



Alliance-ology: looking into the financial future of alliances

Findings and insights from the
FUTURE4ALLIANCES project

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Key points

- ❖ What is the Future4Alliances project about?
- ❖ Findings from the survey on sustainable funding
- ❖ Insights from site visits on performance-based funding in Austria
- ❖ Scenario inspired by ISTA
- ❖ Need for better policy alignment



FUTURE4ALLIANCES project

- Future4Alliances (F4A) is an **Erasmus+ project** aiming to support continued development of the 65 European universities alliances (EUAs) by creating an environment conducive to the expansion of their activities, and by enhancing the coherence of funding provided by national and regional authorities.
- To do so, F4A **brings together national and regional authorities, national agencies and European Universities alliances** from European countries and provide guidelines and recommendations for the future development of the EUAs.
- It is conceived as a **platform** that enables **partners to exchange on important issues** related to the funding and implementation of European Universities alliances. Meetings and events provide opportunities to share good practice from all over Europe.
- The project focuses on **three key themes**: i) The sustainability of funding of European Universities alliances; ii) Joint educational programmes and activities, and iii) The international dimension of EUAs and hosting policies.
- F4A involves **different actors** as mentioned **from 13 countries**: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland. Project lead: Campus France.

Austria's responsibility



How can independent European Universities alliances be financed at transnational and national levels in the long term?

Looking for evidence by...



Collecting data on the funding instruments available for higher education at national and European levels



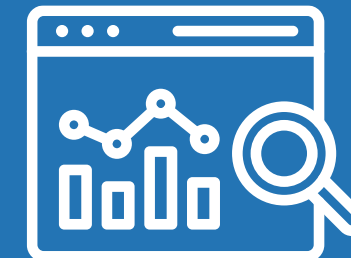
Identifying the interactions between the funding instruments, including complementary effects and synergies



