LIBER QUARTERLY
The Journal of the Association of European Research Libraries
Vol. 35, (2025) 1–26 | e-ISSN: 2213-056X

Extending Awareness of Open Science via Peers: The ERUA Open Science Ambassador Programme

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Abstract

Reaching researchers in terms of Open Science-related matters is a big challenge for Open Science professionals. To encourage peer exchange among researchers working at universities of the European Reform University Alliance (ERUA), we launched the ERUA Open Science Ambassador Programme. In this programme, four researchers working at different universities of the alliance took on the role as Open Science ambassadors. This paper illuminates the programme's aims and discusses the risks we faced. It outlines how we got the programme going, explaining how we recruited our ambassadors, how we connected them, what knowledge and materials we equipped them with and how we communicated the programme within the alliance. Furthermore, the paper delineates the ambassadors' activities, giving recommendations based on the challenges we encountered and the experiences we made. The paper is a valuable source of information for institutions that consider setting up similar Open Science ambassador programmes.

Uopen Journals | http://liberquarterly.eu/ | DOI: 10.53377/lq.22303

Keywords: Open Science; ambassador; European Reform University Alliance; Re:ERUA

1. Introduction

Open Science improves the productivity, quality and responsiveness of research, which is why the European Commission considers it a priority (European Commission, n.d.). Even though the movement is generally on the rise, there is still much work to do for it to become the common way of doing research in terms of, for instance, Open Access publishing or research data sharing (Ministry of Higher Education and Research, 2021; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Santoro, 2022).

One way of spreading awareness on Open Science to enhance its growth are ambassador programmes. According to literature, ambassadors cater to various needs and functions. They promote specific interests (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2008), increasing awareness on these issues as credible spokespersons who encourage changes in attitude and behaviour through positive word-of-mouth by, for instance, involving their networks, getting access to target groups which would otherwise be hard to reach (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). Ancona and Caldwell (1988) summarise ambassadors' actions in five aspects: developing communication channels, informing, coordinating, negotiating and influencing. Ambassadors can be active in many different areas. They can promote brands (Müller, 2018; Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018; Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2006), organisations (Van Zoonen et al., 2014, 2018) or places (Andersson & Ekman, 2009; Chancellor et al., 2021).

Along these lines, promoting Open Science through ambassadorship is a common practice. Open Science ambassador programmes have been implemented by a range of universities (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2024; Maastricht University, n.d.), journals (eLife Sciences Publications, 2022), PhD networks (European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers, n.d.; Max Planck Society, n.d.), European-funded initiatives (ENLIGHT, n.d.; EOSC-Pillar, n.d.) and non-profit organisations (Software Heritage, n.d.). Despite the prevalence of Open Science ambassador programmes, literature on how to establish them is scant. So far, to our knowledge, the existing literature only briefly touches on Open Science ambassador programmes in the

frame of larger initiatives (Armeni et al., 2021; Knauer & Westerhof, 2024), has a constrained focus (Olyhoek et al., 2018) or addresses library staff instead of researchers (Fernández-Marcial & González-Solar, 2021; Sewell & Kingsley, 2017). By outlining our programme in detail, we expand the current knowledge on Open Science ambassador programmes. In this vein, we intend this paper to serve as a means of inspiration for others interested in setting up similar programmes.

The frame in which our programme was conceptualised and implemented is the *European Reform University Alliance* (ERUA). Here, the ERUA Open Science Ambassador Programme was a deliverable of project Re:ERUA ("Re:" stands for research), which aimed at developing ERUA's research trajectory (European Commission, 2024). In its first funding phase, ERUA comprised of five universities: New Bulgarian University (Bulgaria), Roskilde University (Denmark), University of the Aegean (Greece), University of Konstanz (Germany) and University of Paris 8 (France). Re:ERUA ran from October 2021 until September 2024. The ERUA Open Science Ambassador Programme commenced only towards the end of the project, officially starting in January 2024 (see the programme's website: https://archive.erua-eui.eu/open-science/open-science-ambassadors/). As the lead of the Re:ERUA work package on Open Science, the University of Konstanz' Team Open Science was in charge of the programme.

