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Beyond the National Open Science Sphere: Organising the ERUA Open Science Live Meet-Ups

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Abstract

The Open Science Community reaches beyond national borders, which entails the necessity of international exchange to learn from each other and to develop measures jointly. But how to implement formats of exchange? In this report, Maximilian Heber and Dr. Goran Sekulovski share their experiences planning and performing the ERUA Open Science Live Meet-Ups, a low-threshold format of exchange implemented whitin the European Reform Universities Alliance (ERUA), an alliance of the European Universities Initiative (EUI). Doing so, they reflect critically on this format, hoping that this paper may be a resource of inspiration for others who may be interested in setting up similar initiatives.

Keywords: Open Science; Open Science Exchange; European Universities Initiative; EUI; European Reform Universities Alliance; ERUA; Re:ERUA project

1. Introduction

To spread awareness on Open Science and to learn from each other, formats of exchange are paramount. This refers to exchange within one academic

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institution and to players within consortia of institutions that collaborate closely, such as the academic alliances formed by the *European Universities Initiative (EUI)* (European Commission, n.d.). In fact, we could argue that exchange is of particular importance in cross-national consortia due to the wide range of Open Science-related backgrounds, practices and expectations that go with such a multicultural set-up. This entails a wider range of discrepancies and thus a higher need for exchange. At the same time, it suggests a more ample set of opportunities for growth for everyone involved. Along these lines, the importance of geographical and linguistic diversity in the approach to open research-related information was highlighted in the recent Barcelona Declaration on Open Research Information (2024). Open Science-related practices have lasting and decisive impacts on the role of academic librarianship as "in the context of open science, academic libraries are beginning to redefine or expand their role, reinventing themselves by expanding their traditional information services as well as their educational and mediation functions (Tang & Hu, 2019)" (Liu & Liu, 2023). This evolution aligns with the earlier insights of Paul Ayris and Tiberius Ignat (2018) who explored how libraries can actively engage with and provide leadership in the Open Science movement. Consequently, exchanges on Open Science inherently involve exchanges on (innovative) librarianship.

In view of all that, the Open Science-related activities of the European Reform University Alliance (ERUA), which was founded in the context of the EUI, involved three Open Science Live Meet-Ups (https://erua-eui.eu/). These took place in the context of project Re:ERUA ("Re:" stands for research), which ran from October 2021 until September 2024 and aimed at developing ERUA's research trajectory (European Commission, 2024). In its first funding phase, ERUA involved five universities: New Bulgarian University (Bulgaria), Roskilde University (Denmark), University of the Aegean (Greece), University of Konstanz (Germany) and University of Paris 8 (France). To develop the alliance's research trajectory jointly, Re:ERUA consisted of thematic work packages which involved specialists from the five universities. One of these work packages was dedicated to developing joint synergetic Open Science-related measures, such as exchange formats like the live meet-ups. These meet-ups were designed to give all ERUA members interested in Open Science, not just Open Science professionals, the opportunity to meet in the flesh to exchange perspectives on as well as approaches to Open Science to learn from each other. Along these lines, the live meet-ups were crucial for sharing the individual alliance members' perspectives on and involvements in Open Science.

Apart from that, it was important for Open Science-related professionals as well as other Open Science enthusiasts within ERUA to exchange perspectives and to learn from each other. In this regard, the live meet-ups complemented the monthly virtual Open Science Meet-ups, which were started in ERUA (Heber, 2023; Open Science Meet-Ups, n.d.) and are now offered by the alliance *European University for Well-Being* (EUniWell). In contrast to the virtual meet-ups, we wanted the live meet-ups to seize the opportunities of on-site meetings, offering interactions and exchange that is hard to digitize. To attract a wide range of academic players, the live meet-ups were organised in synergy with the alliance's annual summits. Table 1 provides an overview of the three instalments.

