

EOSC Governance Board Meets in Munich: Our elephant takes a clearer shape

Words: Cathrin Stöver, EOSC Executive Board Vice Chair

There is an excellent parable of the blind men and the elephant, which originated in ancient India, I believe. It is the story of a group of blind men who have never come across an elephant before and who are to describe the elephant by respectively touching one – only one – different part of the elephant. Each blind man feels a different part of the elephant's body, such as the tail, the trunk, the leg. They describe the elephant based on their different experience and of course, the descriptions are entirely different from one another.

I am certain that there are a few stakeholders who see it differently, but very often when we hear and talk about the EOSC, the above parable comes at least to my mind. There is a level of uncertainty felt in the community of stakeholders when it comes to EOSC past, present and future. Added to this is the fact that the EOSC received a new and complicated governance structure this year with the Executive Board and Governance Board being appointed and meeting for the first time in January.

Looking at the EOSC present and future, it is essential that the partners in the governance need to work hand in hand and in a relationship of mutual trust. To build the basis for this relationship, the Executive Board and Governance Board, DG CNECT and DG RTD came together in the first week of May for a two-day teambuilding event in Munich, organized for us by the EOSC Secretariat. In a series of plenary sessions, workshops around the EOSC working groups and team-building exercises, including a beer tasting (how not, when in Munich?), we laid the foundational stones of the EOSC building. Listening to the colleagues in the room, a common set of values emerged over the two days.

These can be articulated as being:

- Focused on research needs
- Community-driven
- Inclusive and respectful of diversity
- Accessible to all from large equipment and computers and "big data" to "small data" and the "long-tail" research
- Open by default – closed where necessary
- Hands-on and participatory
- Transparent and trustworthy.

In order to make EOSC work we need close coordination between scientific communities and continual engagement to co-create a platform and set of services which meet diverse user needs. EOSC will be a living system that is flexible by design and can adapt to the changing landscape and technological advances. This necessitates an incremental and iterative approach, where we remain pragmatic and start small. We cannot afford to wait for the perfect solution or control of our scholarly commons will be lost to more agile and innovative initiatives. We should release early and often, continually testing and improving the best practices, tools and services until open science is no longer spoken about but becomes standard scientific practice.

Across the room, experts, EC, representatives of the governments felt that the above forms the core vision of the EOSC and a collegiate, collaborative and constructive dialogue arose on how this vision can be jointly developed and delivered over the next 18 months. This team-building exercise was constructive and collaborative, open dialogue took place between the governance board, the executive board and the EC. We have taken a major step in these two days building the foundation for the future collaboration within the governance structure.



It is also to be noted that many member states and associate countries have now proposed experts to the EOSC working groups. As a consequence, work in the groups will now commence in parallel to appointing additional members and running an open call in the stakeholder community. Now that we have agreement on the direction, we have to start hitting the ground running in order to make the tight deadlines associated with the delivery of the EOSC.

What's next? We will have regular communications between the Chairs of the EB and GB. We will also meet again for a similar event before Christmas. And, of course, the stakeholder engagement takes shape as well – we will reach out to the stakeholders alongside the RDA meetings taking place in the week of 21-25 of October in Helsinki and during a two-day event in November in Budapest.