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E-infrastructures at the heart of open science

Co-located at their Sixth Plenary Meeting in Paris, a Research Data Alliance (RDA) workshop placed a strong focus on the vital role e-infrastructures play in supporting global collaboration for research and innovation.

Speed read

- The Research Data Alliance (RDA) has been established to improve data sharing.
- To coincide with the recent RDA Sixth Plenary Meeting, the organization held a workshop focusing on the role of e-infrastructures in modern, data-intensive science.
- E-infrastrucutures are also key to fostering greater global research collaboration.

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The Research Data Alliance (RDA) is a global organization — supported by funding bodies in

Europe, the US, and Australia — that has been established to improve data sharing for research.

The Science Node recently reported from the organization's RDA Sixth Plenary Meeting in Paris, France. Read our full in-depth roundup of the event here.

To coincide with this event, the RDA also organized a special workshop under the title 'e-infrastructures and RDA for data-intensive science'. Experts attended the workshop from a wide range of initiatives, each working to enhance global collaboration for research data sharing.

Five tracks, each on track

The event was split into five main tracks:

- infrastructure for understanding the human brain
- data and computing infrastructures for open scholarship
- service orientation to data and high-performance computing infrastructures
- research data infrastructures for environment-related societal challenges
- data and computing infrastructures for global linguistic resources.

These tracks were selected based on the outcomes of a special RDA event — organized within the framework of the Italian presidency of the European Union — held last year in Rome, Italy. *The Science Node* followed the 'data and computing infrastructures for open scholarship' track. Read more about this in our upcoming 18 November issue.
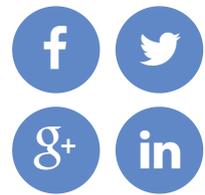
The importance of the RDA, and of global collaboration

In the opening session of the event Hilary Hanahoe, the coordinator of RDA Europe, emphasized the important role e-infrastructures play in supporting research and innovation all across the globe. This was a theme central to the workshop as a whole.

"Cyberinfrastucture has become a central enabler for a lot of science," echoes William Miller, who gave an overview of the wide variety of e-infrastructures the US National Science Foundation supports.

Augusto Burgueño Arjona, head of the e-infrastructure unit of the European Commission (EC), also spoke at the event. "In Europe we have world-class e-infrastructures; we have one of the world's most efficient high-speed research networks in GÉANT," he says. "We need to work together across the globe to ensure interoperability and international cooperation."

Arjona went on to emphasize the important role that the RDA can play in this collaboration, describing the organization as a 'key enabler': "The RDA is a timely initiative that has been able to capture the attention and the commitment of a vast community interested in the interoperation of data infrastructures... we need you."

A tangled (data) bank

One of the most interesting talks at the workshop was given by Mark Parsons, the RDA secretary general. He spoke at length about the importance of trust and relationships in building research infrastructures.

Parsons cited a report from the University of Michigan's Paul Edwards and colleagues that argues infrastructure systems are rarely built from the top down — people don't follow this. He highlighted the importance of establishing social norms, and says that trust is key to reaching consensus when it comes to the social norms around data sharing. "Infrastructure *is* relationships, interactions, and connections between people, technologies, and institutions," says Parsons, who maintains that talking about technical and social solutions for improving research data sharing is really a false dichotomy.

During his talk, Parsons also identified what he believes to be another false dichotomy: this time between *infrastructures* and *e-infrastructures*. "Modern research infrastructure is (or at least requires) e-infrastructure," he says. "It's all about the data."

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