As a format, the ERUA live meet-ups tie in with a whole sphere of (cross-national) Open Science-related exchange formats in Europe and beyond. All three sessions were organised by Maximilian Heber (University of Konstanz) and Dr Goran Sekulovski (University of Paris 8 when the meet-ups were organised, now National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Insee)). In this paper, we want to share and reflect on our experiences drafting, planning and performing these intercultural spheres of exchange, hoping that our methodologies, approaches and experiences prove helpful for those interested in setting up similar formats or those who may already be performing similar meet-ups. We believe that the exchange of best practices for implementing joint actions, through the live meet-ups, has helped foster Open Science in ERUA. The live meet-ups provided a valuable platform for sharing experiences and fostering a community of practice within ERUA that supports the effective adoption of Open Science principles across institutions and disciplines. We reckon they have not only promoted innovation but also helped advance exchange diverse initiatives, thereby amplifying the impact of Open Science to the benefit of the alliance's members and the consortium as a whole.

Table 1: Overview of the three ERUA open science live meet-ups.

Number	Title	Date	Place
#1	The Open Science Community – Perspectives, Approaches and Outlook	08.11.2022	Paris (France)
#2	Reaching the Researchers	11.10.2023	Roskilde (Denmark)
#3	Panel Discussion on (Social) Developments related to Open Science in ERUA and Future Perspectives	25.06.2024	Vilnius (Lithuania)

2. Shaping the Live Meet-Ups' General Concept

In our experience, most people profit from interactive formats more than from the lecture-like presentation-and-questions sessions that still seem to define most academic conferences. In a similar vein, we could not envision a lecture-like format to provide the multilateral exchange for which we strove. Beyond that, lectures seemed to us the format most easily transferable to a digital setting like the virtual meet-ups. In fact, they do not even require a synchronous setting, but can easily be recorded and watched at any time. It thus seemed to us a waste of time and opportunities to dedicate the meet-ups to lectures or mere presentations. Instead, we quickly decided to go for interactive sessions to actively involve those interested in Open Science.

Along these lines, especially in the first meet-up's planning stages, we tried to come up with suitable topics relevant and inclusive enough for the wide range of academic players present at a conference as multi-facetted as the annual summit of an academic alliance without rendering the topics too basic for Open Science professionals. At the same time, we thought of the meet-ups as a forum to draw the alliance's attention to topics that might otherwise not be as prominent, like everyone's relation to Open Science. We thus first came up with *The Open Science Community – Perspectives, Approaches and Outlook*. This topic seemed like a good way to find out how everyone in the room was (or was not) involved in Open Science, what that entailed for their work and where they could go from here. In a similar fashion, the final meet-up's topic *(Social) Developments related to Open Science in ERUA and Future Perspectives* seemed suitable to close the Re:ERUA project by discussing what we had achieved in Open Science, how that may or may not have catered to the alliance's needs and where we could go from there. The summits' diverse range of participants suggested the second meet-up's topic, *Reaching the Researchers*. As there is no single strategy for reaching Open Science-related awareness among researchers, we experience Open Science professionals across the world oftentimes having a hard time reaching academics with their offerings. Moreover, active participation in Open Science entails for a researcher dedicating time to a topic which is usually beyond their normal research. This dual challenge emphasizes the need for tailored communication approaches to inform researchers about the benefits and practices of Open Science, factoring in their workloads and commitments. Catering to this need, we were hoping to get to know perspectives from researchers on how best to reach out to them. To the same end, we also addressed students as future researchers

and non-Open Science-related academic support staff as players unlikely to visit Open Science-related discussions outside the summit, who might be involved in outreach-related activities. Involving all of these target groups, we pursued exchanging experiences on how to get in touch with researchers. This experience seemed particularly significant for us, considering the limited number of studies available on how to effectively engage researchers. By addressing the specific needs and preferences of researchers, institutions can better facilitate the adoption of Open Science principles and practices, ultimately enriching the research landscape.

3. Activating and Energising the Participants

Due to the ERUA summits attracting not only – in fact, not even mainly – Open Science professionals, we decided to start the first and the third live meet-ups with a general introduction to the principles of Open Science, factoring in some space for questions. We did so to make sure that all participants had at least a basic understanding of what, to us as organisers, the term involved so they could connect our standpoints on Open Science with their pre-knowledge. In the second meet-up, we offered only a very short introduction to the general idea behind Open Science, both because of time constraints and as we assumed that the topic *Reaching the researchers* would work out fine without a copious introduction to Open Science due to its rather generalist scope. As the third meet-up looked back to the Re:ERUA project's Open Science-related developments, we decided to present the project's main Open Science deliverables besides an introduction to Open Science to sum up what we had covered as a basis for the subsequent panel discussion. Both of these topical introductions as well as the scarcity of one in the second meet-up worked out fine and ran smoothly without any problems.