This article conveys our approach with regards to conceptualising the programme. It also showcases what we achieved in the relatively short time span during which the programme ran and elaborates on the challenges we faced. In this vein, the paper sheds light on the ambassadors' activities in the final months of Re:ERUA after the programme's official launch. To this end, we will first introduce the programme's objectives and motivations as well as the risks we detected when planning the programme. On this basis, we will outline how we implemented the programme, reflecting back to whether and how the risks we had predicted materialised. On this basis, we shall provide recommendations. To get there, we will first illuminate how we recruited our ambassadors before delineating how we equipped them with knowledge and material. Subsequently, we will present the ambassadors' activities. We shall conclude the article with an outlook chapter that explains which challenges the programme may face in the long run. We hope that this publication will serve as a means of inspiration for others who may be interested in setting up similar programmes.

2. Conceptualising the Programme

Based on the research proposal behind the Re:ERUA project, the ERUA Open Science Ambassador Programme was planned to pursue three core objectives: promoting Open Science, advancing institutional Open Science development and creating synergies within the ambassador network.

2.1. Promoting Open Science

The programme's core objectives were to raise awareness of and to increase the support for Open Science at the ambassadors' universities as well as, where suitable and feasible, beyond. As target groups, we mainly had researchers of all career levels in mind, but also other groups such as students. Along these lines, we envisioned the ambassadors to offer consultation sessions on Open Science-related issues, to involve the publicly available Open Science Fundamental Course (Heber et al., 2022) and Open Science Advanced Course (Heber et al., 2023) we had previously developed in the Re:ERUA project and to support their consultations with promotion material. Beyond that, we envisioned events organised by different parties as another prospective field of involvement – both in terms of events in which Open Science plays a key role, such as the Open Access Week, and with regards to academic events in which Open Science still lacks representation. The idea behind this was to tie in with and to thereby enhance existing offerings to the end of advancing Open Science by being proactive and approachable in social contexts. If possible in view of their capacities, we envisioned the ambassadors to also expand their activities beyond their universities to reach a broader academic network.

2.2. Advancing the Universities' Institutional Open Science Development

Another idea behind the programme was to advance Open Science-related developments at the alliance's universities. In our concept, this entailed initiating and/or maintaining contact with departments relevant to this aim (e.g. rectorate, library) and committees to advocate Open Science-related developments within the individual universities. We envisioned one possible outcome of such an institutional advocacy an ambassador's contribution to new or updated institutional Open Science policies.

2.3. Creating Synergies within the ERUA Open Science Ambassador Network

From the beginning, we envisioned the ambassadors to act not only separately from each other, but also to pursue joint efforts with their peers at the other ERUA universities. Along these lines, we felt it was important that the ambassadors exchange experiences and best practices to learn from each other, creating or seizing synergies. If, for example, one university's ambassador could not properly dedicate themselves to a certain Open Science-related issue (e.g. a discipline-specific question), we wanted that ambassador to be able to consult on a low-threshold basis another university's ambassador for help. To that end, we wanted to provide the ambassadors with opportunities for networking by encouraging them to meet up regularly. Here, we envisioned the organisers' role to be mainly administrative and coordinative. At the same time, we wanted to assess how the ambassadors' efforts were going and whether there were programme-related issues that needed to be discussed. Apart from these regular meetings, we wanted the ambassadors to be able to get in touch on an occasional bilateral basis, such as whenever an ambassador needed a colleague's support as described above.

3. Bearing in Mind the Programme's Risks

The ambassador concept faced certain challenges and risks we had to bear in mind to yield success. The most obvious risk we detected was finding volunteers who would take on the role as ERUA Open Science Ambassadors. We expected this to be challenging as most researchers have busy schedules and as we could not offer them any financial reward. Moreover, we were aware that the programme's success would depend on individual aspects like an ambassador's recognition within their academic community or their communicative skills. On a less individual note, we knew it would be important to factor in intercultural aspects as academic environments vary across countries. Along these lines, we planned for the programme's implementation as well as the respective ambassadors' degrees and forms of involvement to vary across ERUA. Along these lines, the programme did not presuppose any fixed expectations for the ambassadors, both to minimise its risk of failure and to give the ambassadors plenty of creative space. We deemed both elements important prerequisites for the programme as a whole to flourish independently from each institution's individual contributions.

