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Dr. Doreen Siegfried

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“We’re all in the same boat” – Professionals from research data competence centres join forces at GO CHANGE workshop

The latest international workshop offered by the GO FAIR International Support and Coordination Office brought together 28 representatives of research data management competence centres and research communities from Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Germany at the German National Library in Frankfurt on June 19, 2019. United in seeking to establish an academic culture in which research data are made findable, accessible, interoperable und reusable (“FAIR”), the participants exchanged about practical approaches and explored possibilities for future collaboration.

Activities of fostering a socio-cultural change towards FAIR handling of research data are underway in many research performing institutions – often carried out by research data management competent centres or Open Science communities. In the GO FAIR initiative, such activities are subsumed under the pillar “GO CHANGE”, one of three activity pillars through which the initiative advocates for the implementation of the FAIR data principles. The dedicated “GO CHANGE” workshop in Frankfurt was aimed at facilitating knowledge exchange between “change agents” from research data management competence centres and research communities. Its main outcomes are:

- A compilation of resources: Based on the input of the workshop participants, the GO FAIR International Support and Coordination Office was able to compile a collection of resources deemed helpful for engaging researchers in FAIR data management practices and raising awareness for FAIR. The compilation is available at: http://www.zotero.org/groups/2345721/fair_data_resources/
- New Implementation Networks: University of Cologne’s Competence Centre for Research Data Management (C³RDM) had initiated a “GO UNI” Implementation Network for research data competence centres under the umbrella of the GO FAIR initiative. This idea met with broad approval when presented at the workshop. Monika Linne from C³RDM will soon organize a kick-off meeting for anyone interested in joining “GO UNI”. The workshop participants moreover suggested that university-wide Open Science communities become members of the GO FAIR initiative in order to facilitate international exchange. Presentation by Monika Linne: <https://www.go-fair.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Founding-the-IN-GO-UNI.Monika-Linne.pdf>

On the whole, the workshop revolved around three central questions which were addressed both in ignition talks by invited speakers as well as in working groups formed by the workshop participants. Here are the key insights from these sessions:

(1) How to effectively implement a policy on FAIR research data management?

- Heidi Laine from the CSC – IT Center for Science in Finland shared her insights from serving as advisor to Finland’s university rectors’ council UNIFI when developing an open science and data action plan in 2018. As key ingredients for this successful cooperation she emphasized, among other things, “little competition among Finnish universities” and

“lots of sticks and carrots from the Finnish government”. Her presentation slides are available at:

<https://www.go-fair.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Cooperation-for-Open-Science-in-Finland-Heidi-Laine.pdf>

- For professionals from research data competence centres, policies on FAIR research data management can serve as a useful reference for pointing out the “official” importance of research data management to researchers and to the university administration – even though these policies often remain vague while trying to ensure institution-wide validity.
- When it comes to implementing policies on FAIR research data management on a practical level, professionals from research data competence centres fulfil the important task of “translating” them into concrete rules and instructions for researchers. Another fruitful approach is to have each faculty concretize the generic policy into a more hands-on protocol for its specific data management purposes with the help of professionals from research data competence centres.
- Policies on FAIR research data management require regular updating in response to new developments. In order to stay relevant, they need to be understood as “living documents”.

(2) Through which formats can the scientific community be successfully engaged?

- Anita Eerland and Loek Brinkman, the founders of the Open Science Community Utrecht (OSCU), presented the various formats through which they engage researchers. When offering opportunities for knowledge exchange online and offline, they recommend focusing on researchers who are interested in Open Science practices and ready to take the next small step, not just on full-fledged experts. Their presentation slides are available at:
<https://www.go-fair.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Power-of-OSCs-Anita-Eerland-and-Loek-Brinkman.pdf>
- Offering open office hours, Open Science symposia per faculty and meetings addressing community members’ concrete questions are likely to be added to OSCU’s current format mix of workshops, Open Science cafés and newsletters.
- There are useful materials out there for raising awareness for the merits of research data management – developed by players such as the Danish e-Infrastructure Cooperation or the North Rhine-Westphalian State Initiative National Research Data Infrastructure. The materials offer a playful, low-threshold approach to issues of research data management and are available for reuse. Considerations for new editions of these materials include providing them in open rather than closed file formats, integrating calls for action, and underlining why research data management is so important.
- Success stories / horror stories: Many workshop participants agreed that shocking or negative examples can be a useful instrument to raise awareness. This could be used in many formats, for example in newsletters or invitations for the next workshop or webinar. The closer the story is to the discipline or institution in question, the more attention it gets. Some people preferred to raise awareness with information on ‘how to’ do good data stewardship, e.g. use examples from FAIRer disciplines, and have positive motivation through journals, credits, etc. Such small ‘tips and tools’ can also serve as a category in a newsletter.

(3) What would it take to make it mandatory for researchers to share research data from publicly funded projects?

- Erik Schultes from the GO FAIR International Support and Coordination Office in Leiden presented a 7-step implementation study that aims at making it easier for funders to realistically require FAIR data stewardship planning and, likewise, for the grantees to comply. He emphasized that the “FAIR funder community” who initiated the study is open to any funder or service provider and points to the “FAIR Funder meeting” to be held in Leiden from Sep 30 – Oct 1, 2019. His presentation slides are available at:

https://www.go-fair.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-FAIR-Funder_Erik-Schultes.pdf

- It was suggested to assemble an external panel – potentially in the fashion of “ombudspersons” – in order to review progress on the FAIR Funder. This would help ensuring that use cases are obtained over the complete turn of a funding cycle.
- Researchers accept the idea of writing project proposals to get funding. At the same time, they tend to be reluctant to write data management plans – until they do and start seeing the value for their own research. Asking for the data management plan as part of the proposal was considered a good measure for funders to encourage FAIR handling of research data.

Download the report: https://www.go-fair.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Report_GO-CHANGE-Workshop.pdf

wissenschaftliche Ansprechpartner:

Ines Drefs, International Advisor, GO FAIR initiative, i.drefs@zbw.eu

URL zur Pressemitteilung: <https://www.go-fair.org/2019/07/02/go-change-workshop-report/>



Representatives of RDM competence centres & research communities met at the German National Library in Frankfurt (Main) on 19/06/2019 to discuss how a FAIR academic culture can be established.