Research Management Associations in small countries: challenges and opportunities

Presented by the Board of DARMA:
Olaf Svenningsen, Karam Sidaros, Lone Varn Johannsen, Marianne Gauffriau, Karen Slej, Jakob Feldtfos Christensen, and Stine Bjorholm

Please note: the full presentation is only – but permanently – available online at:
https://goo.gl/JOxS1N
Background

- Research Management Associations (RMA's) have grown in numbers and sizes over the past decades

- The Nordic countries as an example:
  - Denmark – DARMA (2008)
  - Finland – FinnARMA (2012)
  - Iceland – IceARMA (2012)
  - Norway – NARMA (2013)
  - Sweden – informal network, EU/FoU-nätverket

Leiden Group of RMA

Informal group of European RMA chairs, meets at each EARMA Annual Conference. Learning points include:
- Substantial variation in size, organization, setup.
- RMA's can be controversial...
INORMS – International Network of Research Management Societies

- INORMS was formed in 2001 to bring together research management societies and associations from across the globe.
- The objectives of INORMS are:
  - to internationalise the body of knowledge on research management
  - to exchange best practice
  - to develop international approaches to supporting the research enterprise
- Currently 17 member associations, counting at least 20,000 members worldwide.
INORMS webinar on RMA board effectiveness

A "taxonomy" of associations:

- **Phase 1**: Initial; small; voluntary
- **Phase 2**: Structured; some resource
- **Phase 3**: Strategic; more resource
- **Phase 4**: Comprehensive

How generally applicable is this taxonomy?
DARMA as an example

DARMA's development:
2008 - founded, first GA
2009 - courses developed, Brussels study tour
2010 - Nordic NIH conference
2011 - US East Coast study tour
2012 - INORMS in Copenhagen
2014-15 - Fully legally and financially independent association, Special Interest Groups and Westensee Workshops launched

What DARMA offers:
- Annual Meeting and General Assembly
- Study tours (Brussels, Copenhagen, Eastern US, UK, Munich, and more)
- Courses (two: introduction to RMA, strategy)
- Westensee Workshops
- Special Interest Groups
- Funder workshops
- Travel stipends
- Website:
  - News and views
  - Events lists
  - Job ads
  - Contact w. other members

Ladder of member involvement
- Online web forums @ DARMA.dk
- Hot Topic Round Table discussions at annual meetings
- Westensee workshops (members organize, DARMA pays, shared logistics)
- Special Interest Groups
- Ad hoc working groups
- Board membership
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Challenges for RMA's in small countries
(DARMA's experience)

• Member base: c. 300, limited potential for growth.
• Limited (but healthy) financial turnover constrains hiring staff.
• Dependence on member engagement: initial euphoria often fades quickly.
• Professional development offerings from larger association (EARMA, ARMA, SRA, NCURA).
• Small and voluntary board is sensitive to external pressure on board members: job shifts, stress, health problems, private life crises, etc.
• The Board is - by necessity - operational, leaving less room for strategic development.
# Observations

## Small vs. BIG

- Small associations...
  - have less distance between members and board, "everybody knows everybody".
  - can easier tailor activities to special needs.
  - are more dependent on an operational board.

- Big associations...
  - require more bureaucracy.
  - can hire staff.
  - can have a board focusing more on strategy and strategic development.

## Informal network vs. association

### Advantages

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<td>Low admin workload.</td>
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**Advantages**

**Network:**
- Low admin workload.
- Informal communications.
- No or small responsibilities.

**Association:**
- Name recognition; formal collaborations.
- Economy – security.
- Long-term planning.
- Larger range of possible activities.
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Disadvantages

Network:
• No formal structure.
• No economy.
• No name recognition.
• Collaborations difficult (who represents?).

Association:
• Certain level of bureaucracy is required.
• Expectations...
• Higher stakes; failure is always an option...
Conclusions

- Although informal networks are beneficial, forming an association creates new possibilities.
- Name recognition provides outward visibility and credibility - opens new doors.
- Economy allows long-term planning.
- Cycle of recurring events ("årshjul") provides stability in activities.

INORMS RMA "taxonomy"

- Does not necessarily apply to associations in small countries.
- "Taxonomic evolution" not necessarily linear: steps could be eliminated, taken in another order, etc.
Questions for discussion

• Do you agree with us...? How have these issues been addressed in your country?
• Do you recognize "quickly fading initial euphoria"? How can it be dealt with?
• Could and should criteria be defined for how and when an informal network is ready to become an association?
• How can associations in small countries collaborate with each other and the "big elephants" to best serve the RMA community?
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You can follow this presentation "live":

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