Considering governance issues related to funding instruments and models



Building and discussing future scenarios on funding EUAs



Desk research and document analysis

Survey questionnaire and field study / side visits





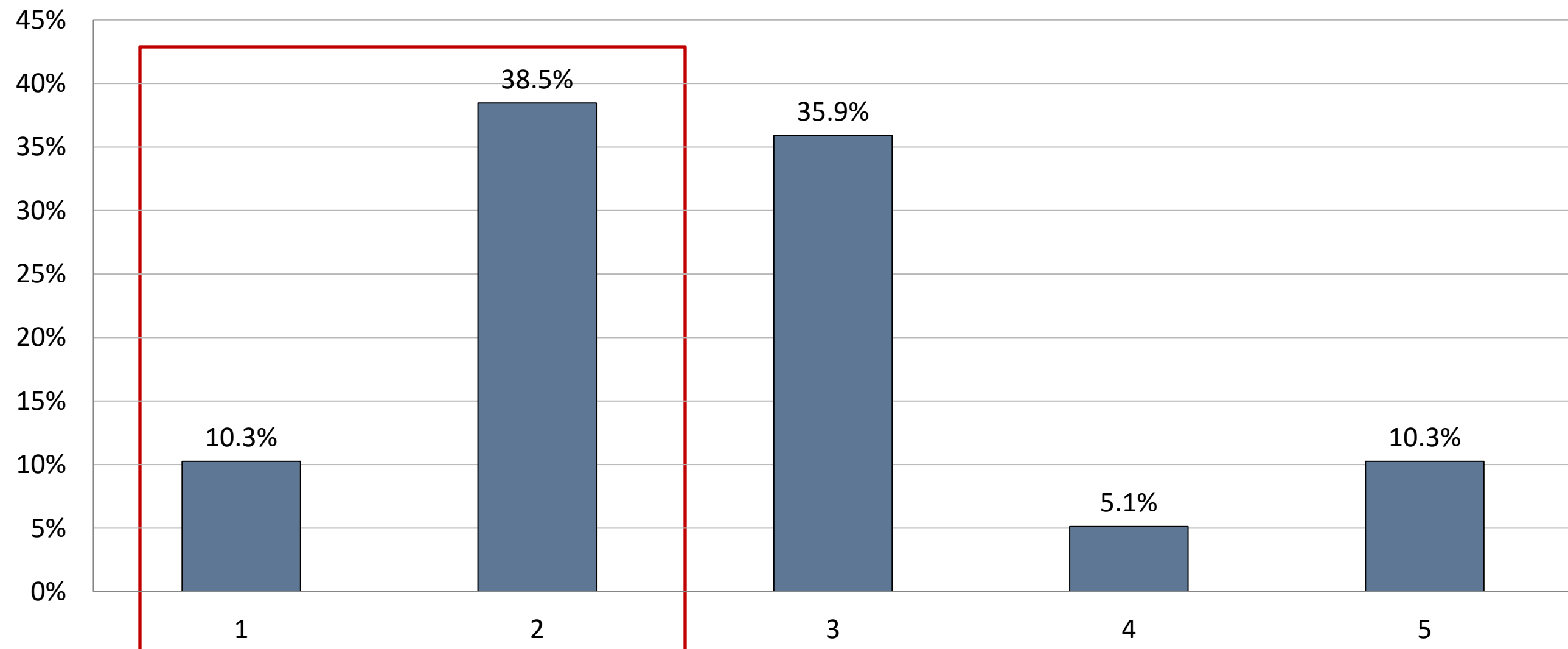
Survey

- ❖ Period: 10–26 September 2025
- ❖ Responses from 39 out of 67 alliances,
+ 5 Seal of Excellence
- ❖ Two thirds of the responding EUAs are
in the second funding period



Survey

How suitable is the current funding portfolio of the EUA to support long-term sustainability?

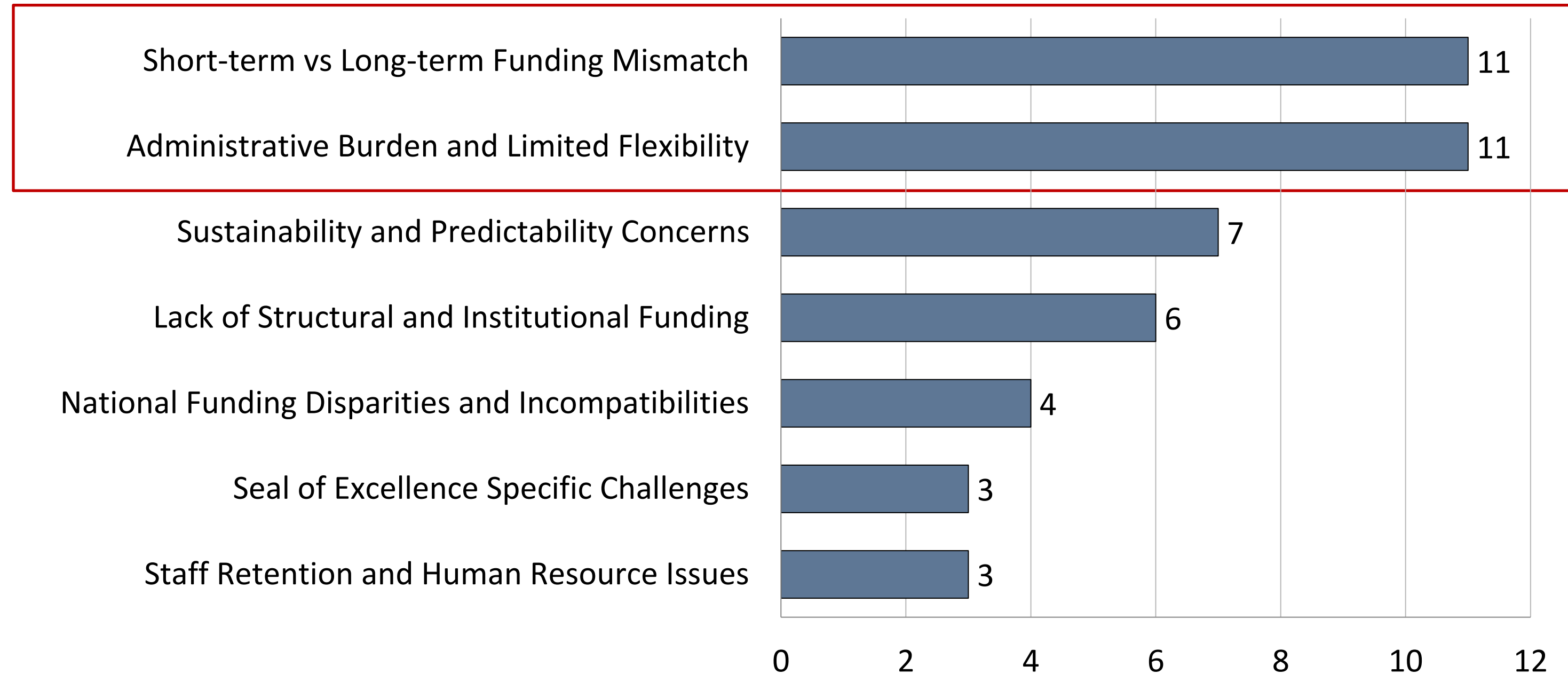


1= not suitable -
5= very suitable

48.8% of the EUAs rated their current portfolio as not suitable for sustainable funding.

Survey

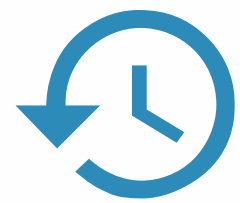
What are the main current challenges in funding the alliance?



