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Chapter 1.5

History of RMA in Central and Eastern European Countries

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Abstract

The history of the profession in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries is not a long one; it results from their history, their size, their spending on research and innovation, their position in geopolitics and world economy. Nevertheless, what makes it exciting is the fact that we are just at the birth of the profession in the region. Historically, there have been very few professionals either related to or officially recognised as Research Managers and Administrators (RMAs) in CEE countries, resulting in their limited resources and capabilities. Nevertheless, some RMAs have found the way to start mutually beneficial collaboration for the sake of their own professional development, for their institution's and country's competitiveness by launching networks of RMAs or using regional or European funds for capacity building and developing training or educational programmes.

This chapter aims to provide a short summary of the profession in CEE countries while highlighting a few cases which show how the RMA profession is moving forward but still lagging behind.

Keywords: Profession; research support; networks; collaboration; professionalisation; programmes; Central and Eastern Europe

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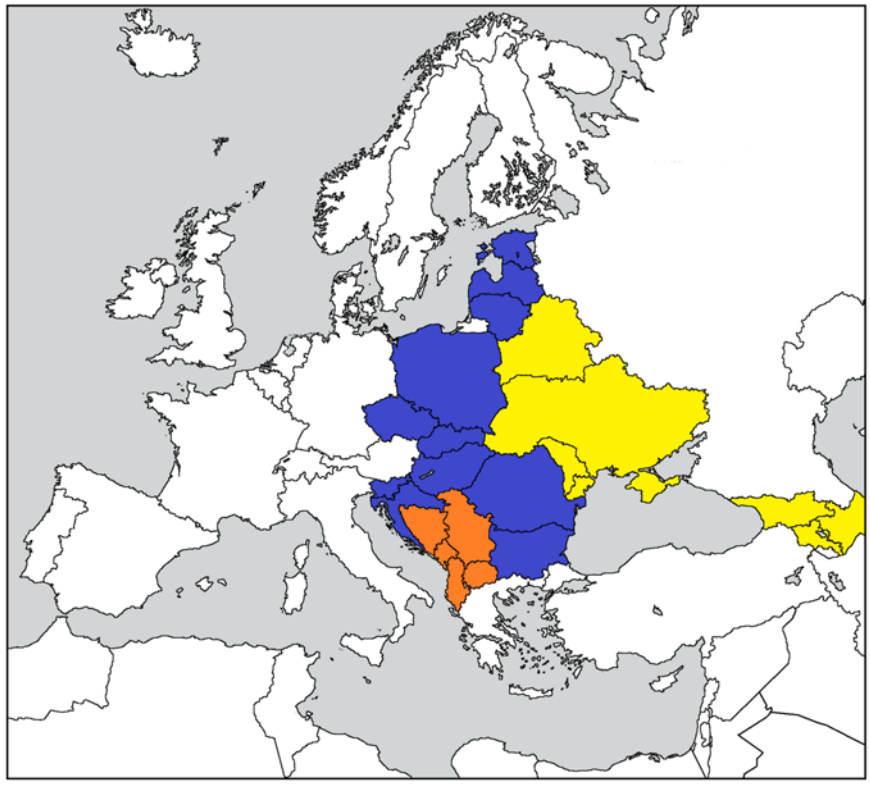

Fig. 1.5.1. Countries of Central and Eastern Europe Based on the Working Definition. Blue (Dark Grey): Countries Accessed the EU Since 2004, Orange (Grey): Western Balkan Countries, Yellow (Pale Grey): Eastern Partnership Countries (Own Edition).

Territorial Scope

Central and Eastern Europe is a heterogeneous region (Gergely, 2003, p. 11) carrying various definitions in terms of history, politics, as well as literature (Magris, 2005, p. 92). Many debates have taken place among researchers regarding the definition of the territorial scope of this region based on different aspects coming from historical, cultural, political, geographic or geopolitical positions. Nevertheless, there is still no consensus and multiple definitions of Central and Eastern Europe exist in parallel (Zsár, 2012, p. 10).

