

Organising the ERUA Open Science Meet-Ups: Methods, Experiences and Lessons from the First Ten Months

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Abstract

The field of Open Science is subject to constant change and expansion. In order to stay up to date, exchange is paramount – not only within universities, but also within larger spheres, such as academic alliances. This paper analyses the development of a format of international Open Science-related exchange called “ERUA Open Science Meet-Ups” within the Re:ERUA project (research trajectory of the European Reform University Alliance). We will look at in which contexts the format came to be, how we got the format started and which measures of promotion and dissemination we took. Moreover, we will discuss the individual sessions’ scope and provide insight into which lessons we learned when performing the Open Science Meet-Ups. Specific recommendations for everyone wanting to set up a similar format as well as an outlook on future sessions will conclude the paper.

Keywords: Open Science; exchange; European Reform Universities Alliance; Re:ERUA project

1. Introduction

The multi-faceted field of Open Science, which “bundles strategies and procedures that all aim to consistently use the opportunities of digitisation to make all components of the scientific process openly accessible and reusable

Table 1: List of the first eight ERUA Open Science Meet-Ups.

Nr.	Topic	Date
1	Open Science Jeopardy	27.01.2022
2	Openness	24.02.2022
3	Open Educational Resources	31.03.2022
4	Open Data Science	28.04.2022
5	The University of Paris 8's Open Science Pole	18.05.2022
6	Open Access Journals	23.06.2022
7	Citizen Science	21.07.2022
-	<i>No meet-up in August</i>	
8	The Impact of Bulgaria's National Open Science Plan on the New Bulgarian University	29.09.2022
9	Open Access Books	27.10.2022

via the internet” (Open Science AG, 2014), is subject to dynamic developments. In order to stay up to date on things, to develop Open Science-related efforts jointly and to involve those with little or no awareness of Open Science-related paradigms, exchange is paramount. In view of that, the Re:ERUA project (European Reform University Alliance, n.d.), which aims at developing the research trajectory of the *European Reform University Alliance (ERUA)*, involves not only a work package on Open Science, but also a deliverable to establish a series of monthly meet-ups that target all ERUA university members with Open Science-related interests (Table 1). The idea is that everyone who is interested in Open Science can participate in the meet-ups as they please without prior registration to discuss current topics, to get feedback on aspects they are currently working on and to ask questions they are pondering. We hope that this report may serve as a source of inspiration to anyone who may be interested in setting up a like-minded format.

2. Getting Started

The first questions we faced were about how to get the ball rolling. How would we frame the format? What would be the meet-ups’ scope? How would we get whatever target group we would be aiming at to meet up in a relaxed atmosphere?

Finding suitable digital tools was not a challenge. After almost two years of COVID-related restrictions and workspace-related adaptations that went with

them, the University of Konstanz' Open Science Team, in which the meet-up organisers work, is well-equipped and experienced. From the big bunch of conference software, we ended up selecting Zoom, as it is well-known within Europe and easy to navigate. Moreover, it allows for a variety of interactive features like surveys and screen sharing. In addition to Zoom, we occasionally used the Miro application for brainstorming and interactive note-taking.

After an initial phase of brainstorming in the project, we figured that a game would be the most suitable way of attracting attention and to initiate the process of community building, as, in our view, games epitomise the relaxed exchange for which we strive in the meet-ups. Moreover, we did not want to start with Open Science-related subtopics, but with something overarching to discuss the field of Open Science as a whole. In this vein, we created a game of *Open Science Jeopardy* using a free service website (<https://jeopardylabs.com/>) on which you can create interactive digital jeopardy templates for free. The idea was to tie the game in with a discussion on central Open Science terms and to see whether there are any differences among the five ERUA countries. Moreover, we hoped that via gamification we would be able to attract a wide range of different academic people who would be interested in visiting future meet-ups dedicated to discussions and exchange on more specific aspects of Open Science. As far as the timeframe is concerned, we decided to plan for approximately 45 minutes per meet-up when we organised the first instalment. After the first meet-up, we decided to stick with that. Despite potential problems with looking at Open Science-related aspects in detail in such a short period of time, we chose that timeframe as we knew that many people would have busy schedules and, overall, would be unlikely to visit long sessions on a regular basis.

The next challenge we faced was how to promote the meet-ups effectively within the alliance. As we will see, the issue of participation was discussed repeatedly throughout the planning process of the first nine Open Science meet-ups – for that reason and as participation is vital to any meet-up series' success, the aspect deserves closer scrutiny.