The biggest challenges identified by alliances include funding mismatch (short-term vs. long term), alongside with administrative burden and limited flexibility.

Survey

In words...



Short-term
vs Long-term Funding
Mismatch

“

We only get funding for a rather short amount of time (project funding): the alliances are asked to push transformations and really change the institutions. We are happy to do that, but **it takes time. This cannot be done in a four years project period.** So long-term funding is essential.”



Administrative
Burden and Limited
Flexibility

“

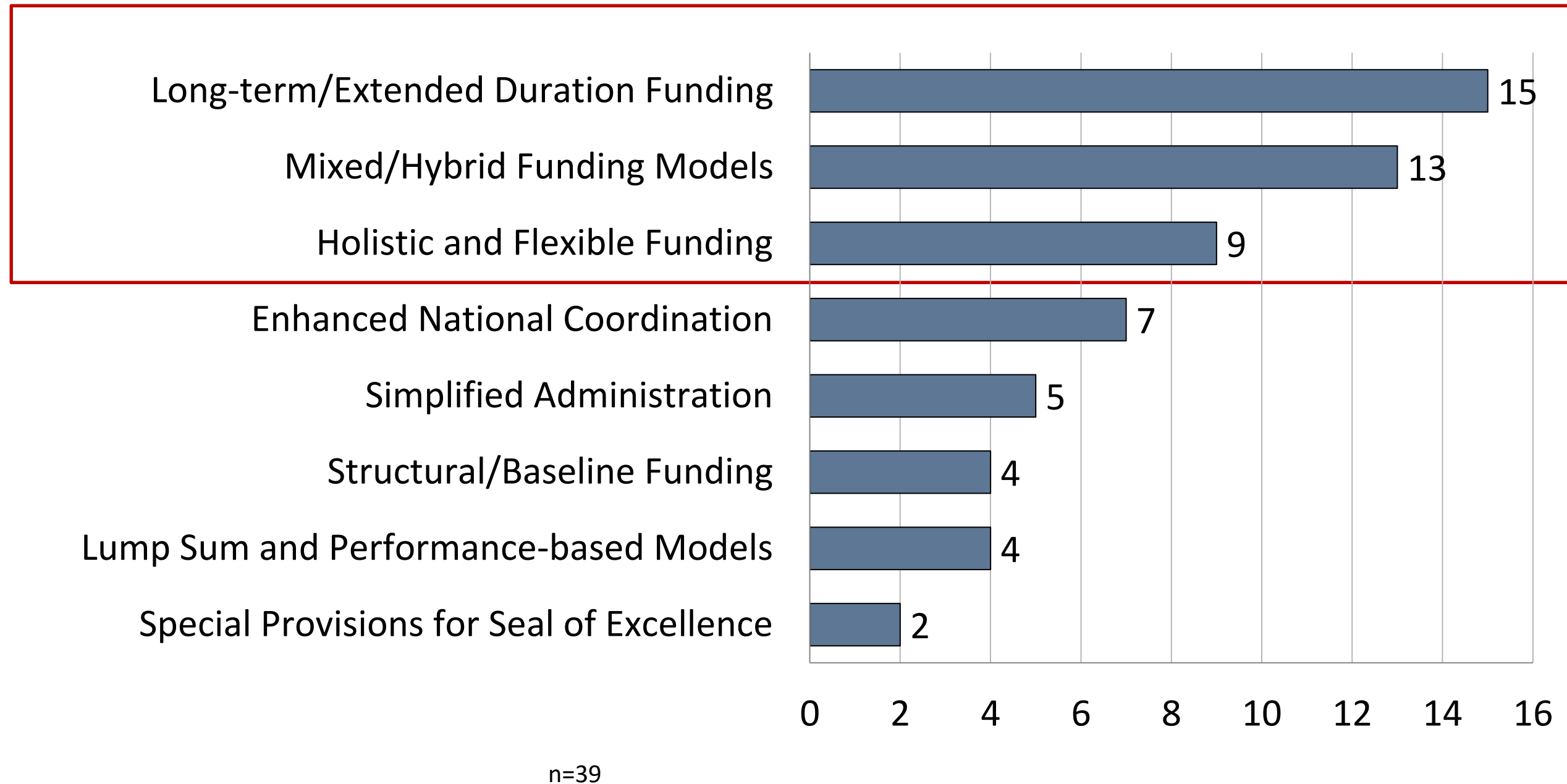
Complex administration with different regulations and reporting systems.”

