical scope or topical interest will allow a more targeted identification of research needs and could possibly avoid duplication of research activities in the same field on the national levels.

CIRCLE will therefore:

- Support already ongoing CIRCLE sub-groups (e.g. MEDiterranean, NORdic, Mountains) and foster the establishment of new thematic sub-groups;
- Implement a fast-track agenda until September 2009 (e.g. activities like CWS or even a small bi- or tri-lateral common call);
- Support a sub-group on how to "spice up" interaction with the stakeholders (e.g. EU) on the development of the research agenda (e.g. invite national experts on CCIR and the EC to a small workshop);
- Promote the definition of a sub-group catalogue of interests under specific research topics whenever deemed necessary by a number of interested partners.

Joint competitive calls will remain the essential instrument under CIRCLE.

Focussing on joint calls will be at the core of CIRCLE's coordination activities and will aggregate the insights gained from the sharing of experiences and knowledge between all partner institutions. As a prerequisite, a strong commitment of partners to fund common calls prior to participating in CIRCLE as full members is required.

These calls will be put into practice via:

- Concrete implementation of the research topic's foreseen as priorities for both national and trans-national research agendas;
- Adaption and use of available instruments such as the management framework and project evaluation scheme for joint calls;
- Use of the existing online tools such as the submission tool for proposal submission and the online review tool (i.e. review platform for reviewers).

- **Staff and resources exchange**

Mobility and effective knowledge-sharing are key features of the ERA concept.

Within the CCIR research field, CIRCLE will, if possible and appropriate:

- Promote the exchange of scientists and project managers from partner countries, allowing them to gain further insights into different programmes and national research agendas – this will foster mutual trust and understanding among partner institutions under the ERA concept.
- Promote active collaboration between institutions of different partner countries that can go beyond the participation in joint research calls (e.g. use of research or management infrastructure and resources).
- Support partner countries with smaller scientific know-how on research management and thus facilitate capacity building.

4.2 CIRCLE Research Knowledge Platform (RKP)

One important aspect of CIRCLE's pursuit of the ERA's goals is the establishment of its Research Knowledge Platform (RKP).

Complementing CIRCLE's joint activities and the development of a transnational research agenda, some of the expected outcomes of this Platform will allow CIRCLE to

- Link information from national and transnational research in some parts of Europe to policy needs in other regions based on the latest and collected research findings;
- Respond to changing policy needs by a flexible and dynamic network (e.g. fast-track alerts on emerging issues, elaboration of "policy briefs", organization of targeted workshops on topical issues);

- Facilitate the exchange of experiences in designing CCIR actions;
- Promote scientific added value of CIRCLE's research results by common use of dissemination schemes and specific instruments for each level (European, national, regional and local).

Through the proximity to national and regional policymakers and stakeholders CIRCLE will function as a platform for identifying different needs and priorities within the partner countries, cluster and translate them into concrete research questions and connect groups of countries with common research funding priorities.

A series of stakeholder workshops (i.e. for all potentially in CIRCLE interested persons or institutions, including scientists, policymakers and the general public) will be organized.

The main objectives of such a workshop series will be:

- Promotion of joint events with stakeholders, policy-makers and researchers to open up communication channels between policy and science, to discuss research needs and to disseminate results (e.g. deliver scientific expertise to policy makers about topical issues). This could be organised as an annual CIRCLE CCIR workshop, where research results facilitated by CIRCLE's joint calls would be disseminated over a broad range of partner and non-partner countries;
- Creation of a research catalogue of interests that will feed into the CIRCLE transnational research agenda and serve as a basis for funding decisions taken by CIRCLE's consortium and supported by the AB.

Hereby CIRCLE will have the ability and opportunity to respond to CCIR research questions on regional and topical issues by means of flexible mechanisms of planning, launching and facilitating funding via transnational joint calls for proposals.

Using flexible joint research funding collaborations (e.g. bi- or multi-partnership initiatives) CIRCLE will also put emphasis on novel approaches to multidisciplinary issues.

