

RDA and the Nordics – viewpoints on open science

Nordic Open Science and Research Forum 2016, Helsinki

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Notes

Welcoming words

Development Manager Irina Kupiainen from CSC – IT Center for Science Ltd. / Research Data Alliance (RDA) Europe opened the event and briefly described the program. The goal of the event is to enhance and promote Nordic collaboration in data related issues, and RDA could function as a platform for this activity. Free movement of data across borders and organisations is a topical question in Europe and the Nordics can contribute and have a strong impact on these developments.

Sverker Holmgren, Programme Director for the Nordic eScience Globalisation Initiative (NeGI), gave a brief introduction to Nordforsk, where a lot of discussion is taking place around open science and opening up research. Holmgren is familiar with RDA and its working groups, and he hopes that in the future there would be more Nordic participation in open data related discussions and events.

Recap from previous RDA Finland meeting

Coordinator Johanna Kaunisvaara from CSC/RDA Europe, presented the topics discussed in the last RDA Finland meeting that took place in March 2016. Back then, the ownership of research data raised a lot of questions, and also the role universities and governments in promoting and crediting open science efforts was discussed. During that meeting it became clear that a common platform or forum to share experiences and ideas in opening research data was needed. In order to avoid overlaps between organisations, collaboration and sharing best practices would be highly valuable. These ideas have been taken forward in RDA, and as a result, national RDA groups¹ have been formed in RDA web page. Kaunisvaara encouraged the audience to join the group to get the latest updates on RDA activities.

RDA achievements and opportunities

Irina Kupiainen gave an introduction to RDA activities and impact, and how people could join RDA. The vision of RDA is that researchers and innovators openly share data across technologies, disciplines, and countries to address the grand challenges of society.

Since the number of researchers in Europe is huge, the potential impact of RDA can be enormous. So far, RDA has 18 flagship outputs, of which 4 have been recognized as Technical Specifications through European Multi-Stakeholders Platform on ICT Standardisation. Altogether 75 adoption cases have emerged based on these outputs. RDA membership (4670 individual, 46 organisational, and 6 affiliate members) has steadily grown over years, Europe and USA being the most represented regions. Industry engagement is crucial, and more and more focus is put on this side since data plays a key role in future innovations.

Kupiainen gave an overview on RDA outputs and recommendations, which vary from adopted code, policy, specifications and standards to practices that enable data sharing. The time limit for the RDA Working Groups

¹ <https://www.rd-alliance.org/groups/national-groups>

for developing the recommendation is 12-18 months, after which there is an evaluation and endorsement process. Other actors and organisations can adopt RDA outputs in their work, for example OECD has adopted an output from the Interest Group Cost-recovery for Datacenters, and set up an OECD Expert group to come up with policy recommendations. Moreover, RDA has been recognized by the European Commission and European member states as an open, consensus-based and transparent organisation. As part of the Outputs exploitation and sustainability effort in Europe, RDA Europe has supported the approval of the four listed [Recommendations as ICT specifications](#), a particular [EU procedure](#) designed to allow ICT specifications issued by a non-standards body to become endorsed standards and referenced in public procurement.

Ways to engage in RDA were discussed. Anyone can join and become a member (individual or organizational), it's free and it doesn't bind you to do anything. One can also join RDA working and interest groups in order to contribute in building tools for data sharing on a global scale. Participating in RDA Plenaries is a good way to get involved. The next plenary will be held in Barcelona (5-7 April 2017), and the next one in Canada. RDA offers early career support for young researchers to join plenaries and present their research in poster sessions. In addition, there are various calls one can apply to, e.g. a call for supporting and other RDA outputs, European call for collaboration projects, and a call for organizing the RDA Science Workshop 2018. Organisations and projects can also adopt RDA working group outputs. All these possibilities are described on [RDA Europe](#) and [RDA Global](#) websites.

News and viewpoints from RDA Working and Interest Groups

Project Director Ari Asmi from University of Helsinki / ENVRI+ gave an introduction to RDA working group activities. Asmi has participated in every RDA Plenary and he argues that RDA is strongly a member-driven initiative, since people in plenaries and working and interest groups really lead the work. Asmi has been a co-chair of the Data Citation working group, and he presented their 18-month work on developing a recommendation on the issue. Once the group has finalized its work, it switches into "maintenance mode" when the actual real-life testing of the recommendation/output begins. Asmi states, RDA could be described as "technology testing platform".

Asmi thinks, RDA's regional outreach and contribution to general research facilitation gives added value. RDA offers a platform for people from various disciplines to interact which enables the emergence of new viewpoints on research data issues. Hence, RDA can be understood as a facilitator of Open Science.

The audience asked how to participate in RDA if one has no specific field of research, as a generalist. Asmi stated that RDA interest groups and BoFs are good to start with. A question was raised also about collaboration between international infrastructures and RDA. Asmi said, especially in Europe, the connection is quite close (e.g. e-IRG, ESFRI), and joint workshops and events take place regularly. The audience also asked about the added value RDA brings into discussions on openness in research. Asmi stated that openness should always be in the center of research, and these are very much policy related, but also very technical issues. Actors should have consistent policies, and RDA provides a platform to discuss and share views on these issues. The relation between European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) and RDA raised a lot of discussion. Asmi and Kupiainen highlighted that RDA can be seen as a pillar of EOSC, bringing in the data management element, which is also stated in European Commission's communication "[European Cloud Initiative - Building a competitive data and knowledge economy in Europe](#)". Interoperability is key issue in EOSC, and RDA is able to give an important contribution to it.