“

Running after European projects is a highly inefficient funding model since **the administrative burdens are so high, both on the front end (before there is any guarantee of success) and on the back end (once funding is successfully attained)**”

Survey

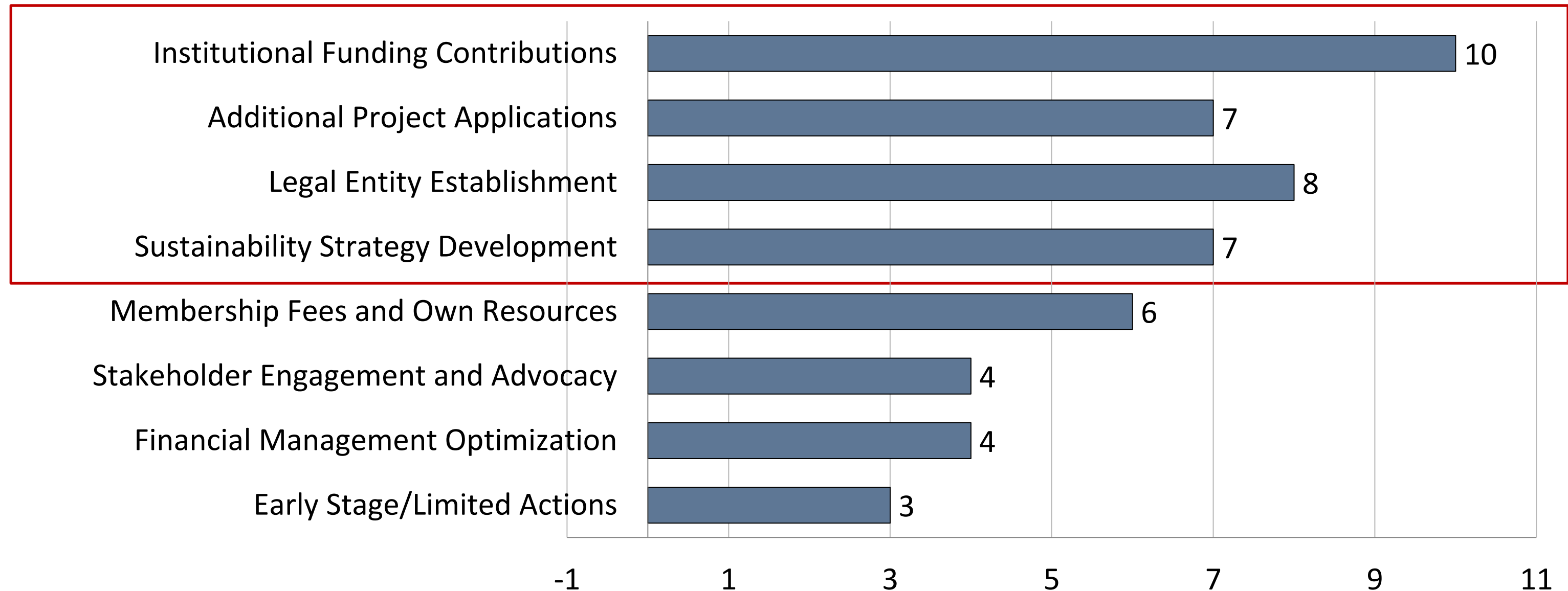
Which funding model is required to ensure the long-term sustainability of the EUAs?



There is a need for funding that is long-term, mixed/ holistic and flexible.

Survey

What steps have the alliances already taken to secure sustainable funding?



A range of self-initiated strategies and actions are being taken to strengthen the alliance's long-term sustainability.



Insights from site visits on performance-based funding in Austria

- ❖ Presentations of different EUAs from Vienna, St. Pölten, Leoben and Graz, agencies and research institutions
- ❖ Discussing challenges and needs
- ❖ Exploring approaches and gaining inspiration



Institute of Science and Technology Austria (ISTA) – best practice in performance-based funding



- ❖ **2006** ISTA law; **2009** opening of the campus; **2012** 100th employee; **2015** first PhD awarded; **2026** 95 research groups, > 1300 employees
- ❖ **External Funding:** > €338 million secured to date; 60% of which come from EU Framework Programmes, 46% from ERC grants

ISTA core principles:

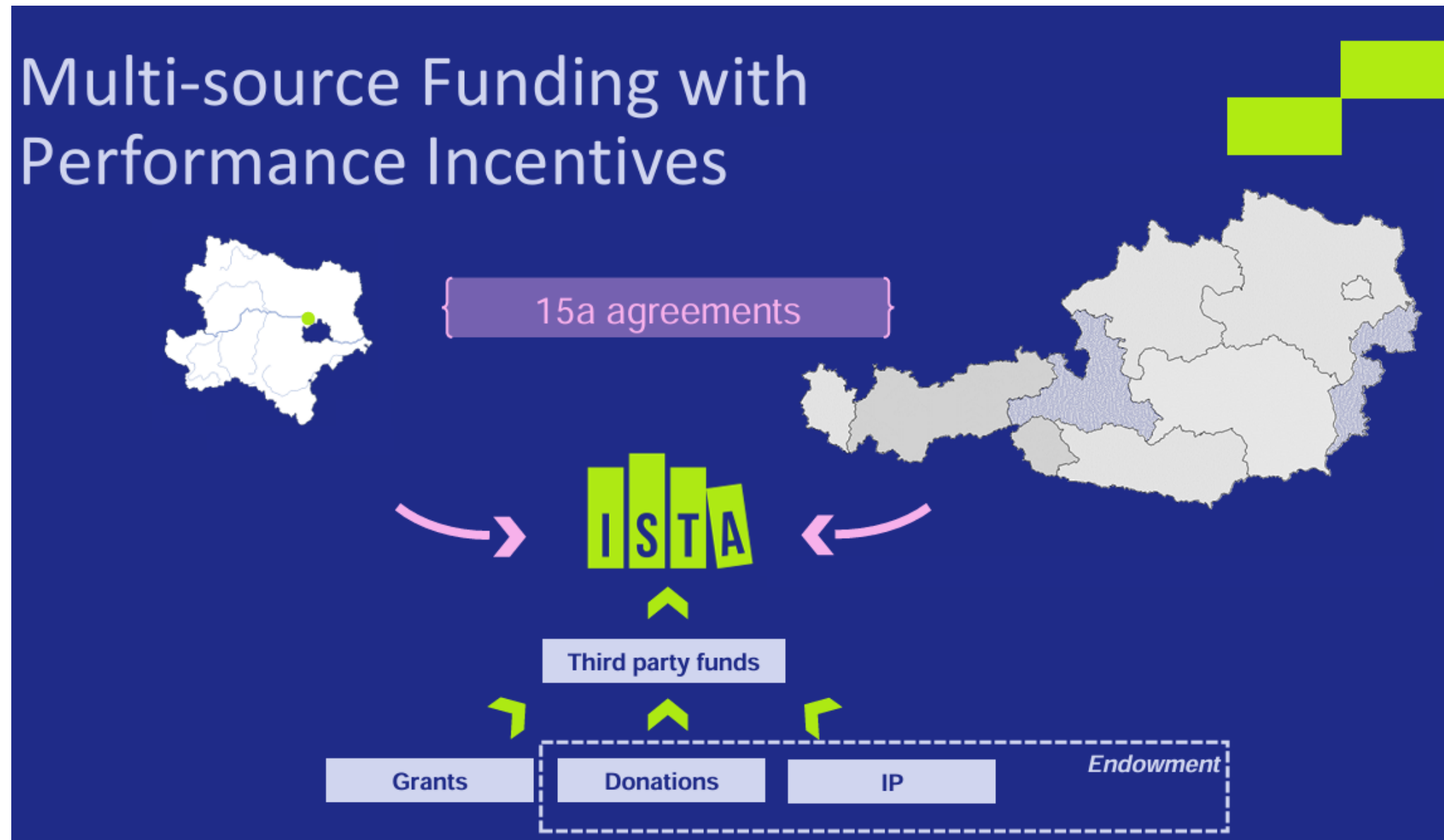
- ❖ cutting-edge basic research
- ❖ highest international standards
- ❖ independence in science, organization and recruitment

Measures of Success - Research Excellence

- ❖ ISTA ranked #1 in Europe and #3 globally by 2019 index
- ❖ 49% success rate of ERC grant applications
- ❖ 80% of ISTA professors hold one or more ERC grants