3. Spreading the Word

How can you inform and attract an audience as diverse and as multi-faceted as members from five universities in five different countries that are

interested in the diverse fields of Open Science? The most obvious measure for us was to involve the central ERUA website, so we published a news article there to explain both the general concept and the scope of the first meeting (European Reform University Alliance, 2022). In addition to that, we decided to promote the meet-ups via ERUA-specific and institutional social media channels, ERUA-specific and institutional mailing lists as well as via further institution-specific channels of dissemination. We would like to exemplify what we mean by institutional channels: At the University of Konstanz, where the meet-up organisers work, we promoted the first meet-up via the following channels:

- The university's local ERUA website and its calendar
- The Communication, Information and Media Centre's website news
- The university's event calendar and event newsletter
- The university's general newsletter EINBLICK
- The university's Open Science-related mailing list
- The International Office's Instagram channel

As far as the subsequent meet-ups are concerned, we decided not to promote them via the EINBLICK. That newsletter is dedicated to topic-centred articles about what is going on at the University of Konstanz – by writing about the meet-ups' initiation as well as their general concept, we agreed that we had used this newsletter to the fullest for the time being. When a central ERUA newsletter was introduced several months later, we involved it in our promotion measures, too. Before the first meet-up, we had created a public mailing list (https://listes.univ-paris8.fr/www/subscribe/open_science_meet-up_paris8) especially dedicated to the Open Science Meet-Ups to make sure that everyone could stay up to date with little effort. For obvious reasons, this mailing list could not attract many people to the first meet-up. However, it was important for us to think ahead and to provide a medium of communication via which the meet-up organisers can reach interested ERUA members directly in the future. Moreover, we agreed upon further measures like reminder e-mails and LinkedIn posts during an internal project meeting in which we brainstormed how to augment our visibility.

Furthermore, we knew that we needed a regular meet-up slot which people would be able to factor into their schedules – due to its relative proximity to the weekend, Thursday afternoon seemed like a logical choice for a format that aims at a relaxed and casual exchange.

Along similar lines, we knew that a key visual would be useful so people would connect the meet-up series across all contexts and media with a visual impulse. To connect people not only with the series itself, but also with our main scope – openness – we prepared four post-its and took a picture of the word “open” (Figure 1). As helpful as that logo was in promoting the first nine meet-up sessions, we decided to develop it further so it not only involves the term “open” but also symbols and captions to help convey the series’ concept in a more ample manner. As of now, the revised logo is still being developed.

In addition to a logo, we created a website dedicated exclusively to the meet-ups to display not only individual meet-up instalments via calendar entries, but also the series as a whole in one place. Due to technical difficulties, we only managed to set up the website for the promotion of the fifth meet-up, but it has since proven invaluable to make materials available that were created or used during the meet-ups (International Office, n.d.).

4. Individual Meet-Up Sessions

When opting for a game as an icebreaker in the first session, we knew that we had to be careful as games, if applied unsuitably, can spark competition among participants, which, if taken to the extreme, could cause the opposite

Fig. 1: The first logo.



of the relaxed exchange we had in mind. Moreover, we were not looking for binary right or wrong answers, but we wanted to see how the terms might be defined differently in various European countries in order to approach the overarching topic of Open Science from an international angle. For these reasons, we decided not to count any points and not to form competing teams, but to let people decide individually on whether to select the more demanding fields in the Jeopardy. Furthermore, we were careful to be appreciative of the answers without putting anyone or any answer on the spot and to look for answers together if people were uncertain. Our first meet-up with the **Open Science Jeopardy** saw the participation of around 30 participants from three different ERUA universities. Given that this was the first instalment, the result exceeded our expectations. Everyone was eager to participate and looking for definitions together turned out to be a good idea to connect the dots and to bring people together. The only aspect we decided to do differently in future game-related meet-ups was not to follow the alphabetical order of names when choosing who could go next in the game, but to use a random number generator instead.

As a follow-up to the Jeopardy, we decided to have a **discussion on openness** in the second meet-up and to see how the term is perceived in different countries and across different disciplines in the context of Open Science. We chose this topic because we wanted to get a more comprehensive international understanding of the overarching aspect of openness as this aspect is the very foundation of everything we do in Open Science. The second meet-up saw the participation of nine people. Even though that rate was significantly lower than the one of the first meet-up, we were pleased with the result as all nine participants were eager to participate. The exchange on different takes regarding what conditions ought to be met for data or publications to be considered open, regarding whether there should be any limits to openness and about how participants perceive openness in their academic environments proved very fruitful. We used a digital Miro whiteboard with virtual sticky notes to gather the different takes; a PDF version of the whiteboard is available on the meet-up website.