The suggested working definition of the author for this chapter is that countries belonging to Central and Eastern Europe cover mainly three groups of countries: first, EU Member States (MS) having joined the European Union (EU) since 2004 with the exception of Malta and Cyprus[1] (in short, CEE MS); second, countries from the

[1]EU MS having joined the EU since 2004 are: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Malta, Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria.

Western Balkans (in short, WB countries)[2]; and third, countries belonging to the Eastern Partnership Countries of the EU (in short, EaP countries).[3]

This working definition is in line with concepts developed in the previous decades. Iván T. Berend and György Bánki argued that Central Europe covers the area between Germany and Russia, and between the Baltic and the Black Sea. Similarly, Jenő Szűcs following Péter Gunst asserted that the Baltic region, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia belonged to Central Europe (Lendvai, 2005). During the last days of the communist regime, Ferenc Glatz spelt out that Central Europe consisted of the members of the Soviet Bloc with the exception of the Soviet Union, which is nowadays more and more approached by the Balkans (Glatz, 2005).

Commonalities and Differences

Among these countries, one can find a high number of commonalities; however, in all cases, there are also certain differences, including cultural background (e.g. the mixed use of Latin, Cyrillic or Georgian alphabets) or economic assets. As a commonality from history, we can highlight that following the Second World War, these countries belonged to the Eastern bloc, or in case of Yugoslavia, to the non-aligned movement. Nevertheless, their Soviet type of governmental systems significantly affected their science policy orientation and the whole research system. Most of these countries acquired their current form in the 20th century, or even afterwards (i.e. Montenegro or Kosovo[4]).

All countries included in the current overview are relatively small states with a population ranging between 680 k (Montenegro) and 10.1 m (Czechia), with the exception of Romania (19.1 m), Poland (37.8 m), and Ukraine (43.4 m).

Where the Story Starts

To understand the lagging status of the profession, it is important to understand the post-Soviet heritage of the research system of the countries concerned; following WWII, these countries – with the exception of Yugoslavia – became members of the Warsaw Pact (or the Soviet Union itself) meaning that they had to follow, if not entirely copy, the Soviet research system. The literature presented below unequivocally underlines that research policy followed the principles of 'scientific socialism': in its three organisational sectors (i.e. the academies, universities and the industry), specialisation, rationalisation and centralisation had to be carried out in line with the multi-annual central plans and directives of the communist party industrial vision (Balazs et al., 1995, p. 615; Jablecka, 1995, pp. 728–729).

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[2]The concept of the Western Balkans is another artificial one which includes those countries from the Balkans which have the perspective of joining the European Union. These countries include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo* and Serbia. See more at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/europe-world/international-cooperation/western-balkans_en.

[3]The Eastern Partnership was launched in 2009 as a strategy initiative to strengthen the political and economic relations between the EU and the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. See more at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eastern-partnership_en.

[4]In line with UN Resolution 1244/1999.

Egorov and Carayannis (1999) add that theoretical projects – so basic research – were carried out within the National Academy of Sciences, some military-industrial complex institutes and the universities. Applied research and development activities took place in industrial research institutes operating related to the branch ministries and in line with the economic plans (Balazs et al., 1995, p. 616). As the whole economy operated in closed and multiannual planning periods, the output indicators related to the economic production were set in advance – all other activities had to serve the achievement of their goals. This contributed to misguided and wasteful research and development projects on the part of many enterprises (Egorov & Carayannis, 1999, p. 160).

Academicians at that time represented a small elite, out of which the leadership of the research institutes was recruited. What should be underlined is that funding went to the institutes themselves instead of to individuals or research groups. Each institute was directed by an academician whose selection did not take into account the person's managerial or policymaking skills (Balazs et al., 1995, p. 615).

Universities were initially devoted exclusively to education without committing themselves to doing any research; however, they had to compete for the same funds as research institutes (Balazs et al., 1995, p. 615). Nevertheless, some research activities also took place at universities even with poorer assets as lecturers worked on research degrees with their students.