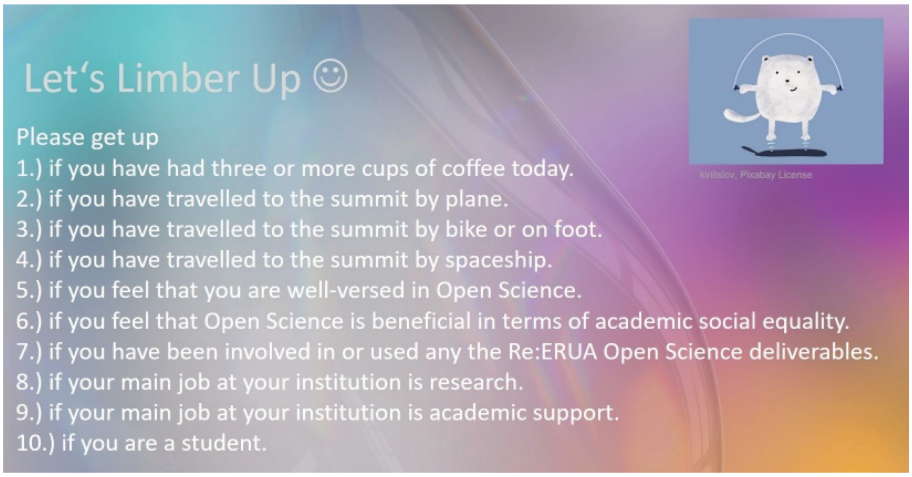
In our experience, besides activating participants with regards to a topic, it is helpful to energise them in a playful and entertaining fashion so everyone is attentive and eager. Ideally, such a warm-up involves physical movement as such is often appreciated by participants after sitting for longer periods or to avoid the post-lunch slump. Along these lines, we decided to do a *position line* as the first meet-up's warm-up, which means that people get up and position themselves on an imaginary line, depending on how they respond to a question. To that end and based on the question *How involved are you in Open Science?*, we asked them to position themselves in the continuum

between the polar opposites *very active* and *not active at all* between two different sides of the room. On this basis, we asked some participants to elaborate on why they had positioned themselves where they were standing, hoping to gradually provide both participants and organisers with an overview on the group's composition. In a similar fashion, we started the second and the third meet-up with surveys, asking participants to get up if a question applied to them (see Figure 1). To make sure that people could not only limber up, but also ease up, we did a couple of playful questions before asking about Open Science-related matters or the groups' composition. Both types of warm-ups worked out very well. We would thus generally recommend them to everyone looking for suitable warm-ups, always bearing in mind whether or not their target group is likely to have any potential physical disabilities that may impede their mobility.

4. Performing the Meet-Ups' Main Parts in an Interactive Fashion

Thinking of suitable warm-ups was comparatively easy. Planning interactive main parts proved more challenging as we did not know who and how many people would join and what connections, if any, they would have to Open Science. This meant that it was rather difficult for us to predict where they

Fig. 1: Limbering up in the third meet-up.



would be standing in terms of Open Science. It was thus rather hard to base our activities on predictable common ground.

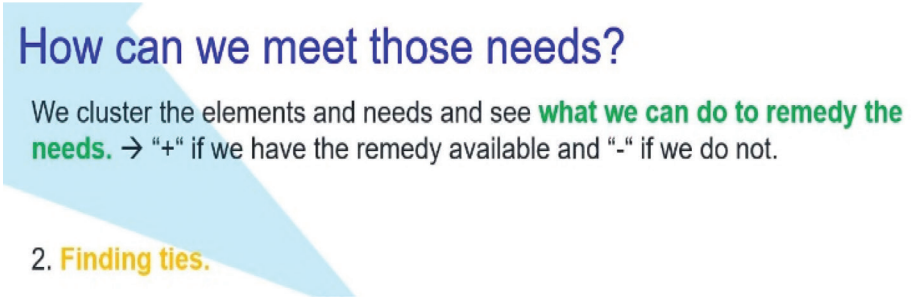
4.1. First Meet-Up: The Open Science Community – Perspective, Approaches and Outlook