4. Recruiting Ambassadors

We planned for each university to appoint one or more ambassadors, preferably researchers from assistant professor level upwards. At this stage, we expected early-career researchers to be more receptive to the role for profile-related reasons. We strove for researchers as they were part of the main target group we wanted the ambassadors to reach and thus in many regards closer to the researchers than Open Science professionals. In similar terms, we assumed professors to be more influential than Open Science professionals and thus to be more impactful as ambassadors. Apart from that, we wanted the ambassadors to cover different disciplines and to be knowledgeable about as well as experienced in Open Science, especially with regards to the core topics Open Access, Open Data/Research Data Management (RDM) and Open Educational Resources (OER). Apart from that, we wanted them to be committed to their role at least until Re:ERUA's end in September 2024 to make sure that the programme would be operational throughout the rest of the project duration. To this end, we felt it was important for them to have an affinity for ERUA or at least, to be open-minded about the alliance and its goals. At the same time, we wanted to encourage the ambassadors to fill their roles beyond September 2024 to the end of creating a more permanent network in the alliance beyond the Re:ERUA project.

As expected, the recruitment process differed across universities. At two universities, members of the Re:ERUA Open Science work package became Open Science ambassadors. One of them was an established and active work package member, the other was rather new to the work package. At the other two universities, the work package members of these universities contacted suitable researchers at their institutions for the role. In both cases, the work package board members used their personal networks to find suitable candidates, contacting researchers they had been in touch with, for instance within the scope of earlier Open Science-related measures.

To succeed, we knew it would be crucial to emphasise the benefits associated with the role as a means of incentivisation, such as networking opportunities with researchers which we expected might lead to research cooperations. Beyond that, we stressed as advantages the increasing importance of non-publication-related activities in career development as well as the ambassadors' potential higher visibility at their home institution, which we assumed

might help, for instance, new professors attract students to their courses. Moreover, we chose to elaborate on the scope of the ambassadors' role, such as possible activities, to make the role tangible. At the same time, we stressed the option of not having to spend too much time on designing extra activities, but instead to (re-)frame – and perhaps adapt – ongoing activities as ambassador activities. We did so to show that an involvement in the programme was likely to require less efforts than some candidates might have assumed. Along the same lines, we made sure to encourage every ambassador to bring their individual time-related capacities and their own ideas to the table. Beyond that, we decided to emphasise the candidates' involvement in a multidisciplinary network of ambassadors to convey that they did not have to feel responsible for or knowledgeable about all academic disciplines they might get in touch with. At the same time, we stressed that we would not expect them to carry the programme as individuals, but as part of a network of peers. Based on these experiences, we recommend providing examples of researchers who are thriving in their ambassador role as a means of inspiration and support.

As expected, the recruitment process as well as the ambassadors' motivation to accept the role varied from country to country. Inquiring the ambassadors about their motivation after recruitment revealed that intrinsic motives prevailed. Ambassadors described themselves as passionate about specific areas of Open Science, wanting to promote these areas and to leverage their role in order to contribute to their own institution (e.g. by fostering a creative and collaborative culture), the research community (e.g. by enhancing collaboration) as well as the wider society (e.g. by supporting evidence-based policy-making). Widening their horizons and developing new competences, such as improving their own Open Science skills and learning about others' practices, were further drivers. Apart from that, extrinsic motives played a role, such as the advantages of having an "official" title, which one ambassador considered beneficial for a funding application. Furthermore, what won people over was the organisers promising the ambassadors continuous support. Besides that, rapport with the organising team as well as assuring the ambassadors that the role could be filled with little efforts proved helpful.

One institution communicated predicting a comparatively low demand in contributing to the ambassador programme, having already focused on building administrative support for Open Science as part of its research

support. This meant that recruiting an Open Science ambassador was not a top priority for this institution. While this was, in synergetic and capacity-related terms, a bit of a setback, it ended up not having a negative impact on the programme as a whole as we had factored in that kind of imbalance in involvement from the beginning to make sure that the programme could work independently from individual contributions.

Despite one university not participating, the ambassador programme ended up involving academics from different disciplines and Open Science-related specialisations. As expected, two early-career researchers accepted the role. Moreover, we managed to recruit two mid-career researchers. Table 1 provides an overview.