Research management was nonexistent as state funding did not pose similar expectations towards research as it did in Western countries. The methodology taken to capture the output indicators in CEE, such as the number of publications and patents, did not follow those of their Western counterparts. Although it falls out of the scope of the current chapter to go into the details, it must be highlighted that initial conditions and values of indicators were relatively lower than in Western countries. There were a number of reasons for this situation, such as (1) the regime of secrecy, (2) the military orientation of R&D, (3) low pressure to publish research results in journals, (4) different organisational set-up of the research ecosystem compared to Western countries, (5) overestimation of the real R&D potential of the region, (6) concentration of a substantial part of R&D personnel on reverse engineering, and finally, (7) a high concentration of specialists in traditional sectors with relatively lower innovative potential, such as coal mining or heavy engineering industry (Egorov & Carayannis, 1999, p. 161).

Following the changes of regimes from socialism to democracy, such systems of research and development could not have been maintained anymore. Their collapse can be showcased by the serious decrease of GERD (Gross domestic expenditure on R&D) between 1% and 3%, number of researchers by 49%–60%, and of industrial R&D by 20%–50% (Egorov & Carayannis, 1999, p. 161). The decline in public funding has been accompanied by structural changes, although the degree and timing of these changes differ from country to country. By the disappearance or decreasing amount of public funding, many scientists moved to private enterprises or departed overseas (Balazs et al., 1995, p. 621), even if the autonomy of science and the freedom of scientific research was reinstalled (Jablecka, 1995, pp. 728–733; Mosoni-Fried, 1995, p. 777). In case of ex-Yugoslav countries, these drawbacks were aggravated by war damages, economic slowdown and brain drain[5] (Svarc et al., 2014, p. 167).

[5]Brain drain is the emigration of qualified people leaving their place of origin for better-paid job abroad.

The foundation of National Research Funds and Technical Development Funds by governments or the Soros Foundation[6] started to push forward the individual or team-based competition for research grants, however, the selection criteria still did not embrace the criteria of quality or economic utility (Balazs et al., 1995, p. 621) but became based almost exclusively on peer review (Jablecka, 1995).

As Egorov and Carayannis (1999, p. 162) summarise, the controversial dynamics of the main R&D indicators help conclude that in the former Soviet Union and in Central and Eastern Europe, the role of domestic R&D became increasingly driven by cultural, educational and ideological, rather than instead of economic or technological factors. This also means that those countries found themselves (again) on the periphery of the world transition to the knowledge-based society. What is not highlighted in the literature is that research management as a profession could not have been developed as there was no competition to meet funders' expectations, and non-research related outputs were hardly expected by research funders.

Starting to Engage in International R&I Competition

Another important feature determining the status of the RMA development in the countries concerned is their relationship with the EU, and more specifically, the EU-funded research and innovation Framework Programmes (FPs). The FPs are the main financial tools through which the EU supports research and innovation activities covering almost all scientific disciplines and whose budget is constantly growing.[7] Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) of EU MSs compete for these funds at the European level. The grant covers a high degree of the project budget: depending on the type of the activities, it is generally between 70% and 100%.

However, the FPs are not only open to MSs, but also to other countries. For each FP, there is a group of countries concluding specific agreements with the EU to get the status of 'Associated Country' (AC). To enable their researchers and research organisations to apply for funded projects with almost the same status as those from EU MS, they contribute to the budget of these programmes proportionally to their GDP.[8] Other countries around the world can take part in FP-funded projects either based on bilateral agreements or at their own costs.

The previously listed EU Member States joined the Union in three rounds: eight of them (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia) in 2004, Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 and Croatia in 2013. Western Balkan countries represent some of the republics of the former Yugoslavia. In the case of Serbia and Montenegro, accession talks are underway. In the case of Albania and North Macedonia, the negotiations necessary for accession were opened in 2020. As regards Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Kosovo, they received the 'potential candidate

[6]The Soros Foundation, today called as Open Society Foundations, founded by George Soros, is the world's largest private funder of independent groups working for justice, democratic governance, and human rights. See more at https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/who-we-are.

