



Access conditions to Technology Infrastructures

27 February 2024

9:00-17:00

Venue

In-person: Wallonie-Bruxelles International, Pl. Saintelette 2, 1080 Bruxelles

Online:

Workshop objectives

With the rising technological complexity and tech-based competition on global markets, industry's innovation capacity, productivity and international competitiveness heavily depend on effective knowledge transfer, access to sufficient testing facilities and a broad range of services provided by Technology Infrastructures. These infrastructures are strategic assets for development of technologies for the green and digital transitions as well as emerging and critical technologies. They are in particular essential for SMEs and start-ups to develop their innovations, demonstrate their capacities and validate their new technologies to be integrated into market applications, products and services. They can be hosted by different organisations such as RTOs, universities or other public or private organisations including companies. Access to these state-of-the art Technology Infrastructures (TIs) means access to technologies, physical and digital facilities, technology expertise and support services to develop, test, validate and scale-up innovations.

The general objective of the workshop is to better understand the existing practices and barriers in accessibility of Technology Infrastructure as well as share information and experiences. The workshop will in particular explore the needs and constraints of different users with regard to access to TIs. It will look into access modes, categories and conditions, as well as the associated legal, financial and administrative arrangements. The workshop will serve as a venue to share experiences, examples and best practices on contractual issues, rights and obligations of TIs and users, as well as data management and intellectual property rights aspects. Finally, the workshop aims to identify the existing bottlenecks to broad and effective access to TIs and explore any available access support schemes for SMEs and startups.

This workshop is targeted to TI managers and users, both private and public users, stakeholders and broader community of infrastructures providing services to industrial users. The inputs of working sessions will be used as basis for further work on access such as recommendations for standardised

principles for access conditions of TIs. They will allow furthermore to explore in more detail the role of TIs in knowledge transfer processes, how finding and access to TIs can be facilitated, and how this could be addressed in instruments and programmes.

The workshop is part of the implementation plan of the Technology Infrastructure activities under the ERA Policy Agenda Action 12 “*Accelerating the green/digital transition of Europe’s key industrial ecosystems*”.

Agenda

9:00 Registration and welcome coffee

9:30 – 10:00 Opening

Moderator: European Commission, DG RTD

- Introduction – objectives of the workshop
- Welcome speech from a representative of the Belgian Presidency of the Council
- Opening keynote: The role of TIs in knowledge transfer processes and knowledge valorisation – Peter Dröll, Director, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission, DG RTD

10:00 – 11:00 Part 1 – Access to Technology Infrastructures: what can we learn from European initiatives?

Moderator: European Commission, DG RTD

- JRC-hosted infrastructures – Fabio Taucer, Deputy Head of Unit, JRC
- Open Innovation Test Beds – John Fahlteich, Managing Director, KETMarket
- European Digital Innovation Hubs – M. Nikowska, Head of Unit, DG CNECT
- European Research Infrastructures – Antje Keppler, Director, Euro-Bioimaging ERIC Bio-Hub, ERIC Forum Chair

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 12:45 Part 2 – Access to Technology Infrastructures: experiences of TI hosts and users

Moderator: Agnès Flémal, Director General, Wallonia Space Logistics

- User perspective: experiences of Startups, SMEs and large industry
- TI Host perspective: collaboration with external users and access to a specific TI
- RI/TI network perspective: access to joint services and networks – Bertrand Bouchet, CEA

12:45 – 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 – 16:30 Part 3 – Access practices and barriers: conditions, modalities, legal, financial and contractual issues

Moderator: European Commission, DG RTD

- Introduction, objectives and working modalities of the parallel sessions
 - o Forms of access needed by different users and access modalities
- Moderator/Rapporteur: Ricardo Migueis, INESC TEC Brussels