5. Connecting and Equipping the Ambassadors

Once we had recruited all of our ambassadors, we organised a virtual kick-off meeting as the programme's official launch. The kick-off's objectives were to let the ambassadors get to know each other, and to let them exchange their motivations and experiences on Open Science, especially with regard to the different disciplines they represented. Apart from that, we wanted to talk about their ideas on promoting Open Science and to discuss the next steps to get the programme going. Furthermore, we pointed to useful material and offerings developed within Re:ERUA, such as the two Open Science courses.

As previously mentioned, we planned to discuss the specific activities with the ambassadors to ensure that all activities would be compatible with their interests and schedules. Moreover, to enhance the ambassadors' intrinsic motivation, we deemed it paramount to encourage them to bring in their own ideas. Beyond enhancing motivation, we hoped that involving their ideas would lead to more genuine and more multi-facetted activities than what we might propose. Beyond that, we deemed it important to suggest to the ambassadors the involvement of concrete Open Science-related examples, such as case studies, to make Open Science graspable, especially for players with little Open Science experience.

After recruiting the ambassadors, we organised a train-the-trainer programme to provide them with the knowledge and the skills required for their

Table 1: The ERUA Open Science Ambassadors.

Ambassador	University	Position and Field	Expertise	Motivation
Charalampos (Harris) Alexopoulos	University of the Aegean	Assistant Professor in Information Systems	Open Data, Citizen Science	Addressing societal challenges, fostering a collaborative culture, creating a more inclusive academic ecosystem, supporting other researchers
Stan Bogdanov	New Bulgarian University	Chief Assistant Professor in English Studies	Open Access, Open Data	Leveraging enthusiasm, being the most knowledgeable about Open Science at his institution
Elias Bouacida	University of Paris 8	Assistant Professor in Economics	Open Data	Improving practices, giving something back to the community, learning about other practices
Gillian Kiliani	University of Konstanz	Senior Scientist in Physics	OER	Widening horizon, enhancing her own reputation, having rapport with organisers, promised support and little efforts

Next, we will delineate how we connected the ambassadors to build up the network. Furthermore, we will discuss how we equipped them with knowledge and material.

position. Train-the-trainer programmes have been successful in Open Science for years (Biernacka et al., 2024; Brinken et al., 2019). As the ambassadors had different areas of Open Science expertise (see Table 1), the train-the-trainer programme was designed to build up basic competences in all three Open Science core topics, i.e. Open Access, Open Data/RDM and OER. Beyond that, the programme raised the ambassadors' awareness of discipline-specific differences within Open Science, for instance with regards to potential reservations of researchers with a humanities background. It involved three units in total for which the organisers recruited experts as instructors from the University of Konstanz' Team Open Science, offering one 45-minute session per core topic. Each session included an expert presentation of around 25 minutes; the rest of the meetings was reserved for questions and discussions. Table 2 sums up the key information.

In addition to the train-the-trainer programme, we provided the ambassadors with promotion material. In collaboration with the Open Science work package and the University of Konstanz' Team Open Science communication expert, we created a modifiable flyer template and a poster (see Appendix 1 and 2). In both templates, the ambassadors could insert their personal details, add any other information they deemed useful, or translate the text.

The flyer was designed as a foldable A5 8-pager with the aim to provide not only information on the ambassadors, but also on core areas of Open Science. It contains pages on the principles and advantages of Open Science in general as well as on Open Access, Open Data/RDM and OER. For more information, the flyer involves QR codes which, for instance, lead to the two Open Science courses or to well-known information portals. For online usage, textual links could replace the QR codes. Beyond that, the flyer provides general information on the ambassadors as well as a frame for details about the ambassador using the material. Apart from our own use of the flyers, we encouraged the ambassadors to use it in their communication, ideally via a range of different channels to ensure an optimal extent of dissemination (e.g. website, email, social media, personal communication). In addition to that, we created a poster template in collaboration with our communication expert and the project's Open Science work package. We designed the poster as a predominantly visual eye-catcher with placeholders, like the ones in the flyer, for the ambassadors' personal and contact details.

Table 2: Summary of the individual train-the-trainer sessions.