After two meet-ups on overarching topics, we decided to start discussing the individual aspects of Open Science. When choosing individual topics, we went for a mixture of prominent Open Science subtopics, topics requested by the participants and dimensions of Open Science in which

individual ERUA universities specialise. However, there are no clear-cut boundaries between these three aspects; in many cases, more than one of these motivations led to our decisions. We dedicated the third meet-up to **Open Educational Resources**. As one of our colleagues in the University of Konstanz' Open Science Team specialises in Open Educational Resources, we asked her for a short keynote speech on the topic. The idea was that this keynote speech would answer at least some of the questions participants might be facing in their professional lives. Moreover, the idea was that the keynote speech would serve both as an introduction to the topic and as the basis for discussions on the advantages and opportunities of OER, but also on the challenges that arise when creating and re-using them. Eight participants visited the meet-ups and engaged in a lively discussion. In the aftermath of this session, we started to realise that building one community that would meet up on a regular basis would be more challenging than we had first assumed – over the course of the first three meet-ups, we rarely had the same participants in more than two meet-ups. Largely, this has continued up until the ninth meet-up. We ascribe this tendency to the multidimensionality and the developing nature of the field of Open Science. We expect that the fact that people who are involved in Open Science usually work in specialised subfields adds to this tendency. As few elements of Open Science are relevant for everyone, it is difficult to create one community. What adds to the challenge of forming a community is the circumstance that in the meet-ups we do not want to focus too much on overarching topics as that focus would keep us from discussing the specific subfields of Open Science which people are interested in. We drew the conclusion that there is not one Open Science community, but various overlapping subcommunities with different foci, which we ought to cater to individually in specialised sessions.

Along these lines, we decided to dedicate the fourth session to the topic of **Open Data Science** after one scientist had stated his interest for Open Data Science in one of the previous meet-ups. To approach the topic, we asked him to provide a short keynote speech on how he applies Open Data Science in his research projects. The idea was to use this keynote speech as a basis for questions people might be facing in their professional lives and as an introduction to the topic. Moreover, we wanted the keynote speech to be the basis for the subsequent discussion on open data in a larger view. The meet-up had ten participants who were eager to ask their questions and to exchange experiences. Before the meet-up, the scientist had explained that he would

like to invite his students to the meet-up as, in his view, the topic is relevant for them, too. This standpoint confirmed our previous community-related understanding of Open Science as a very diverse field that involves many different target groups. As organisers, we appreciated the idea of inviting the students as we agree that Open Science is not only for scientists and for people working in the academic infrastructure, but should also be in students' curricula.

As the first four sessions had been Konstanz-centred, we decided to start involving the other ERUA Universities more when it comes to providing input in the form of keynote speeches. In this vein, we dedicated the fifth meet-up to the **University of Paris 8's Open Science Pole** – a project pursuing various measures to enhance the university's open science profile. The idea was to look at what the University of Paris 8 does to foster Open Science as an inspiration for the other ERUA universities and as a foundation for potential future joint measures to the end of fostering Open Science in the alliance as a whole. As the meet-up only had seven participants – almost all of them from Konstanz – we could not discuss the Pole's individual aspects as much and as diversely as we had planned. The lack of participants in this session led to another brainstorming on how we could reach a larger variety of target groups. The brainstorming and its findings will be analysed later.

The sixth instalment focussed on **Open Access Journals**. We organised the meet-up with a university professor from Konstanz who is editor-in-chief of an open access journal. We agreed that it was important to involve not only Open Science professionals in the meet-ups, but to strive for as much diversity as possible to cover the various dimensions of Open Science as best as we could. In the first two meet-ups, we as the meet-up organisers had provided the input, in two more sessions, a scientist and a scholar had done so; open science professionals provided the remaining two sessions' input up to that point. As far as this instalment is concerned, the professor promoted the meet-up via the University of Konstanz' Linguistics mailing list which led to an increase in participants from that department. In total, the meet-up had 17 participants from three different universities. We drew the conclusion that it matters not only what you promote, but also who does the promotion.

The seventh instalment was about **Citizen Science**, i.e. “scientific work, for example collecting information, that is done by ordinary people without special qualifications, in order to help the work of scientists” (Cambridge

Dictionary, n.d.). We organised this meet-up with two ERUA colleagues from Roskilde University, as Citizen Science is a field in which Roskilde University specialises. After a brief introduction to the topic, our colleagues presented how Citizen Science is conducted at Roskilde University. This session saw the participation of nine people. It was the first meet-up in which there were as many participants from the University of the Aegean and Paris 8 as from Konstanz, which indicated that our social media-related efforts across ERUA started paying off. We will see how this develops over the course of the next instalments. We started the session off with a word cloud to gather associations on the term “Citizen Science” – this helped us visualise what people connect with the term and thus, what expectations they might have for the keynote speech and the subsequent discussion. The subsequent discussion saw active participation from all members and a helpful exchange of Citizen Science-related practices across the alliance.