- Rights and obligations of TIs and users: confidentiality, data management and protection, IPR, liabilities, insurances etc.
Moderator/Rapporteur: Mirka Gottberg, VTT
- Knowledge valorisation: collaboration with TIs - deployment of R&I results and knowledge transfer processes, concepts and codes of practices for efficient management of intellectual assets
Moderator/Rapporteur: Belgian Presidency
- Financial conditions and support schemes: how to support access of SMEs and startups to TIs?
Moderator/Rapporteur: Dominik Sobczak, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission

- Key takeaways from parallel sessions – Rapporteurs

16:30 – 16:45 Wrap-up

Next steps and closure of the workshop – Doris Schröcker, Head of Unit, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission

Background

Technology Infrastructures¹ play an important role in helping to incentivise more industrial R&I and deployment. They provide testing and experimentation capacities and services, and they support the uptake of R&I results and new technologies and help industry, including SMEs and start-ups to scale-up products, processes and services before entering to market. Technology infrastructures (TIs) can be sector-specific or technology-focused and they can be public, semi-public or private², and in this context, the current landscape of TIs is rich, while scattered and complex.

Technology Infrastructures are confronted with four main challenges: *visibility*, *prioritisation*, *accessibility* and *networking*³. With regard to accessibility of TIs⁴ in particular, for SMEs and start-ups, there is no easy way to identify the services they offer or to find suitable TIs to answer questions and needs of industry. Vice versa, to attract users, clear and transparent access conditions following a harmonized approach with inbuilt flexibility, recognizing the different types of users and modes of access, are needed. This could for example be addressed through standardized principles for access to TIs in general, which could be implemented on a voluntary basis (incl. IPR, Data management, etc.).

Accessibility was one of the topics of the thematic session “Towards European Strategy for TIs” in the high-level Conference Europe’s Green and Digital Transition: *The Role of Technology Infrastructures in*

¹ Technology infrastructures are understood as *facilities, equipment, capabilities and support services required to develop, test and upscale technology to advance from validation in a laboratory up to higher TRLs prior to competitive market entry. They can have public, semi-public or private status. Their users are mainly industrial players, including SMEs, which seek support to develop and integrate innovative technologies towards commercialisation of new products, processes and services, whilst ensuring feasibility and regulatory compliance* (European Commission Staff Working Document (SWD 2019/158): <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0df85f8b-7b72-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> Under the revised State aid Framework for RDI, adopted on 19 October, Technology Infrastructures are referred to as Testing and Experimentation infrastructure. The definition of testing and experimentation infrastructures in the Framework builds on the Staff Working Document on Technology Infrastructures of May 2019.

² Idem

³ Idem

⁴ Sources: Inputs from a high-level conference « Europe’s Green and Digital Transition: The Role of Technology Infrastructures in the new Pact for Research and Innovation» 23 June 2022, co-organised together with the European Commission, CEA, EARTO and French Presidency Council: <https://www.earto.eu/joint-ec-pfeu-cea-earto-event-on-technology-infrastructures-on-23-june-2022-recording-presentations-available/>

the new Pact for Research and Innovation organised in June 2022. The following challenges were identified with regard to access of SMEs to TIs:

- insufficient understanding of the full spectrum of TIs services, technological and non-technological, that SMEs can get to achieve what they need,
- lack of resources at SMEs to overcome bureaucracy and administrative hurdles,
- lack of transnational access opportunities to TIs for companies from areas of Europe with less developed facilities.

The work on access conditions should among others, take in to account the following recommendations⁵:

- To build on successful examples, e.g., development of charter of access done in Research Infrastructures, but not mimic them as such.
- When collaborating with external users, it is important to provide specific guidance, e.g. a template or recommendation on modalities of access, rights and obligations of a TI and users regarding IPR, data protection and confidentiality, liability, insurances, and the cost of access.
- Transnational access specificities, promote remote access and other means of lowering the cost of access for users with financial constraints (e.g., travel costs).
- Training and capacity building are important elements of access, e.g. how to use the TI, better understand the use of advanced technologies and their possibilities.