[7]See more at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cros/content/research-projects-under-framework-programmes-0_en.

[8]See more at https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/europe-world/international-cooperation_en#countries-and-regions.

status', accession talks can start only in the future.[9] Eastern Partnership countries are those post-Soviet countries having acquired independence following the fall of the Soviet Union and cooperate with the EU in a number of fields in the frame of the Neighbourhood Policy Instrument. As a result of the different levels of membership or partnership, their participation in the EU-funded research and innovation FPs do also vary.

When analysing the involvement of CEE countries in FPs, we can observe their gradual involvement from the mid-1990s: first, a few RPOs became involved from those countries which aimed to join the EU following the regime changes, such as Hungary, Czechia and Poland; afterwards, their involvement became more frequent and other entities joined as well. In 2004, almost half of CEE countries joined the EU, thus they became MS; this resulted in more frequent, but limited involvement in funded projects. This was followed by bilateral cooperation with MS on specific projects (Svarc et al., 2014, p. 167) and then the start of participation of current Western Balkan and EaP countries in the late 2000s which has slightly increased since then. Table 1.5.1 shows the involvement status of CEE countries in the FPs.

Even if almost all these countries can take part at equal terms in the FPs, their participation rate and the absorbed budget are much below those EU Member States which are involved from the very beginning. The low share of funds absorbed and participation realised by CEE countries are illustrated by Figs. 1.5.2 and 1.5.3.

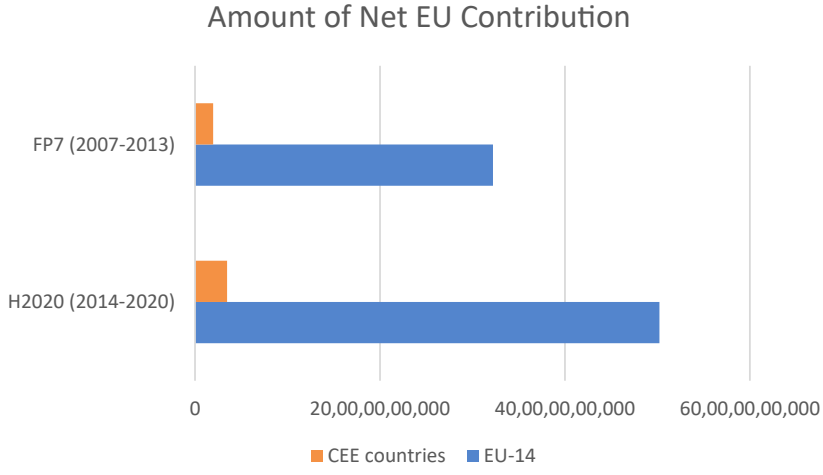

Fig. 1.5.2. Amount of Net EU Contribution Absorbed by CEE Countries and EU-14 Countries[10] in the Last Two FPs (Own Edition, Source of Data: Horizon Dashboard).

[9]See https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-western-balkans-towards-common-future_en. Retrieved on 14 February 2023.

[10]EU-14 countries include those MS which were part of the EU before the 2004 enlargement, with the exception of the UK. So Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Ireland and Denmark are included.

Table 1.5.1. Involvement Status of CEE Countries in EU FPs: AC Denoting Associated Country, MS Denoting Member State (Own Edition, Data Source: cordis.europa.eu, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/horizon-dashboard).

		FP4 (1994–1998)	FP5 (1998–2002)	FP6 (2002–2006)	FP7 (2007–2013)	FP8 / Horizon 2020 (2014–2020)	FP9 / Horizon Europe (2021–2027)
CEE MS	**EE, CZ, HU, LI, LT, PL, SI, SK**	3rd country	AC	AC till 2004 then MS	MS	MS	MS
	BG & RO	3rd country	AC	AC	MS	MS	MS
	HR	3rd country	3rd country	AC	AC till 2012 then MS	MS	MS
EaP	**MD & UA**	3rd country	3rd country	3rd country	AC	AC	AC
	ARM & GEO	3rd country	3rd country	3rd country	3rd country	AC	AC
	AZE & BY	3rd country	3rd country	3rd country	3rd country	3rd country	3rd country
WB	**SRB**	–	3rd country	3rd country	AC	AC	AC
	BiH & NMD & AL	3rd country	3rd country	3rd country	AC	AC	AC
	MNT	–	–	3rd country	AC	AC	AC
	KO*	–	–	–	3rd country	3rd country	AC