After having involved our partners from Paris and Roskilde, we decided to dedicate the eighth session to the **New Bulgarian University**. As – unlike Germany, for example – Bulgaria channels Open Science-related efforts through a **national open science plan**, we decided to make that plan the scope of the session; more specifically, what impact this plan has had on the way the New Bulgarian University performs Open Science. The concept behind this was to seize the experiences made by one ERUA university with regards to the implementation of a national Open Science plan as a model case which can serve as a medium both of reflection and preparation for the other ERUA universities, which may not yet have been influenced to the same extent by equivalent national plans. This is of particular relevance as national Open Science plans and strategies are becoming more and more common and may become relevant for all ERUA universities in the not too distant future. We managed to find two keynote speakers for the session, the NBU’s library director and a university professor who is well-versed in Open Science. The meet-up saw the active participation of around ten people. We drew the conclusion that, despite some diversity-related success in the previous meet-up, our promotion-related efforts still needed improvement – regarding not only the amount of efforts, but also with regards to how you can promote a comparatively abstract topic like a national Open Science plan so people can connect with it properly.

The ninth and most recent Open Science meet-up saw a comparatively straightforward topic: **Open Access books** – books everyone can access

Table 2: List of the Next Open Science Meet-Ups.

Nr.	Topic	Date
10	Repositories	24.11.2022
11	Christmas Open Science Game	15.12.2022
12	Open Science and the Reform Universities' Paradigm	01/2023
13	Open Science and the Global South	02/2023
	<i>More meet-ups tba</i>	

without paywalls. At the University of Konstanz, we seized the coincidence of the meet-ups' regular slot at the end of the month and the Open Access Week which took place in the same week and promoted the meet-up in synergy with further Open Access Week-related activities that took place at the University of Konstanz. In this meet-up, a colleague of ours from Konstanz who is an expert in Open Access book publishing gave the keynote speech. Despite an additional Open Access week-related promotion measures at Konstanz, the meet-up saw the participation of only 15 participants. We drew the conclusion that we should consider promoting less what we do, but more why what we offer is relevant for the potential participants. It will be interesting to see how that works in future (Table 2). We will discuss this conclusion as well as others in detail in the next chapter.

5. Lessons Learned, Recommendations and Outlook

Our first main realization was that, at least as far as the ERUA universities are concerned, there is not one single Open Science target group, but a variety of partly overlapping subgroups that must be catered to individually to ensure that the issues that matter to the respective groups can be addressed properly. Without this, exchange is much less meaningful for the participants and much less fruitful. Overarching topics and discussions on topics like "openness" and Open Science terminology are important to develop a common framework, but the issues whatever target group you cater to cares about are more specific. Along those lines, it is our plan for future meet-ups to discuss topics in depth that are taken from the working environments of open science. This is the only logical next step after having discussed Open Science subfields like OER, Open Access Books and Citizen Science in more general terms. The idea is to use some of the meet-ups for ERUA Open Science

professionals to learn from each other and to develop Open Science-related measures jointly.

As far as participation is concerned, it is important to understand that you cannot reach this alliance's target groups – and perhaps any university alliance's target groups – via alliance-specific channels of communications alone. It is important to also use as much as possible institutional channels of communication and to use as target group-specific channels as possible. We drew this conclusion during a brainstorming in the project after the fifth meet-up about how more non-Konstanz participants could be reached when there continued to be an imbalance among universities in terms of the overall meet-up participation. At first, we decided that the meet-up organisers would be writing social media texts for all instalments which the other universities' project members would be forwarding to their social media departments. However, after a while we realized that it can be sufficient if the general ERUA social media channels promote the meet-ups and tag all other ERUA universities. That way, all institutional social media departments are aware of the promotion efforts and the only thing they have to do is share or forward the posts to their own audience. Moreover, we decided to target subject-specific institutional mailing lists across all ERUA universities if a meet-up is dedicated to a particular subject and thus a specific subject-related target group. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind not only to promote what you do, but also why what you offer is relevant to the target groups you want to attract. In many cases, it matters also who does the promotion as people will be attracted more easily by people they know, especially if whoever does the promotion is highly regarded in the community. It will be interesting to see to what extent the measures we derive from these findings prove fruitful in the future.

It turned out to be a good idea to include as many different perspectives as possible in the meet-ups – not only as far as the participants are concerned, but also regarding keynote speakers and other input providers. Here, a mixture of input provided by the organisers, by researchers and by academic support staff has proven to be valuable when it comes to discussing and understanding Open Science from different angles. Along similar lines, we recommend seizing synergies within the alliance not only to look at individual aspects of Open Science from different angles but also to seize foci which not all universities may share, like Roskilde's experiences with Citizen Science, for the benefit of the entire alliance.

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