Nordic view on open access to data

Sverker Holmgren presented the report “Open Access to Research Data - Status, Issues and Outlook” that the Nordic Council of Ministers requested from Nordforsk. For many years, Nordforsk has been involved in discussions related to research data, and “ensuring open access” is one of the nine principles in Nordforsk Strategy 2015-2018. Holmgren argued that it is not possible to talk about open science as such, and one needs to combine it with data management, sharing of data, and open access to data. There are two arguments why you should have an open regime: 1) making research more efficient, transparent and reproducible – improved quality, and 2) enable more extensive and faster interaction between research and society – improved impact.

However, researchers have doubts about open science, and sometimes, fully open access to research data cannot be implemented. It is crucial that we acknowledge the diversity of research and research fields. Hence in data management, one-size-fits-all-solutions will not function, so we need to work closely with researchers in developing data management policies and practices. If researchers are not involved in the process, there is a risk that data management policies will not be accepted by them. This is something also RDA has to take into consideration.

Additionally, enabling open science requires clear roles for all actors. Who is responsible for funding these efforts? Who has the responsibility to restore data? Who owns research data collections? What kind of barriers the legal framework sets for research? The world has witnessed a huge growth of data which is difficult for researchers to handle by themselves, so interfaces and collaboration between actors are definitely needed. During Holmgren’s presentation it became clear that data management practices and legal framework vary in Nordic countries.

Holmgren argued that Nordic actors should be more active on international arenas, and raising awareness about open science policies is needed. Researchers should tell the European Commission what is needed, not just silently wait for EU’s proposals. It is clear that many organisations are discussing open data themes, but are we lacking a joint forum to share the views and experiences?

Finnish National Perspective on Open Science

Counsellor Eeva Kaunismaa from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture gave a brief introduction to Finland’s governmental objectives on knowledge and education for 2015-2019. One target is to strengthen the cooperation between HEIs and business life in order to bring innovations to the market, and thus the impact and utilisation of research and research results must be improved. Kaunismaa presented Open Science and Research Initiative 2014-2017 that offers a holistic view on the whole research system in Finland. Its aim is to open the whole research process and promote transparency and collaboration, which will ultimately improve the visibility and impact of science and research. Hence, openness should be viewed as a means to an end. Kaunismaa pointed out that a working group in Open Science Policy Platform is thinking about rewards and credits that researchers get for implementing openness in their research, and some results from this work are expected during spring 2017.

Nordic RDA Participation – Panel discussion

Ville Tenhunen (University of Helsinki), Juni Palmgren (Karolinska Institutet), Lene Krøl Andersen (Danish e-Infrastructure Corporation DeIC), Ari Asmi (University of Helsinki/ENVRI+) and Sverker Holmgren (Nordforsk) participated in panel discussion, led by Eeva Kaunismaa (Ministry of Education and Culture). The discussion focused quite much on the emerging European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), and there was an understanding that its impacts on research are still quite unclear, and national and infrastructure input is needed when planning the structures. Additionally, research including personal data involves a lot of regulations which may

cause some challenges in building the EOSC. The panelists concluded that Nordic actors should collaborate and share views on EOSC, and this is something in which RDA could provide valuable input and a platform. There is now a good momentum for RDA outreach in the Nordic countries.

It is clear that researchers need to act as drivers for change, but also policy makers should be involved. The challenge is that researchers need concrete tools and guidelines, and they may not be interested in policies and programs. Data management plans also raised discussion in the panel and the overall view was that researchers have to be aware of different stages in planning the data management in their research project. Collaboration between IT-service providers, researchers, policy makers and funders is crucial in this respect since 'open data' may indicate to researchers that they have to do something extra. The challenge is to make them understand, that openness makes life easier and brings benefits to the researchers.

Closing and follow-up

Irina Kupiainen wrapped-up the event by highlighting the importance of a comprehensive view: we need to work towards sustainable infrastructures for open science and data. We need legislation that supports free movement of data, and we need to think about how to promote data movement between research and industry, leading to innovations. The RDA industrial engagement is an important activity that needs more attention. As Nordic countries we can together strengthen the RDA community by bringing in the Nordic expertise and viewpoint, and we should try to increase Nordic update of RDA outputs².

Overall the event showed a positive spirit for developing further the Nordic regional activity in RDA, and the participants agreed on the value of continuing such efforts.

Kupiainen thanked the presenters and audience for an active discussion, and informed that all participants will be added to the RDA Finland/Nordic mailing list, and RDA Europe will come up with a plan on how to facilitate also Nordic collaboration and discussion in research data issues.

After the event, the process of identifying Nordic RDA contact persons and facilitating Nordic RDA outreach has begun, and we are looking forward to strengthening the Nordic contribution in RDA.

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² See also RDA Data Harvest report: <https://www.rd-alliance.org/data-harvest-report-sharing-data-knowledge-jobs-and-growth.html>