Furthermore, the following shall be performed under the RKP:

- **Support the development of action plans on Climate Change Impacts and Responses.**

More specifically, CIRCLE RKP will support Climate Change adaptation policy by:

- Contributing to the harmonisation and complementarities of the heterogeneous European and national research agendas and therefore increase efficiency and effectiveness in terms of outputs of research funding;
- Providing relevant scientific support to design climate change adaptation activities through coordination of research on policy relevant topics that are able to address demand-oriented needs (i.e. driven by social, political and economic issues on adaptation);
- Coordinating research on the effectiveness of adaptation measures (e.g. monitoring strategies and/or indicators) in various fields, focusing on transnational common goals and problems (e.g. for coastal areas, tourism or water resources);
- Identifying opportunities for transnational cooperation on how to mainstream relevant climate change EU regulations and national policy development;
- Involving relevant stakeholders in the process of assessing, clustering and developing common CC response strategies of national and European relevance.

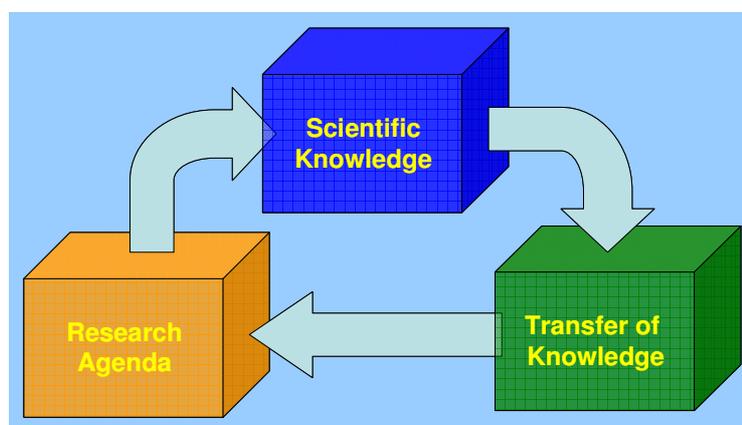


Figure 3: CIRCLE's conceptual 3-sided core activities

- **Collaboration with other ERA-Nets**

CIRCLE will promote and whenever possible, aim at developing active collaboration with other ERA-Nets (e.g. environment, marine, water, management), in order to exchange information and knowledge and therefore:

- Avoid duplication of efforts under the covered CCIR topics;
- Interlink institutions participating in different ERA-Nets;
- Organize joint meetings with other ERA-Nets and invite coordinators as well as WP-Leaders to promote and foster cooperation in specific research topics.

- **Service point**

Install a CIRCLE service point (e.g. central secretariat) that disseminates research results and project milestones within the consortium. This service point will further support outreach efforts for project marketing, possibly in the framework of a CIRCLE outreach initiative (e.g. conferences, events).

- **Database**

As a replacement of the Extended Country Report via questionnaires, the CIRCLE database, containing project and programme information on CCIR of the participating partner countries, will serve as the basic tool to carry out analyses of research gaps and to support the topic finding process. It should provide added value to national information platforms and link to the planned EU Clearinghouse on CCIR information.

5 Timeframe

Recognizing the obvious mutual benefits, the CIRCLE partners have decided to continue coordinating concerted research activities. Many of the CIRCLE partners aim to deepen the already accomplished integration by means of a follow-up ERA-Net.

- **Short term – what will be achieved within current CIRCLE:**

Roadmap until September 2009:

- Prepare for another phase of CIRCLEs collaboration (building on existing achievements, manpower and budget);
- Further project marketing;
- Aim to issue another common call by 2009 – pilot phase to test new mechanisms by:
 - Identifying research needs through e.g. organise workshops with stakeholders in each country and exchange outcomes thus addressing national questions that require transnational research projects;
 - Clustering research needs;
 - Quality assurance supported by the AB.
- Focus on call activities;
- Fulfil reporting to the EC;
- Decision on the AB role and composition until September 2009 including a consultation with the current AB members about their commitment and their comments on the current composition and role.

- **Midterm – what will be left for a future follow-up**

CIRCLE partners continue the work and install a permanent platform for the continuation of collaboration. In this regard, CIRCLE shall be recognised as the European platform for CCIR research coordination and will evaluate the option to become the nucleus of a topical Article 169 measure. This can either be an umbrella for the participating partners for continuous sharing of information and promoting opportunities (“clearing-house”) and/or be used to enable ad hoc pooling of national calls, resources or promotion of results.

The pertinent national research funds shall be both well coordinated among each other and, likewise, part of an overall European scheme that links them in a complementary way to the funds of the 8th and 9th EU framework programme to achieve the most efficient and highest output-oriented policy support via research.