

2023 Data Stewardship. Concepts and Implementations

Introduction: Lothar Nunnenmacher

Data Stewardship is still in its infancy in many Swiss research institutions and has only recently received more attention due to the possibility to apply for funding for data stewards from swissuniversities. Under [action line B5.2](#) of their Open Research Data (ORD) programme, it approved the data stewardship action plans of 25 institutions. Unfortunately however, the four research institutes (4RIs) are not eligible to apply for funding under this action line. In order to keep up with recent developments, Lib4RI thus proposes to co-develop a data stewardship network together with the ORD support services at the 4RIs, taking advantage of what was already implemented and possibly with funding from the ETH board.

Fabian Felder «ORD at the 4RI – A proposition for a cooperative Data Stewardship Project», DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7789105>

Fabian Felder gave a general overview of all ORD support services at the 4RIs and outlined a proposal for a cooperative data stewardship project. The project aims to strengthen the cooperation between the existing ORD support services at the 4RIs by introducing a joint network of data stewards. The data stewards would provide in-lab ORD support to researchers and at the same time be a connecting link between the established ORD support services and researchers. According to the proposed plan, Lib4RI would coordinate this data stewardship network to ensure knowledge transfer among them, and between ORD support services.

Yan Wang «Data Stewardship at TU Delft: Where are we now», DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7774963>

TU Delft pioneered data stewardship in Europe with their network established in 2017. Their faculty-centred network consists of eleven data stewards and one coordinator. The core team has weekly meetings to discuss and exchange good ORD practices in order to learn from each other. They sit in the faculty as part of the management support, whereas the coordinator is located at the library as a part of their research data and software service.

Yan Wang also highlighted some challenges that data stewards and ORD support services will face in the future. As for data stewards, it will be challenging:

- to clarify the scope of data stewardship in an ever-changing landscape, and
- to ensure capacity on continuous reflection and evaluation.

Whereas for ORD support services, it will be difficult:

- to understand research and its own role with regards to data stewardship, and
- to implement collaboration at both strategic and operational level.

Ilire Hasani-Mavriqi «Data Steward Concepts and Implementations in Austria», DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3217/t13s3-6zz38>

In Austria, the ministry of research has funded the national initiative «Fair Data Austria». It aims to develop a common understanding of the role and tasks of a data steward in different institutional contexts, to coordinate data stewardship activities at the national and international level, to establish cross-university data stewardship programmes, and to define data stewardship models, profiles, competencies and trainings.

In the Austrian context, three main models of data stewardship are being implemented:

- Data steward contact points – offer general advice but do not perform any operational activity.
- Data steward offices – data stewards are positioned at central organisational units. The presence of a team enables to share tasks.
- Data steward networks –based at the faculties, main research areas or institutes.

The experiences at different Austrian research institutions show that the main challenges revolve around the different priorities of decision makers, ill-defined models, as well as the lack of clearly specified roles and responsibilities.

At TU Graz, three data stewards serve 30 institutes. They require communication, organisational, technical and problem solving skills to fulfil their tasks.

Julian Dederke, «Towards Decentralised Data Stewardship – A perspective from ETH Zurich», DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000605802>

The action plan for data stewardship (2023-2024) at ETH Zürich was only recently initiated and is co-financed by the [ORD action plan of swissuniversities](#). It is the result of long discussions within the ETH on how to implement data stewardship at their institution. Given the diversity of disciplines and heterogeneous communities of practice at ETH Zurich, it was concluded that the faculty-centred data stewardship model is not ideal for them. Instead, they chose a decentralised data stewardship model which highlights existing roles, empowers people that already have RDM responsibilities, nurtures diversity of data stewardship approaches, and encourages researchers and Principal Investigators (PIs) to include data stewardship in their research project applications.

General Discussion

Following the last input of Julian Dederke, Ilire Hasani-Mavriqi and Yan Wang were asked for their opinions on the decentralised model introduced by ETH Zürich. Both recognised the potential of this approach to cope with the current challenges, but see issues regarding the recognition and clear definition of data stewards' position and role within research institutions. This in turn could deter people from becoming a data steward. Yan Wang further noted that PhD students, who would qualify best for the data steward position in a decentralised model, currently have little incentive to take on this role. Research institutions want them to teach and publish during their PhD, not to provide in-lab ORD support to other researchers. A possible solution for this issue could be to give PhD students the option to substitute teaching responsibilities with data stewardship tasks.

Lothar Nunnenmacher thanked the speakers for presenting their conceptions and implementations for data stewardship at the event. As a next step, Lib4RI will further investigate the question on the ideal placement of data stewards within a cooperative data stewardship network. It will then share a reworked proposal with ORD support services and other potential collaborators in order to find an agreement on how to establish a cooperative data stewardship network at the 4RIs.