In the first meet-up, we decided to find out about the participants' perspectives on Open Science and their adherence to the Open Science community or a set of Open Science-related subcommunities. Beyond that, we wanted to find out about what they were still lacking or needing to work effectively, creating a cross-section of our community- or communities-related status quo. Beyond that, we strove to help each other work more effectively – both with regards to peer-related tips and to the end of finding prospective fields of action for our Open Science-related work package in the alliance. We did so by asking the participants to write down key words about their involvement in Open Science as well as about what they were still needing or lacking in that regard. The idea was to use sticky notes as visualised above and to attach these to a whiteboard. To pursue a uniform structure on the sticky notes for the subsequent activity, we provided the participants with a visualisation of how we wanted them to write on the sticky notes (see Figure 2). On this basis, we as organisers were planning to cluster the sheets according to communities in a discussion with the participants. At the same time, we were going to see what we could do the remedy the participants' needs and to find out about ties among the different subcommunities (see Figure 3). During the clustering, we were going to write down the findings of the two tasks in green and orange on the whiteboard next to the respective sticky note clusters.

While writing on the sheets and putting them on the whiteboard worked out well, the subsequent clustering activity did not go as planned as the sticky notes did not stick well and constantly fell to the ground. Beyond that, the notes and the writing on it was too small, so many participants could not see and read them well. With around 30 participants, the meet-up attracted more people than anticipated, so the overall number of notes was quite large and thus hard to cluster without losing track of the whiteboard's structure. This meant that we had to improvise. At some stage, we left the notes where they were, going through them with the group and looking for solutions jointly. In this vein and independently from the clustering, the group got an idea

Fig. 2: Visualizing the first meet-up's main task.

Fig. 3: Clustering the findings.



of who was in the room and how people were in different subcommunities. Beyond that, there were several needs or lacks that we could cater to quite effectively in the group. For example, one person struggled with how to find out whether an open access journal was reliable. The group quickly came up with the idea of using the Directory of Open Access Journals (https://doaj.org/). In other cases, we discussed possible overarching solutions and measures that could prospectively help the community as a whole like publication-related deals or OpenAIRE-related activities as solutions only conceivable beyond the influence of individual institutions.

After the session, we were uncertain how to feel about it. On the one hand, we had a good discussion with our participants. On the other hand, a range of

things felt like they had failed quite obviously. Fortunately, a number of our participants came to see us, stating that they had quite enjoyed the interactive set-up and the discussion. Some said they had quite liked how we dealt with things that were not going as planned. The sum of the feedback confirmed to us that we had been right in choosing an interactive format and the discussion that emerged out of it, no matter whether everything had gone as planned or not. To the participants, the most important part seemed to have been a meaningful, fruitful and helpful discussion about Open Science. Reflecting on the meet-up, we came up with ideas on how to improve the main part:

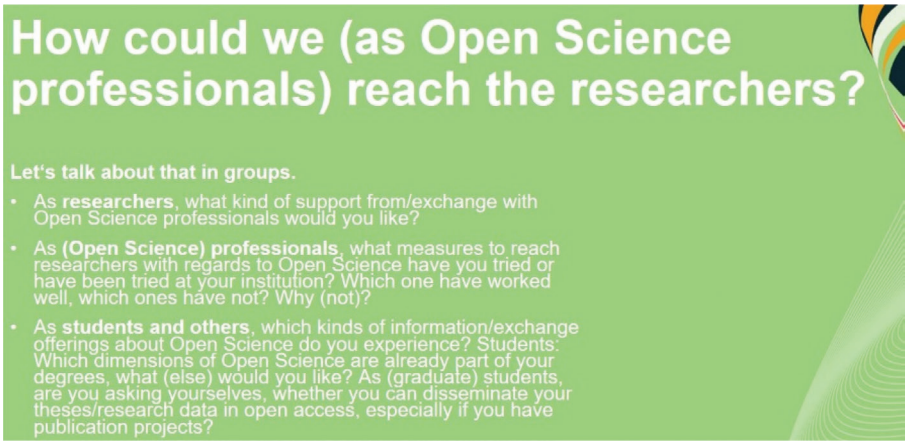
- Be sure to use sheets large enough to write on with bold felt pens or the like.
- Use magnets or scotch tape instead of relying on sticky notes.
- Do not use pens, biros or other writing utensils that invite small and thin writings that may be hard to read.
- Think on your feet. If you have more participants than expected, spontaneously set a maximum number of notes per person so you do not lose track of the contributions.