Core area	Expert and function	Scope covered
Open Access	Andreas Kirchner	– Introduction to Open Access and the academic publishing system
	Open Access Officer, University of Konstanz	– Predatory publishing
	Co-founder, board member and editor, Meson Press	– Open Access support offered by funding organisations
		– Finding Open Access publications
RDM	Maximilian Müller	– Introduction to RDM
	RDM specialist, University of Konstanz Data Steward for the national bioimaging consortium NFDI4Bioimage	– Advantages of publishing research data
		– Quality criteria for research data publications
OER	Paulina Helmecke	– Definition of OER
	Open Education Coordinator, University of Konstanz	– Advantages and challenges behind OER
	Maximilian Heber	– Open licenses
	Re:ERUA Open Science Work Package Member and OER expert, University of Konstanz	

6. Communicating the Programme within ERUA

As one of our first steps, we asked the ERUA website's administrators to build a subpage with short profiles for each ambassador as a low-threshold information offering. To get there, we had created a profile template, defining some information about each ambassador as mandatory (name, position, discipline, area of Open Science expertise, e-mail address, picture), while the ambassadors were free to provide additional details such as a quote and links to websites, social media accounts or ORCID profiles (see the website here: https://archive.erua-eui.eu/open-science/open-science-ambassadors/). For communicative purposes, we equipped two of our ambassadors with functional e-mail addresses, which we embedded on the website. Together, the organisers and ambassadors decided that the organisers would change information on the website at any stage upon the ambassadors' request. Unfortunately, creating the webpage took very long. In comparable situations in the future, the organisers will try to get in contact with the respective website administrators early on so there is enough time for setting up the website. In general terms, getting in touch early with website administrators comes highly recommended if others interested in setting up similar programmes want to set up a website outside their home institution.

Apart from a website, we deemed creative social media content valuable to reach a broad audience. Here, we recommend factoring in the ambassadors' individual practices and levels of affinity to producing social media content. We shall discuss this in greater detail when shedding light on the ambassadors' activities. Another way of introducing Open Science ambassadors, which we did not get to use, might be at events, at research group meetings or symposia, or via university-wide media such as newsletters. Along these dissemination-related lines, it is uncertain how the individual universities raised and spread awareness on their ambassadors, i.e. where and how they employ, for example, the flyers and the posters. If Re:ERUA had run for a longer period of time, one of our next steps would have been to share and exchange dissemination-related experiences to learn from each other to the end of promoting the programme on a larger scale.

7. The Ambassadors' Activities

This subchapter provides an overview of our ambassadors' activities. These reflect the ERUA Open Science Ambassador Programme's aims: promoting

Open Science, advancing institutional Open Science development and creating synergies within the ambassador network. In the following, we will give examples of the ambassadors' activities and planned activities pertaining to these three aims. All activities took place from the programme's official launch in January 2024 until the Re:ERUA project's end in September 2024. Some activities were part of the ambassadors' regular work, while they engaged in others specifically due to their ambassadorial role.

7.1. Promoting Open Science

Despite the short period of time from the programme's kick-off until the time of writing this publication, the ambassadors have engaged in many activities to promote Open Science. In sum, they have been promoting Open Science via institutional websites, events, teaching, editorship, collaboration with local specialists, social media as well as research projects.

7.1.1. Institutional Websites

Among the first measures and as a consequence of the ambassadors' involvement, some universities began spreading awareness on an Open Science and the ambassador programme via institutional websites. For example, the University of the Aegean has established a website on Open Science which includes information on the local ambassador (2024). The University of Konstanz has integrated a subpage on Gillian Kiliani on its Open Science website (Open Science Ambassador, 2024). This subpage provides general information on the ambassador, promotion material, contact details as well as social media content and links. The University of Paris 8 plans to create a similar website.

7.1.2. Events

The ambassadors have engaged in a range of events to promote Open Science, such as the ERUA Open Science Meet-Ups. These meet-ups were monthly, mostly virtual 45-minute meetings dedicated to one specific Open Science topic per session. They usually involved a max. 20-minute impulse talk which was followed by questions and discussions (Heber, 2023, 2024).