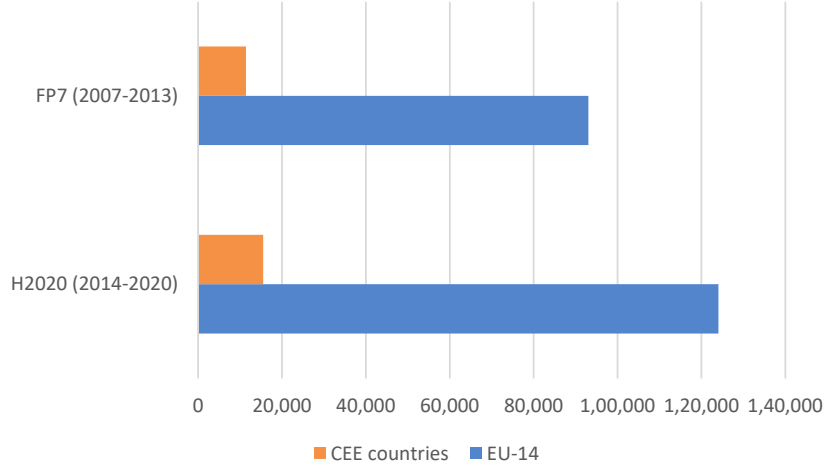

Fig. 1.5.3. Number of Participations from CEE and EU-14 in EU-Funded Projects During the Last Two FPs (Own Edition, Source of Data: Horizon Dashboard).

Among barriers to cooperation in FPs, the lack of project management capacities has been always highlighted such as the bureaucratic barriers of the European Commission in case of the WBC countries in 2008 (Svarc et al., 2014, p. 169) and in case of EU-13 MSs in 2018 (European Parliament, 2018).

Driving Forces Necessitating the Appearance, Professionalisation and Specialisation of RMAs

There are multiple driving forces behind the appearance of RMAs in the CEE countries; however, the involvement in international, but more specifically, EU-funded research and innovation projects became the most important one, as it is detailed below.

In the case of CEE countries, the accession to the EU did not immediately result in significant involvement in FP-funded projects (see Figs. 1.5.2 and 1.5.3). The reasons are manifold, but one of them is the availability of Cohesion Funds.[11] In the frame of various national Operational Programmes financing human resource development, innovation, and research facilities, an important amount of funds was absorbed by research performing organisations based mainly in CEE EU-13 countries. This means that these research organisations rather opted for these funds which were available through national competitions instead of entering into EU-wide competition. As Cohesion Funds are decreasing and many CEE regions reached a significant level of economic development becoming ineligible for these funds, stakeholders of the R&I

[11]The Cohesion Fund provides support to MS with a gross national income (GNI) per capita below 90% EU-27 average to strengthen the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU. See more at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/cohesion-fund_en.

ecosystem have to turn to and compete for the R&I funds distributed at the EU level (Virágh et al., 2020).

It must be noted that preparing proposals for the calls published under the above-mentioned National Operational Programmes and the management of these projects also necessitated increased management capacities. Researchers were not able to arrange all the administrative and financial requirements of the projects funded by Operational Programmes where the red tape has been regularly much higher than in case of FPs. So the expertise of project managers became crucial. In most CEE countries, the national Operational Programmes had a dedicated budget line for management, even if it was limited to 5%–10% of the total budget. So, for a few years, EU project managers, or in fact, research managers were understood as those specialists being familiar with all the administrative rules and requirements of these national Operational Programmes implemented at various research organisations.