ISTA: Performance-based funding model based on excellence

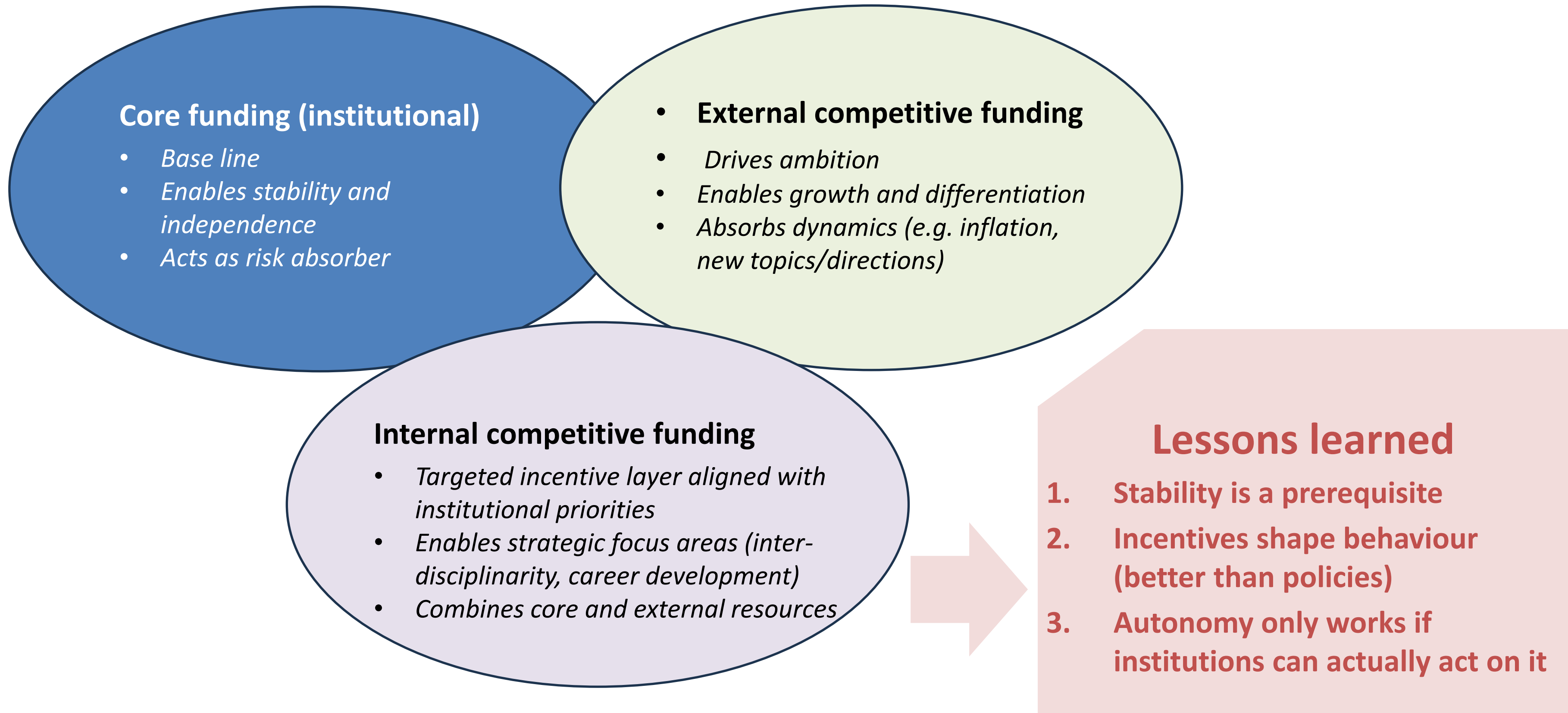


Source: ISTA – Institute of Science and Technology

In Austria, a **15a agreement** is a **formal contract (legal basis)** between the federal government and a province.

It defines how the Federal Republic of Austria and the Province of Lower Austria jointly establish, fund, and operate the ISTA.

