On the contractual and social legitimacy of research integrity offices in small research ecosystems:

Experiences and recommendations from the evolution of the Luxembourg Agency for Research Integrity

Tom Lindemann, LARI Secretary-General

The Luxembourgish research system

- 5 public research institutions (1 university, 3 research performing organizations, 1 research funding organization)

- 4 of the 5 institutions are (primarily) based on the same campus, some even in the same building

- Public research and higher education system only exists since ca. 20-25 years

- Luxembourg
  - Population: 672.050 inhabitants
  - Size: 2.586 square kilometers

Luxembourg Agency for Research Integrity

- Founded in 2015, operational since 2017/2018, major governance changes in 2022/2023, operational change processes ongoing

- LARI is an independent association (non-profit)

- All 5 public research institutions are members of LARI

- Threefold mission
  - Investigating cases of alleged research misconduct
  - Promoting research integrity
  - Supporting members in policy development

Research integrity offices and the need for legitimacy

Research integrity is (mostly) a soft law system

Research integrity is a shared responsibility

Corollary of academic freedom

Contractual and social legitimacy

- **Contractual legitimacy**: legal-formal, derived from adherence to legitimate processes *(normative)*

- **Social legitimacy**: sociological, derived from being perceived as normatively appropriate *(empirical)*

- Both types of legitimacy are **intertwined**

-> Both are needed for the effective functioning of research integrity offices
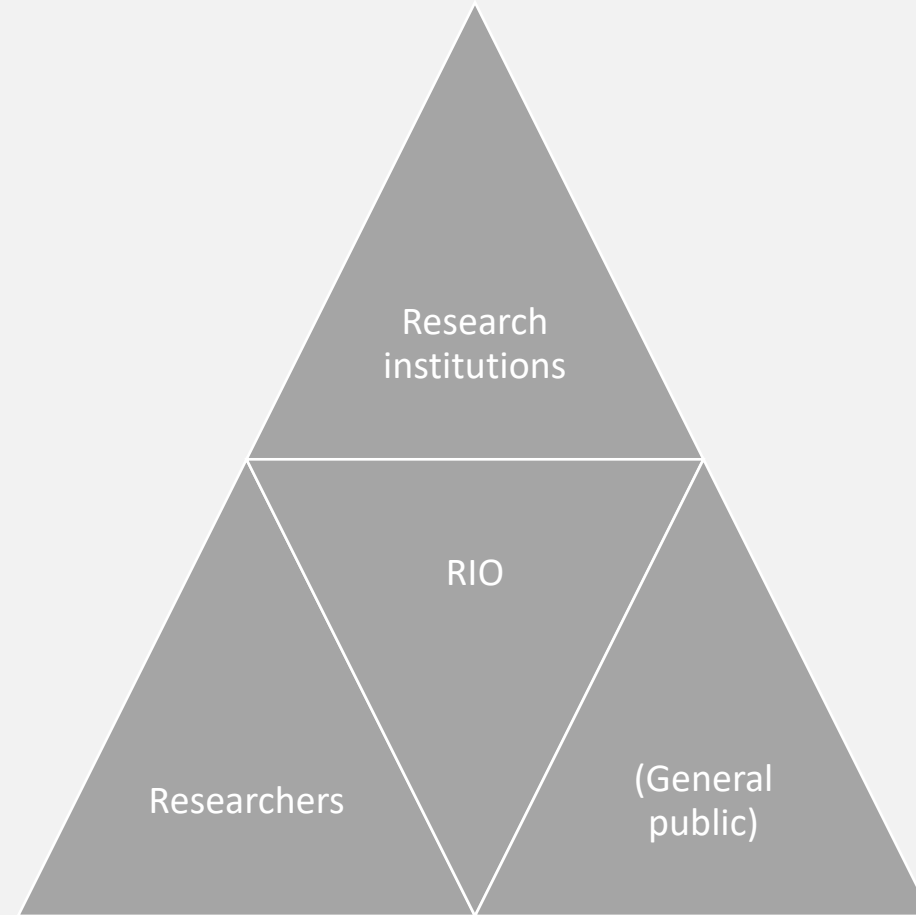
Contractual and social legitimacy

Contractual legitimacy

- Formal structures that enable commitment to consistent application of defined procedures

Social legitimacy

- Believe in appropriateness and expectation of compliance with defined procedures

Legitimacy demands on research integrity offices

Demands can conflict between and within groups

Some experiences of LARI

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- Smallness allows for informality -> exacerbates commitment problem -> need for specific and transparent procedures & governance structure that reinforces independence

-> Need for rather detailed contracts as a precondition for social legitimacy

- Few research institutions: changes can be implemented quickly; but also: every institution is de facto a veto player

-> Building the ship at sea can be difficult…or easy

References

On legitimacy

Schoon, E. W. (2022). Operationalizing legitimacy. American Sociological Review, 87(3), 478-503.

On the history of and lessons learned by LARI

Audit report by Technopolis (report unpublished, short update available on https://lari.lu/updates/)

Personal correspondences and experiences

Contact

tom.lindemann(at)LARI.lu