In the meantime, non-EU countries of the CEE region also gradually aimed to reinforce cooperation with the EU and turned towards European R&I funds due to the lack of national funding.

As research organisations from CEE became more and more involved in EC-funded R&I projects (see Table 1.5.1), EU project managers working previously on national projects had to improve their knowledge and become familiar with the requirements of the FPs. This proved to be a real challenge due to several factors which included the lack of English knowledge, lack of knowledge on the profession and related EU or international networks.

The BESTPRAC COST Action[12] echoing that 'Excellent research requires excellent research support' running between 2014 and 2019 represented a unique opportunity and perhaps the tipping point for these countries to upskill and move to the next level of consciousness in the profession. As it was funded by the COST programme,[13] participants of the half-yearly conferences, study trips and training schools had the opportunity to participate free of charge. Thus, the action proved to be a flagship initiative in creating a wide European community of research support staff; this community of practitioners included a growing number of professionals from the CEE countries providing them opportunity for practical knowledge exchange and professional development. Moreover, this action started to shed light on the profession and scattered the seeds for awareness raising and recognition of the profession in most CEE countries.

Important to note that through the rising participation of research organisations from the CEE region in EU-funded programmes national funding agencies also started to align their evaluation criteria with the EU ones to force RPOs to raise the excellence and the impact of their submitted applications (European Parliament. Directorate General for Parliamentary Research Services, 2020). These changes aimed to push research organisations to engage in the EU-wide competition for R&I funds; thus, the need for RMAs being aware of all requirements of EU-funded projects were further reinforced.

[12]See https://bestprac.eu/home/.
[13]See https://cost.eu/.

Programmes Aiming to Build Knowledge and Capacities of RMAs

Another commonality for the region is that apart from a few countries, such as Poland, Czechia and Croatia, RMA knowledge and capacity building was only supported through EU-funded programmes. The most common and acknowledged action in the field is again the BESTPRAC COST action. RMAs from the region were also aware of some INTERREG projects which included opportunities – even if not exclusively – for RMAs, such as the Excellence-in-ReSTI project (2017–2019)[14] funded by the INTERREG Danube Programme.[15] The project aimed to improve the management capacities of people working on social and technological innovation projects. For that reason, it developed easy-to-use checklists, learning modules and advice with specifically tailored content.

As mentioned, only Poland and Czechia used funding schemes within the national Operational Programmes to provide targeted training and capacity-building opportunities for RMAs. In Poland, a postgraduate training programme was launched, whereas in Czechia regular training and networking opportunities were organised for RMAs, primarily responsible for technology transfer. In Croatia, the Ministry of Science and Education supported the capacity building of technology transfer offices in RPOs in Croatia (through the Science and Technology Project funded by the Word Bank[16]), which was running between 2013 and 2020.

It should be also mentioned that only lately Hungary followed a similar path by supporting the employment and knowledge development of research support staff through one of the national research funding programmes and following the publication of the research report of Virágh et al. (2020), a postgraduate programme was launched and taught on research and innovation management.

In non-EU countries, such trainings are almost completely nonexistent. Efforts to overcome such gaps can be tracked down through the activities of transnational organisations, such as the Central European Initiative (CEI)[17] and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).[18] Each of them supports capacity building, knowledge exchange in the field of human resources, innovation and entrepreneurship through small-scale projects. However, due to their limited budget, their efforts cannot replace national support mechanisms.

Another finding of Virágh et al. (2020) shows that there are no educational programmes in Europe which aim to train university students to become potential RMAs.

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[14]See https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/excellence-in-resti.

[15]See https://www.interreg-danube.eu/.

[16]See more: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/775801604948389416/pdf/Croatia-Second-Science-Technology-Project.pdf.

[17]The CEI is a regional intergovernmental forum of 17 MS in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. It fosters European integration and sustainable development through regional cooperation. More information is available at their website: https://www.cei.int/.