ISTA: Principles of funding



Source: ISTA

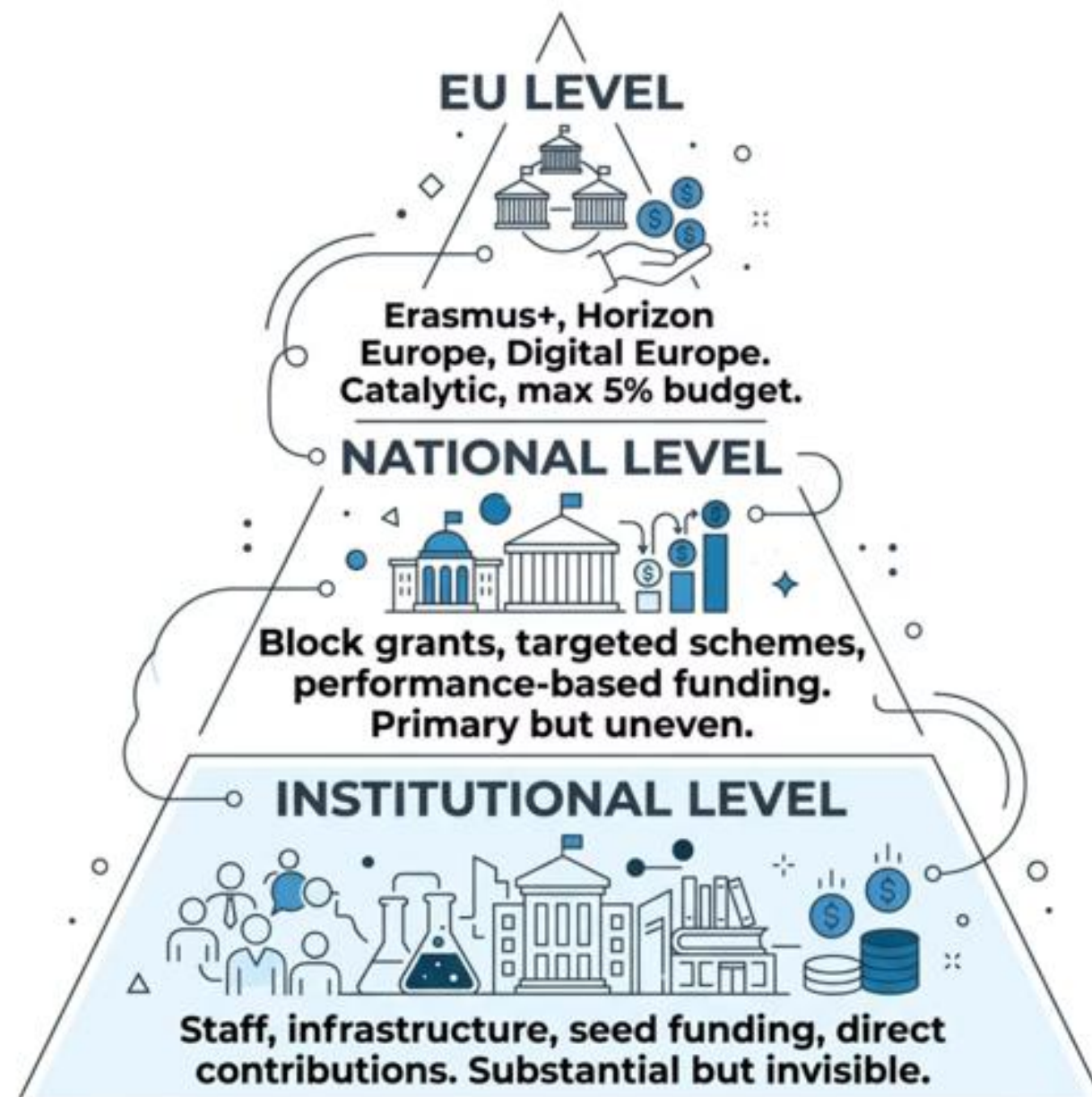


Scenario inspired by ISTA

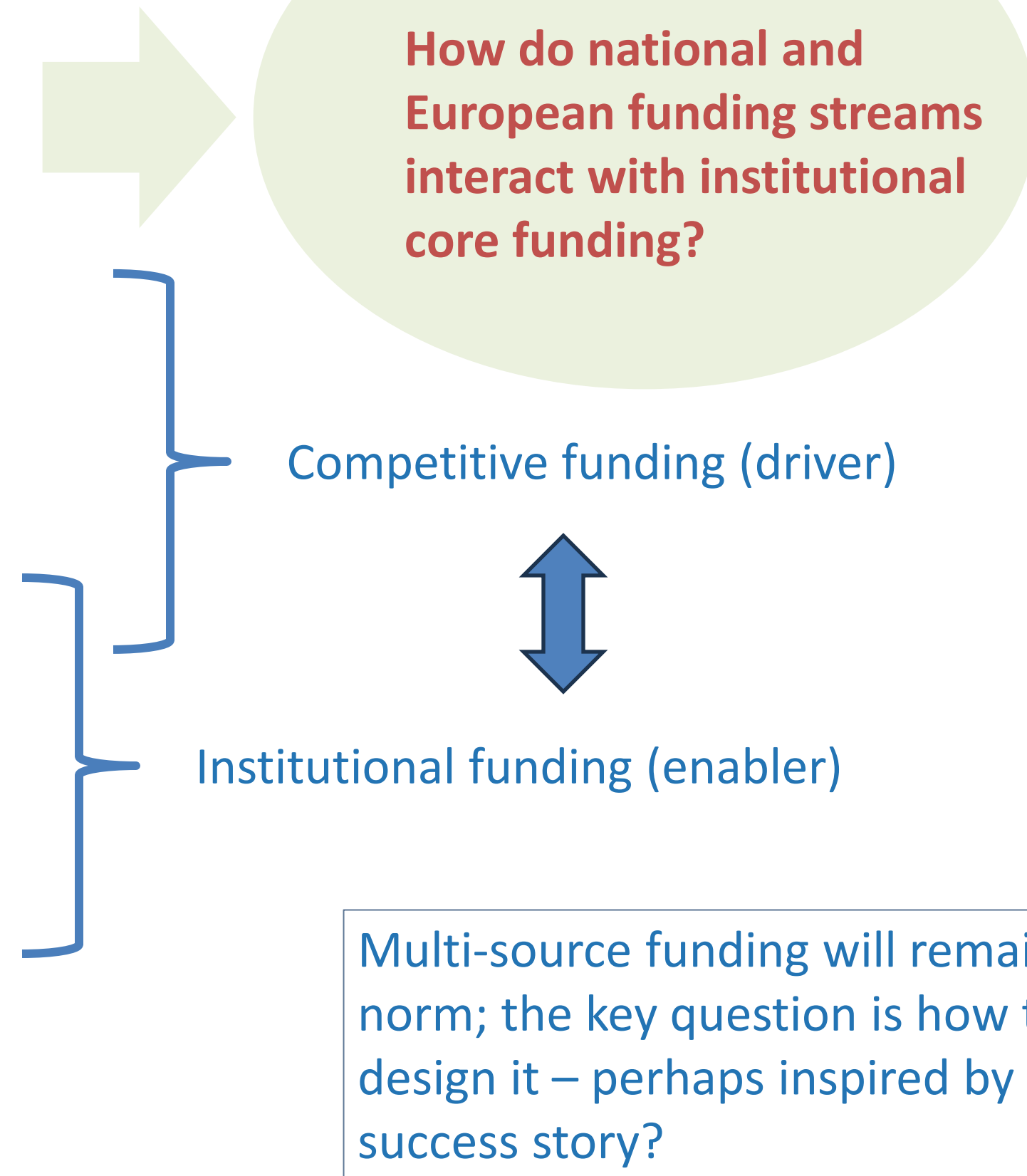
- ❖ Facing, institutional funding is essential; it comes primarily from Member State ministries and acts as the enabler.
- ❖ Costs for the alliances are higher than initially estimated.
- ❖ EU funding and competitive funding are key drivers of transformation.



