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Facilitating research collaboration through computing and data infrastructure

Pirjo-Leena Forsström, director of information infrastructure services at Finland's IT Center for Science (CSC), will give a keynote speech at next month's European Grid Infrastructure (EGI) Community Forum in Helsinki, Finland. iSGTW speaks to her ahead of the event to find out more about the work that she and her colleagues have been doing at CSC.

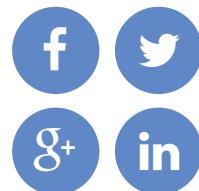
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Andrew Purcell
European editor

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about the work that she and her colleagues have been doing at CSC...

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What does CSC do? And why is this work important for researchers in Finland?

CSC is a state-owned, not-for-profit company belonging to the [Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture](#). Our task is to aid research institutions, including cultural ones. We carry out work in many different fields, including high-performance computing, of course.

We're involved in the activities of [EGI](#), which is one of the main services we provide to researchers in Finland. The hub for [FUNET](#), the Finnish national research and education network, is also located at CSC. Additionally, we provide researchers with services related to data, software development, networking, *etc.* However, the most important thing CSC has to offer is the knowledge and expertise of the people that are working here. It's not just about the actual infrastructure.

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Tackling the challenges society faces today often requires collaboration between researchers from a variety of domains. Organizations like CSC can look at the interoperability between systems, models, and datasets from these various fields and can help facilitate integration. Equally, unifying the underlying research infrastructures and providing scalable services to the whole research community is much more cost effective.

So, you mentioned there that CSC doesn't just work with scientific research institutions, but also cultural ones then...

Yes, we've been working closely with [the National Digital Library project](#), which, despite the name, also focuses on archives and museums, too. We've been building the digital preservation system for them.

We also develop and maintain systems for various archives, museums, and libraries. In fact, the national library systems of Finland are managed by CSC. In addition, we're working on different kinds of meta-data services and several digital archives actually physically reside within CSC.

This isn't just about digitized books or documents, of course. Much of this work is about giving access to archives of 'born-digital' data. We don't just want materials to be stored where no-one can find them. We really want everyone to have access and to be able to study this material.



The EGI Community Forum will be held at the University of Helsinki's main building. Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

That's very interesting. At last month's Research Data Alliance Third Plenary Meeting in Dublin, Ireland, Tony Hey, vice president of Microsoft Research, claimed that we have now reached a "tipping point" in terms of open access and the sharing of data. Do you agree with this? Is this what you're seeing 'on the ground' at CSC?

Yes, definitely. I think this is true for society as a whole. Just yesterday we had a seminar on how policy makers in Finland can make better use of research data. The prevailing view is that the products of research - and that includes all of the data generated - should be used for the benefit of the whole of society. I'm really happy that the policy sector is now taking up this idea and is even starting to build new funding instruments to facilitate this. This will enable collaboration that is very important for the whole of society. In Finland - and elsewhere too - these ideas are really taking off.

That being said, it's important not to forget that significant challenges still remain. But it's a big thing that people are just willing to discuss this now

and even put money behind making these ideas work. In my opinion, the biggest barriers we have to overcome are the cultural ones. Researchers in different fields often have very different concepts, so it can sometimes be difficult for them to even agree what they're talking about! It's vital that we can get all these different parties to trust one another.

So, what do you plant to talk about during your keynote speech at the upcoming community forum?

I will talk about the importance of openness and increasing access to both research publications and theses. I'll also focus on what needs to be done to ensure the long-term availability and accessibility of this. It's not just enough to open doors; we also have to keep them open for a long period.

And, finally, why is it an event you feel it is important to attend? What are you most looking forward to?

It's important to follow what other researchers are doing and find out what's being done elsewhere to tackle some of the challenges we've discussed. I'm looking forward to meeting the people involved in finding the answers to these questions. Of course, EGI itself is a very big player in this field: the organization has lots of experience in building data infrastructures, promoting openness and encouraging researchers from a wide range of fields to work together.

The EGI Community Forum will be held from 19-23 May in Helsinki, Finland. Read more about the event [here](#).

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