[18]The RCC is a regionally owned and led cooperation framework covering Southern European countries and connecting them with the members of the international community and donors on subjects which are important and of interest to the SEE, with a view to promoting and advancing the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the region. RCC works to develop and maintain a political climate of dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance and openness towards cooperation, with a view to enabling the implementation of regional programmes aimed at economic and social development to the benefit of the people in the region. More information is available at their website: https://www.rcc.int/pages/2/about-us.

This is why the project foRMAtion[19] was such a breakthrough when it was launched and financed under the Erasmus+ programme[20] between 2019 and 2022. The project, which included three CEE countries (Hungary, Romania and Slovenia), aimed to develop an innovative and interactive educational module and mentorship programme for university students to provide them with an overview of the profession and a wide set of opportunities for skill and capacity development. This unique initiative proved to be successful in its piloting phase. The question is now whether RMAs can push university management for the adoption and adaption of the module and the mentorship programme by other higher education institutions, which necessitates the recognition of the need for such professionalised support and well-trained RMAs by institutional leadership. Nevertheless, as the experiences gathered during the project showcases, RMAs are sometimes not enough to overcome this obstacle and push forward the recognition of the profession within their institution (Zsár et al., 2022).

It must be also highlighted that in many CEE countries, especially in non-EU countries, training or educational programmes for researchers rarely include knowledge or capacity building in the field of research management; or if they do so, they are occasional and primarily derive from certain cooperation with an EU MS. Such examples include different EU-funded projects (the funding comes mainly through actions supporting the international cooperation with regions beyond the EU), JRC Enlargement and Integration actions,[21] WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) trainings with Ukraine,[22] Moldova and Western Balkan countries.

Associations of Research Managers and Administrators

Associations gathering research managers and administrators at the national level are rather scarce in the CEE countries. This can be understood as a result of the lack of recognition of the profession as such, as well as the delayed and still limited participation in EU-funded R&I programmes. Only Poland and Slovenia represent outstanding exceptions as the KOsRIS-II (Coordination of Independent Research Institutions of Slovenia)[23] network of public research institutes in Slovenia operates now for more than a decade as a working group for research managers; in Poland there is a national network for research managers working at universities called KRAB (National Council of Research Project Coordinators)[24] since 2007. Even if these networks are not inclusive, they provide an important opportunity for knowledge exchange and networking at the national level.

Further positive developments can be tracked down in this field, but they are mainly the result of the increasing awareness dedicated to the importance of research support and the rising participation in EU-funded projects. Experts working and getting experience through EU-funded projects started to seek additional opportunities for knowledge and capacity development; so first they joined BESTPRAC, and some of them managed to persuade their supervisors to join EARMA and get the membership fee paid. Since 2020 then, we have seen certain bottom-up initiatives moving towards the establishment of national associations in more and more countries, including Czechia

[19]See https://www.formation-rma.eu/.
[20]See https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/.
[21]See https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ukraine.
[22]See more at https://ukrainet.eu/res-management/.
[23]See https://kosris.zrc-sazu.si/.
[24]See http://www.krab.edu.pl/.

(CZARMA),[25] and Lithuania (L-ARMA). However, the lack of recognition of the profession within and beyond the RPOs, their limited budget and/or willingness to be involved in EU-funded projects, are factors representing an important obstacle for the personal development of RMAs, as they struggle to get funding to become members in EARMA or to volunteer for the creation of national associations.

There is still a long way to go to get the acknowledgement of institutional leadership and also the necessary funding. There are some exceptions to the situation set above where research performing organisations start to assess and seize the possibilities of professionalising their research support offices and their staff. But if there is already an opportunity and/or a will to push forward the issue of professionalisation, regional or transnational funds can provide the certain funding. This was the case following the official ending of the BESTPRAC COST Action, when HETFA Research Institute,[26] hand in hand with various research organisations from the CEE region submitted a project to the International Visegrad Fund.[27] The project entitled 'Visegrad 4 and Western Balkan Network of Research Managers and Administrators'[28] was granted and run between 2020 and 2022 with the aim of bringing forward the BESTPRAC spirit and provide additional opportunities for knowledge exchange and training for RMAs based in the covered countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Czechia, Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia) and of course, beyond. Any such initiatives prove to be successful due to extremely high demand of RMAs for knowledge exchange and skill and capacity development.