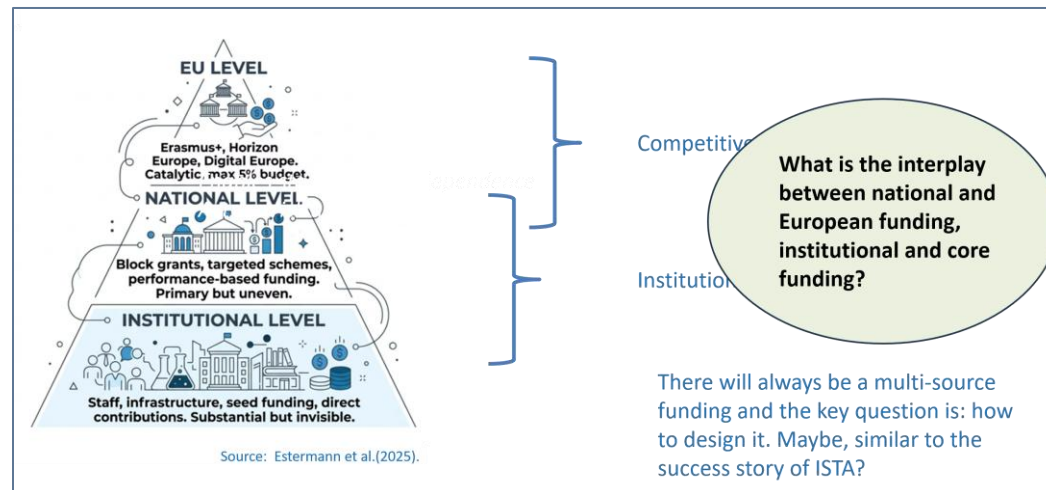
Mirroring the findings



Source: Estermann et al.(2025).



Funding pathway aligned with values, impact and performance



Performance indicators, defined top-down, can be:

1. Participation rate of students in the EUA
2. Mobility numbers
3. Additional external funding

Impact measures, defined bottom-up, as KPIs of the workplan

Keeping this in mind...

...when designing a funding model for the EUAs

The current funding model:

- Project funding by EC
- Institutional funding by Ministries/ Member States

Funding model is matched between:

- EC and Member States
- Institutional and project funding
- Bottom-up impact path-way and top-down performance measurement

Future Funding Model:

Matched Funding between funding by EC and institutional funding by Ministries/ Member States based on:

- Values
- Impact/ performance



Need for better policy alignment

- ❖ Sustainable funding for the EUA requires clear governance arrangements.
- ❖ The EC is in charge of the policy coordination of the EUI, it works in close connection with the alliances.
- ❖ But how is this aligned with Member States' policies?



Better coordinated, more aligned HE policies. But how?

- **Structured dialogue:** institutionalise systematic policy dialogue between EC, Member States/ ministries, university representatives to design and work on strategic frameworks and review the progress.
- **National European Universities “Contact Points”:** established at the ministries to support alliances and ensure coordinated implementation at national level.
- **Mutual learning:** promote peer learning/ reviews, best-practice exchange, and joint pilot initiatives across Member States.
- **Legal frameworks:** work towards developing harmonised legal frameworks, e.g. the legal status of EUAs.
- **Simplify administrative processes:** harmonize reporting and administrative procedures.
- **Alignment of documents and priorities:** synchronize EU and national documents and priorities through joint efforts.

All this builds trust and creates transparency

...to work together on a sustainable funding model built on value and performance principles.



**Thank you
for your attention**

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