Stan Bogdanov spoke at the meet-up "Pitfalls of Open Access and How to Handle Them" (January 2024), Gillian Kiliani spoke at "Open Educational Resources within the ERUA Open Science Ambassador Programme: A Best Practice Example" (May 2024). Both meet-ups were among the most successful ones in the series in terms of the discussions' liveliness as well as in terms of attendance. Both meet-ups involved a high number of people from beyond ERUA, for instance from other European Universities Initiative alliances. Once a year, we organised an on-site ERUA Open Science Live Meet-Up during the annual ERUA Summit. At the 2024 ERUA Summit, Stan Bogdanov participated in the panel discussion "(Social) Developments related to Open Science in ERUA and Future Perspectives" within the scope of an ERUA Open Science Live Meet-Up. This met the participants' patent interest.

Beyond the meet-ups, Gillian Kiliani participated in a round table discussion at the conference "Paving the Future" within the scope of EUniWell, another European Universities Initiative alliance. At this event, Gillian spoke about establishing a joint Open Science strategy as well as the role of OER in Open Science. Stan Bogdanov gave a speech titled "Promoting Diamond Open Access through New Bulgarian University's Serials" at the conference "Advancing Open Science: The Barcelona Declaration and Open Research Information", organised by Mykolas Romeris University (Vilnius, Lithuania) and the Lithuanian Research Council. Moreover, Stan Bogdanov has actively promoted the projects' Open Science Basic and Advanced Course. Due to a time conflict, the New Bulgarian University's library director substituted for Stan to promote the courses at the 2024 ERUA Annual Doctoral Conference. Furthermore, Stan Bogdanov accepted an invitation by another university in Sofia (Bulgaria) to give a workshop on Open Science. Participating in activities that had an impact beyond their own university and ERUA, Gillian Kiliani and Stan Bogdanov reached a wide range of individuals that might otherwise not be involved in Open Science-related events.

7.1.3. Teaching

The ambassadors have engaged in educational offerings. At the New Bulgarian University, Stan Bogdanov will incorporate the two previously mentioned Open Science courses into the New Bulgarian University's e-learning platform. The fundamental course will be self-paced, self-taught

and in English with PhD students as its main target group, while the advanced course will be offered in Bulgarian, on site and with a monthly focus.

In 2024, Elias Bouacida gave a talk in a seminar on ethics in research at the University of Paris 8. From 2025 on, he will be perpetuating the offer in the form of a PhD course on ethics in research, particularly experimental research, together with two collaborators in Paris. The course includes sessions on Open Science and reproducibility, which all PhD candidates in experimental research shall attend in the long run. The ambassador programme proved crucial for establishing this course, as, in Elias' view, the idea of starting this course would not have emerged without the ambassador programme, or at least not as quickly.

7.1.4. Editorship

One of Stan Bogdanov's main Open Science-related activities is his editorship of the Diamond Open Access journal *English Studies at NBU* (https://esnbu.org/). This activity is another example of promoting and practising Open Science beyond an ambassador's home university.

7.1.5. Collaborating with Local Specialists

In order to prepare herself for her promotion activities, Gillian Kiliani asked to meet the Team Open Science to get an overview of the Open Science competencies at her university. To this end, she joined a Team Open Science live meeting. There, all team members introduced themselves and their work. This provided Gillian Kiliani not only with the knowledge of who to contact with regard to her own work, but also with an overview of potential contacts to refer to when approached by peers. Apart from that, Team Open Science staff members meet Gillian Kilian regularly to update her on current Open Science developments.

7.1.6. Social Media

One of Gillian Kiliani's most impactful activities so far is a short video she and her colleague Jonathan Ristow produced for social media (see Figure 1).

Fig. 1: Impressions from Gillian Kiliani's video.

In this 60-second video, she summarises the advantages of Open Science and its core areas Open Access, Open Data and OER. The video appeals to viewers by including catchy phrases, animations, changes of locations (she recorded the video at different locations in the university) as well as clothing, finger snapping and an auditory element signalling the aforementioned visual changes. The University of Konstanz' communications department posted the video as a reel on the university's Instagram channel (Kiliani & University of Konstanz, 2024). Its caption includes information on who to contact for further information (the ambassador or the Team Open Science) and links to the respective websites as well as e-mail addresses.

7.1.7. Research Projects

Gillian Kiliani and her team have applied for an outreach project, which has been approved by the German Research Foundation. The project is about educational games based on physical experiments, which are going to take place on site, but will also be made available to a broad audience in the form of CC BY-SA 4.0-licensed videos and a playable online version of the game.