However, based on observations of the author other factors can also explain the lack of national associations, such as (1) the relatively small size of most countries not necessitating any official platform for being in touch and sharing practical knowledge, (2) the lack of recognition and (self-)awareness of the profession, (3) difficulties in getting funding for any activities enabling knowledge exchange or capacity building at the national level. In some cases, from experience the author also observed that RMAs still see each other as competitors; thus instead of cooperation, they rather compete with each other. Last but not least, the fact that RMAs are generally overloaded, and they do not have any time and energy to start the organisation of such activities can be also regarded as an obstacle.

The Population of RMAs within CEE Countries

Based on the reasons above, it is extremely hard to make any estimation on the precise number of RMAs in each of these CEE countries. The lowest number of RMAs, around 50–100 in total can be found in EaP countries – in their case the researchers themselves lead and manage the projects, RMAs rather work at programme level (see Belarus chapter). Then comes the WB countries, where in total there might be around 100–150 RMAs (see WB chapter). Regarding CEE EU MSs, the number of RMAs might be between 550 and 1,100. Moreover, the RAAAP surveys do not provide much

[25]See https://www.czarma.cz/en.
[26]See https://hetfa.eu/.
[27]The International Visegrad Fund is a donor organisation established in 2000 by the governments of the Visegrad Group countries – Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. It runs different funding schemes, such as Grants, Scholarships and Artists Residencies. The main aim of the fund is to help the regional progress in seven main areas of Culture, Education, Innovation, Democratic Values, Public Policy, Environment and Tourism, and Social Development. See more at: https://www.visegradfund.org/about-us/the-fund/.
[28]See https://hetfa.eu/international-projects/v4wb-rmas/.

evidence on the population – the number of respondents remained extremely low even for the RAAAP-3 completed in Spring 2023 (Kerridge, Dutta, et al., 2023).

Institutional practices with regard to the number of RMAs employed and the level of their employment (at central or at departmental level) are therefore diverse, and various teams of RMAs can be found at each level. However, it must be highlighted that in many RPOs, international research projects have still to be managed by researchers in a completely decentralised manner; this practice has a number of detrimental consequences on the work of researchers, on the possibilities of reinforcing international cooperation as well as on carrying out efficient administrative, financial and legal implementation of the projects.

Recognition of the profession in national laws is generally absent. RMAs have extremely diverse job descriptions and legal naming. The most general ones include project managers or some kind of support staff, but they can even be called employee for R&D activities, scientific manager and/or advisor, research coordinator and/or research administrator, associate experts. In some countries, public RPOs have defined categories for their staff which include a low variety of positions for research support staff. This means that their career development including their wage raise has limited possibilities, even before budget considerations are taken into account to employ research support staff.

Future Expectations

Although a number of obstacles are still persistent in CEE countries with regard to the recognition, networking and training opportunities of RMAs, the trends, especially the increasing involvement in EU-funded R&I projects, showcase relevant changes. Some stakeholders have already acknowledged that the excellence and the attractiveness of scientific careers can be reinforced by changing the outdated, post-Soviet academic rules and reinforcing internationalisation and enabling training, skill and capacity development. Thanks to the increasing engagement of an EU-wide and international network of professionals and an emerging, both bottom-up and top-down policy support, CEE countries are witnessing a particular momentum for RMAs. The recognition of the profession and wide-spread training and networking opportunities shall increase the excellence and competitiveness of the regional research and innovation ecosystem. Last but not least, the results of the project foRMAtion (Zsár et al., 2022) also suggest that it should be made clear that scientific careers also include possibilities beyond doing research *per se w*hich is particularly pertinent in the CEE region where many researchers still undertake tasks which could be performed by RMAs. RMA as an appealing career should become a real career possibility for those who are already working in it, particularly for those, who enjoy working in international environments, who have a supportive character, and those who can be pleased to bring in a high number of important transversal skills.

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