Development of ECCSEL-R.I. Italian facilities: user access, services and long-term sustainability

D.7.3.3 – Sustainability plan

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SUMMARY

The long-term sustainability of a research infrastructure goes well beyond funding and encompasses several dimensions including financial, organizational, environmental, political and legal aspects. The deliverable here illustrated points out the key elements of a sustainability plan aimed to outline the above-mentioned aspects for the full functioning and sustainability of the research infrastructure as resulting from the ECCSELLENT project. The document is also instrumental to trigger and structure the debate with the ECCSELLENT Steering Committee members who will develop and highlight the measures and strategies to make the research infrastructure viable and sustainable in the long run.

As indicated in the project form submitted to the funding organization, the infrastructure as resulting from the ECCSELLENT project is expected to last for a period of 10 years after the conclusion of the project itself.

1 SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Building a sustainability plan for a research infrastructure involves careful consideration of various factors, including financial, environmental, social, and organizational aspects. Generally speaking, developing a comprehensive sustainability plan means to adopt a step-by-step approach based on the following elements:

1. Understand the Scope and Purpose: Define the research infrastructure, its purpose, and the services it provides. Identify key stakeholders, including researchers, institutions, funding bodies, and the community.
2. Conduct a Needs Assessment: Evaluate the current and future needs of the research community and users. Consider technological advancements and changes in research methodologies.
3. Financial Planning: Identify funding sources, both current and potential. Diversify funding streams to reduce dependence on a single source. Develop a budget that includes operational costs, maintenance, upgrades, and expansion plans.
4. Cost-Recovery Mechanisms: Explore options for cost recovery, such as user fees, partnerships, or collaborative projects. Consider alternative revenue streams, like training programs, workshops, or consultation services.
5. Environmental Impact Assessment: Assess the environmental impact of the infrastructure. Implement sustainable practices, such as energy-efficient technologies and waste reduction strategies.
6. Community Engagement: Foster collaboration and partnerships with the research community and other stakeholders. Seek input from users to understand their needs and expectations.
7. Governance and Management: Establish a clear governance structure with defined roles and responsibilities. Develop a succession plan for leadership and key personnel. Implement efficient management practices to ensure smooth operations.
8. Risk Management: Identify potential risks, such as changes in funding, technological obsolescence, or regulatory issues. Develop strategies to mitigate and manage these risks effectively.
9. Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement performance metrics to measure the effectiveness of the research infrastructure. Regularly evaluate financial sustainability, user satisfaction, and environmental impact.
10. Adaptability and Flexibility: Build flexibility into the sustainability plan to adapt to changing circumstances. Stay informed about emerging trends and technologies in research.
11. Communication and Outreach: Develop a communication strategy to promote the research infrastructure and its achievements. Engage with the broader community to raise awareness and garner support.
12. Policy Advocacy: Advocate for policies that support the long-term sustainability of research infrastructures. Stay involved in relevant policy discussions and initiatives.

13. Documentation and Reporting: Maintain thorough documentation of all aspects of the sustainability plan. Regularly update stakeholders through reports, newsletters, or other communication channels.
14. Continuous Improvement: Establish a feedback loop for continuous improvement based on user feedback, technological advancements, and changing needs.

By considering these steps and tailoring them to the specific context of the research infrastructure, it will be possible to develop a sustainability plan that ensures long-term viability and positive contributions to the research community.