Gillian Kiliani and her team explicitly stated the projects' Open Science character to project reviewers.

7.2. Advancing Institutional Open Science Development

The ambassadors have been involved in fostering Open Science at their institutions. At the University of the Aegean, appointing an Open Science ambassador underlines the university's view of Open Science as a topic of strategic importance. The ambassador's appointment has led the local Re:ERUA/ERUA scientific coordinator, who is also a member of the Administrative Council, to submit and present the Re:ERUA Open Science strategic plan and ambassador concept to the university's Administrative Council and the Senate for their approval.

At the New Bulgarian University, Stan Bogdanov's role as ambassador has empowered him to spark discussions about reconsidering the university's infrastructural setup. He could imagine establishing a specialised research support unit dealing with Open Science that needs managerial approval. As the University of Konstanz with its strong Team Open Science is a national forerunner, Stan Bogdanov and the New Bulgarian University's library director visited the University of Konstanz. They did so to get an overview of the Team Open Science's structure, specialisations, and principles of operation in order to be able to assess whether, and if so, how, a similar unit is plausible at New Bulgarian University. This visit was a first step in achieving the ambassador programme's goal of advancing an institution's infrastructural Open Science development.

7.3. Creating Synergies within the Ambassador Network

It takes time for synergies and collaboration to develop and this also depends on the activities performed by the ambassadors as some activities are more conducive to creating synergies with other ambassadors than others. In our case, some ambassadors met face to face which certainly helped strengthen their relation in addition to the range of regular virtual meetings. Elias Bouacida and Stan Bogdanov met at the ERUA Summit 2024 in Vilnius, while Gillian Kiliani and Stan Bogdanov met during the latter's visit at the University of Konstanz.

8. Outlook

Due to their diverse academic and Open Science backgrounds as well as their motivation, all four researchers have proven to be very good fits as ambassadors. However, independently from the ambassadors' motivation and involvement, our programme is facing two issues related to the short timespan the programme has been running: keeping the programme alive and discrepancies between aims and results. In the following, we will elaborate on these issues and propose recommendations for other institutions.

8.1. Keeping the Programme Alive

The biggest challenge at this stage is keeping the programme alive after the end of project Re:ERUA on September 30, 2024. The project's proposal scheduled the programme rather late, which means that it had comparatively little time to grow and flourish. Moreover, the University of Konstanz changed its role in the second funding phase of ERUA, becoming an associated partner. This was not planned at the time of submitting the Re:ERUA proposal. It means that the programme's lead leaves the alliance, handing the programme over to the remaining and new partners, which will continue the alliance in its second phase in a somewhat different composition beyond Re:ERUA. At the same time, the second phase of the alliance's smaller emphasis on Open Science is an obstacle impeding the programme's smooth continuation. All ambassadors are aware of the programme's official handover, having discussed it thoroughly in one of their regular meetings. In the same meeting, the programme's organisers strongly emphasised the wish that the ambassador programme continue. In general, all ambassadors are in favour of continuing the programme as well, but it is unclear at this point what format it is going to take and whether it is going to be embedded in any ERUA-related structures. At the same time, the ambassadors' willingness to continue can be seen as a validation of the programme. As a consequence of all this, we recommend institutions that consider establishing an ambassador programme to have a clear long-term perspective for the programme in mind. This ties in with project structures or foreseeable changes in resources entailing that efforts may only pay off for short periods of time. An ambassador programme is therefore built up best if there are persistent structures and resources.

8.2. Discrepancies between Aims and Results

Due to these unforeseen shifts, not all of the three aims formulated in the conceptualisation phase reached the momentum envisioned. So far, most of the ambassadors' activities have been about promoting Open Science, as activities of that kind can be implemented on a relatively low-threshold level. Compared to that, advancing the institutional Open Science development and creating synergies with other ambassadors are objectives that require more preparation, inter-institutional coordination and interaction – all of which needs more time than what we had in the remaining project duration. If the structures within the alliance had remained the same, the programme's organisers and the ambassadors could have hit the ground running, pursuing these objectives during the second phase of ERUA. In fact, on the basis of our activities, the alliance can still pursue these objectives, albeit with some staff-related changes and whatever holdups may go with these changes. To what extent and in which form this transpires remains to be seen.