4.2. Second Meet-Up: Reaching the Researchers

Even though – or maybe especially because – our first meet-up's interactive format had not quite worked as planned, we decided to go for another interactive format in *Reaching the Researchers*. Apart from that, an interactive format suggested itself to us, as we wanted to learn about as many different perspectives as possible on how to reach out to researchers. Moreover, apart from our general faith in interactive sessions, the previous meet-up's feedback had confirmed to us that interactivity was in the participants' interest.

To involve everyone's pre-knowledge, expertise and perspective on our scope, we divided our around 30 participants into small groups of up to six participants and asked them to discuss a range of target group-specific questions (for more details see Figure 4), visualising their responses and findings on posters. To branch out across groups, we had planned to pin the posters on the walls and to do a gallery walk, which means that people walk from poster to poster for inspirations and to exchange ideas with the participants they meet by the respective posters. In principle, our methodology worked well. However, after the poster creation phase, we realised that our questions had been too varied and too multi-dimensional, lacking sharpness and

Fig. 4: Mapping the diversity of questions raised.



a clear sense of direction. Besides, it would have been useful to bear in mind disciplinary diversity to provide a clearer focus. Due to all that, people had talked about a range of different topics which were somewhat related to our scope rather than about how exactly to reach out to researchers. The range of different and divergent approaches on the posters mirrored this lack of a joint direction (see: Open Science Meet-Ups, n.d. for the posters). As organisers, we took from that situation that it is more important to ask a clear-cut question than to try to involve every single participant or possible target group. Even if not every single participant can connect the question with their preknowledge, they may still be able to join the discussion when someone else contributes an idea that resonates with them. Still, when wrapping up the meet-up, we realised that everyone had profited in some way from the session. Moreover, just like in our first meet-up, several participants told us after the session that they had enjoyed the interactivity we had involved.

4.3. Third Meet-Up: Panel Discussion on (Social) Developments Related to Open Science in ERUA and Future Perspectives

In view of the advent of ERUA's second funding period in November 2023 and the Re:ERUA project's upcoming end in September 2024, looking at which grounds had been covered in the alliance in terms of Open Science and where the alliance could go from there seemed to suggest itself as the

most suitable topic for the final meet-up. This tied in with the 2024 ERUA summit being the last one in which the University of Konstanz, the alliance's then-Open Science lead, participated – which entails passing the Open Science baton to other alliance members in the context of composition-related shifts within the alliance. Given that the ERUA 2024 summit was organised as an amalgam of the annual ERUA summit and the SOCIN'24 Conference (https://socin2024.mruni.eu/), dedicated to the topic Social Innovations for Transformative Society, we decided to involve an optional social element in our scope to address both of the conference's main target groups. We did this by adding "(Social)" to the title, giving participants, as will be described below, the option to address social aspects behind Open Science at their will. As it is one of the main motivations behind Open Science to open up academic findings to the public and thus to the benefit of a larger social sphere, this addition and the prospect of having potential social science-related perspectives seemed to enhance the original meet-up plans organically.

As we felt that a scope as far-reaching as the whole range of ERUA-related Open Science developments and potential future developments can be discussed best when involving a range of different perspectives in an interactive fashion, we had the idea of approaching the topic via a panel discussion. After the warm-up, the organisers decided to direct some initial questions on general and Open Science-related issues to the panellists to break the ice before passing the floor to the participants for their questions and comments. From the organising stage onwards, it was clear to us that the panel's composition and the range of specialisations and perspectives that went with it would be pivotal for our meet-up's success. In this vein, we focussed on involving multi-faceted perspectives with regard to gender, affiliation and Open Science subfield-related specialisation. We ended up having male and female panellists from four different countries and institutions, representing the Open Science movement's main fields Open Access and research data management. Including perspectives from both within the project and from the outside, we felt well prepared to perform the panel discussion. This feeling turned out to be justified: As the panellists were responding to our first two questions, we quickly realised that not just one or two individuals per question, as we had anticipated, were eager to respond, but instead they were all eager to bring in their perspectives, building on each other's responses harmoniously and organically. This led to the overall responses being even richer, as well as more multi-faceted and more detailed than we had hoped. However, as we had started late and as we needed more time per question

