

IASSIST Regional Secretary Report for Europe, 2023-2024

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Membership:

In 2024 the IASSIST has 63 European members. Compared to Canada and the USA this is not a very impressive number. The USA has 279 and Canada 89. Looking at the population of those countries the USA has 330 million, Canada, 38 million, and Europe 740 million. In addition, Europe is not a country but has 47 countries (some with federal structures) itself. Looking at those numbers, Europe should have massively more members (if it would like to compete with the USA, it should be easily more than 500 members). Keeping this in mind; it looks like IASSIST is not really represented in Europe as it should and maybe could be.

Members in Europe are mainly affiliated at national data services (former data archives) or governmental institutions. The libraries are less well represented than in north America. They have different organizational networks or are not organized at all. Some much about the current membership in Europe.

General remarks

The current European IASSIST Secretary for Europe is located in Switzerland (Swiss Institute for Information Science in Chur, Eastern Switzerland). Switzerland is not a part of the European Union (EU) (like Norway or the United Kingdom). Still those countries are interacting with the EU on many levels and many communities are structured along Europe as a continent. It also needs to be realized that developments are strongly forced on national level and by the European Union. All this makes it sophisticated to give a IASSIST report for Europe. Members are organized in their national network, sometimes within the EU or in other European network organizations like CESSDA (as a network organization for the national data services in Europe). According to that this report is, as an example, highlighting some of the relevant discussions in Switzerland and afterwards talks about the missing relevance of IASSIST in Europe.

Situation in Switzerland

Switzerland is a federal state with 26 cantons. Responsibilities for actions in the Social Science are located at the federal and the cantonal level. Main movements in the last years aimed on a better availability and usage of data. In that regard, a revision of the statistical law is underway aiming on a better availability, usage and linking possibility for data sources. At the same time a motion is

discussed that aims for “secondary usage of data”. This action is not especially aimed on science but on a general reuse of data. The motivation can be found in the need for larger and high-quality data collections as basis for data driven systems known as AI-systems. Beside those approaches Switzerland aims on connecting to developments in the EU. Namely, the EOSC (European Open Science Cloud). This system should collect, connect and provide data but also tools and services. First aiming on a European infrastructure stakeholders had to realize that the national structures need to be respected. Therefore, the focus changed. In the last two years national nodes are conceptualized to cover the needs and sources of a country and connect to the European EOSC at the same time.

European Perspective

This short review of relevant actions in Switzerland only works as an example. All other countries undergo same or similar actions. Accordingly, a huge need for coordination, communication and exchange is needed. Conferences are an important structure to enable people and organizations to do exactly this. But looking on the membership numbers and the fact that IASSIST is only taking place every four years in Europe, IASSIST is not playing this role in Europe. At the same time there is a strong need to have a structure like IASSIST more present and more active in Europe. IASSIST has Regional Secretaries and is structuring itself in regions. This is a useful approach. The Situation, for example, in Europe is different from the one in North America. Sometimes it is hard to cover and represent this in the yearly conferences or in the issues of the IASSIST Quarterly (IQ).

IASSIST Communities and Relevance in Europe

IASSIST focuses on Social Science and Library Science in particular. Those communities are not strongly connected in Europe at the same time they have similar needs. Especially when talking about Information Services and Technology. There are two main activities that might give IASSIST more relevance in Europe. First a yearly European (Regional) IASSIST Conference and second a European IASSIST Quarterly. Both activities will fill a current gap in Europe and will help to build a community by talking about IASSIST topics with a European background in mind. Especially a journal like IQ, helping to make European developments regarding IASSIST topics visible, is strongly needed.

The European Secretary of IASSIST therefore recommends a discussion about those two activities for Europe. Having the next regular IASSIST in Bristol will be a perfect starting point for developments.