Workshop concept

The first part of the workshop will address the landscape and context of access to TIs across Europe. It will highlight the central role of industry, SMEs and startups and their needs for access to these infrastructures in developing and adapting the new technologies to green and digital transitions. It will reflect the role of Member States and the European Commission as policymakers, facilitators and implementors of various R&I initiatives on national, regional and EU level and their views on R&I infrastructures as specific elements of innovation ecosystems. This session will also put forward good practices and experiences of a selection of European initiatives in research and technology infrastructures in terms of access modalities, related services and practices for knowledge transfer in collaboration with external users.

The second part of the workshop will reflect the user experiences of the collaboration with TIs through real life cases and examples. This part gives a floor to SMEs and startups to elaborate their experiences among others, in finding the correct TI to support the technology development, testing and experimenting in integration of a specific technology into their innovations, market applications, products and services, and validation before the uptake in market specifying also their needs for different non-technological services. The second part also provides an opportunity to TI hosts to reflect on the collaboration with external users and how these use their capabilities, what technical and non-technological services they provide, typical modes of access as well as related costs.

The third part will discuss specific aspects of access in more depth in four parallel sessions to collect best practices but also to address the bottlenecks and challenges.

Parallel session 1: Access modes and types of services - needs of industrial users

⁵ Ibidem

- The session will focus on the needs of different industrial users with regard to access modes (physical, remote, virtual) and types of services (e.g. access to instruments & equipment, analysis of samples, technology validation, etc.). What kind of technical help and support is needed from TI in technology development, testing and experimenting activities and what are the common modalities related to access to physical and digital infrastructures and related services and networks of services available. One of the targets of this session is to find gaps in the process of finding the right TI, access to their capabilities, knowledge, equipment, technologies and services. What are the current best practices to support access and how they could be improved? How this could be better supported by the EU, MS and regional authorities?

Parallel session 2: Rights and obligations of TIs and users: confidentiality, data management and protection, IPR, liabilities, insurances etc.

- The target of this session is to explore the current best practices and modalities to cover these aspects; how these aspects are managed and covered by contractual arrangements between industrial users and TIs or networks of TIs?
- Here, the best practices of the access rights to JRC's RIs and TIs will be used as a basis for the discussion and will be complemented by the TI host and operators with their own practices.

Parallel session 3: Knowledge valorisation: collaboration with TIs - deployment of R&I results and knowledge transfer processes, concepts and codes of practices for efficient management of intellectual assets

- This session will focus on non-technological services of TIs linked to knowledge management and valorisation, identifying the key parts of the knowledge transfer process when collaborating with SMEs and startups, and how the management of intellectual assets is organised. It will look into the needs of industrial users in this respect and the sensitive issues that need to be tackled.

Parallel session 4: Financial aspects of access: how to support access of SMEs and startups to TIs?

- This session will explore the financial barriers in accessing TIs, also cross-border, by industrial users as well as share experiences with regard to available instruments or funding schemes used/tested at EU, national or regional levels. What could be learned from these instruments? What type of support for access to TIs is effective and needed?

Each session will have a moderator and rapporteur, who will then summarise and present the key outcomes of each session in the plenary. The sessions will be supported by analysis and examples gathered prior to workshop (e.g., through the RITIFI 'Research Infrastructures Technology Infrastructures for Impact' project and external experts).

Finally, the wrap up session will draw main conclusions and suggest concrete next steps.

The outcomes of the workshop will be summarised in a report to be shared with the participants, TI community, ERA Action 12 contacts and the ERA Forum. The workshop report will be used as a building

block for the further work on access conditions to TIs under the ERA Action 12 later in 2024. The report will also provide input to the Commission Expert Group on Technology Infrastructures on challenges and barriers with regard to accessibility of TIs and their services for different users, i.e. large industry, SMEs and start-ups across the EU. The work will then continue on exploring measures that could eliminate these barriers and increase the availability of TI services to users across the EU.