than we had assumed in the planning stages, we spontaneously decided to drop our third and fourth icebreaker question and instead passed the floor directly to our around 20 participants to make sure that everyone could ask their questions. As we had planned our questions as a mere icebreaker, this did not have a negative impact on the meet-up's structure. In fact, we soon realized that two icebreaker questions were enough as many people in the room were eager to contribute their questions. Those who did not contribute their own questions seemed to be listening eagerly, which was also fine for us as we knew that especially beginners were not likely to have enough of an Open Science-related overview to feel willing to contribute their own questions. However, we knew they might still profit from listening to other people's questions and the respective responses. Again, in most cases most panellists were eager to contribute their standpoints, their responses organically building on each other. In fact, in the case of several questions some participants were also eager to share their thoughts on some of the matters and the panel's responses, which made the responses even more multi-layered and diverse than we had hoped. Due to the discussion's richness and the wide range of topics covered, it is impossible to discuss the course of the discussion in greater detail. Moreover, it would exceed the frame and the scope of this paper, which is dedicated to our methodological framework and the lessons we learned after having performed the meet-ups.

All in all, as our methodology had worked out very well, we were very happy with how the meet-up turned out. Beyond that, various participants and most panellists told us afterwards that they had profited from the meet-up and enjoying the way we had organised it. One researcher approached us stating that, having been sceptical about Open Science beforehand, they were now eager to find out more about the field in order to see how they could implement that in their professional life. At the same time, they enquired after the link to our modular ERUA Open Science Courses to find out more, which we gladly provided (Heber et al., 2022, 2023). Furthermore, several participants highlighted the quality of these modular Open Science courses, both among the panellists and the audience.

5. Closing the Live Meet-Ups

As the first meet-up was, among other things, about the Open Science communities' needs, we felt it was important to provide contact points to which

the participants could reach out for information or assistance. We did so to make sure they knew they were part of a community with plenty of support-related offerings so nobody felt alone with the matters they were dealing with. We provided them with links to three central information portals on Open Science as well as the information that most academic institutions have a local contact point that provides Open Science-related consultations upon request. Besides that, we informed them about the monthly virtual Meet-Ups as a low-threshold sphere of exchange on all Open Science-related topics, asking at the same time whether they had topics they wanted to discuss there.

In a similar fashion, we wrapped up the second meet-up with some information on the Open Science offerings we had developed over the course of the first Re:ERUA year. As the rather generalist nature of *Reaching the Researchers* did not entail any urgent need for general Open Science-related content, we decided to do without additional contact points like information portals. Instead, we decided to hand the closing remark to the participants via the so-called flashlight method, which means that everyone briefly talks about their main takeaway or takeaways from the session. This served as a means of reflection for all participants and showed us how the workshop had resonated with our participants. Doing so, as organisers we realised that everyone had profited in some way from the session, despite the fuzziness of our main task's questions.

As far as the final meet-up is concerned, we had not planned any specific conclusion, assuming – and rightfully so – that the panel discussion would end organically. Besides, as we had already presented our Open Science-related offerings and activities in the beginning, there was not much subject-related to add.

6. Conclusion

Looking back on all three live meet-ups, especially the last one, where our methodology worked out completely, we felt we had made a good decision pursuing interactive sessions. In light of the rewarding and validating experiences provided by the three live meet-ups, we strongly encourage trying out interactive formats in conference-like environments to the benefit of all participants. While this approach may initially seem counterintuitive, particularly given the traditional presentation-and-questions format familiar to

many academic players, it offers significant potential to foster deeper engagement and collaboration. In fact, there is a range of related offerings in the Open Science community like barcamps and staff weeks that we would like to refer to as additional means of inspiration for everyone who would like to perform similar formats (Schneider et al., 2021a, 2021b). By adopting these interactive approaches, we not only enhance the conversation within our community but also foster a more vibrant and inclusive landscape for Open Science dialogue in ERUA. As ERUA's first funding phase and the Re:ERUA project have both come to a close, it is hard to say to what extent the contacts established and the scope discussed during the live meet-ups will picked up again in the second phase of ERUA. This ties in with the second ERUA phase's smaller emphasis on Open Science and the fact that the alliance's so-far lead in Open Science, the University of Konstanz, has left the alliance, handing the field of Open Science over to the remaining as well as some new ERUA members.

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