Independently from these staff-related changes, advancing the institutional Open Science development requires an ambassador to have a certain standing at their institution. Besides that, the role of the ambassador needs to have established itself at the university so it is associated with respect and held in high regard. As previously mentioned, this takes time. In our case, the ambassadors first had to find themselves in their new role to see which activities they could and wanted to perform comfortably. Along similar lines, discussions with university management, for instance, contributing to new or updated Open Science policies, requires a lot of good preparation and interaction with academic support departments, such as Open Science or research support offices. Moreover, as predicted, there proved to be considerable structural differences between the individual universities which means that experiences made within one university do not necessarily translate to another. Due to that, we believe that it will take a bit more time until all ambassadors will be able to engage in advancing the institutional Open Science development on the same level.

In a similar fashion, creating synergies with other ambassadors takes time, too, as opportunities for synergy arise according to the extent of ambassador activities (e.g. consultations bringing up questions that another ambassador can answer). Moreover, it takes some time until the ambassadors know each other well enough to know with whom to connect in which kind of

situation. Besides factoring in enough time, institutions that consider building up their own ambassador programme should thus have a clear idea of the programme's objectives and target groups so the networking can work efficiently. The objectives should be realistic and in accordance with the organisers' as well as the ambassadors' resources. Moreover, regular contact among the ambassadors should be fostered so they can discern opportunities for synergies.

9. Conclusion

Researchers who take on the role as Open Science ambassadors, building bridges between academic support departments and the research community, are valuable when it comes to advancing Open Science. The ERUA Open Science Ambassador Programme involves researchers that are competent in Open Science, acting as contact points to provide a low-threshold opportunity for peers or students who want to find out more about Open Science. Apart from that, the ambassadors actively promote Open Science within their institutional structures as well as among peers and other target groups. To form a fruitful ambassador network, a good mix of academic disciplines as well as areas of Open Science expertise is paramount. Besides that, one of the most important things to consider when building up an ambassador programme is time. It takes time to recruit the ambassadors, to let them get to know their role and to raise awareness of Open Science at their universities in synergy. An ambassador programme strongly profits from a long-term perspective, so everyone thinking about building up such a programme should make sure that the structures behind the programme have the chance to be maintained over an extensive period of time. Moreover, we recommend factoring in copious time for organisational issues such as developing and publishing communication measures. It is also crucial to emphasise the programme's importance within its setting and to clarify responsibilities early so all measures can be realised on time.

Funding Information

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 101035808.

Further Information

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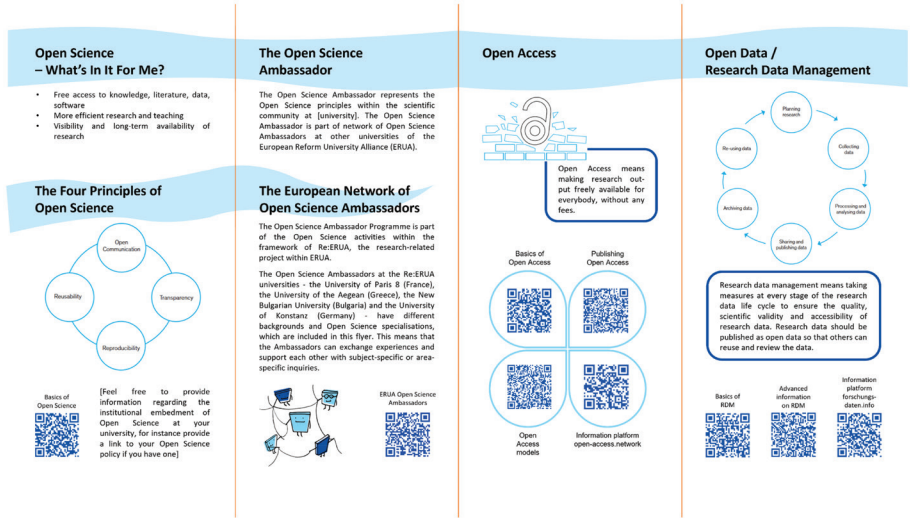
Appendix 1: Editable ambassador flyer



Appendix 2: Editable ambassador poster