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Strategic Vision on National Research Infrastructures (RIs) in Switzerland

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With this position paper, swissuniversities confirms the need for a strategic vision on and planning of national research infrastructures (RI) in Switzerland, which will contribute to securing Switzerland's position as a leading innovative research location. The identified overall strategic relevance concerns two types of research infrastructures, encompassing both, core facilities/specialised staff as well as data infrastructures. Note that international RIs are outside the scope of this paper.

With the swissuniversities-internal process for the 2027 Roadmap for research infrastructures and the elaboration of a national platform for RIs (SPADRI) in order to increase visibility and coordination (together with a governance for admitting projects on the platform), swissuniversities underlines the will to strengthening coordination between HEIs, facilitated by the Vice presidents for Research (VPsRES).

Situation analysis

There is an increasing need for cutting-edge research infrastructures combined with a challenge of financing RIs. In order to meet this need, coordination between all Swiss HEIs and a strategic vision implying a prioritisation of the most important investments will be required in the future.

Scope

This strategic vision concerns two types of RIs that a national process of selection and (co-)funding should target:

- RIs of national relevance
- RIs of interinstitutional importance

RIs of national relevance and RIs of interinstitutional importance (encompassing core facilities/specialised staff as well as data infrastructures) are shared research resources that offer services to researchers and customers and may charge user fees. RIs are defined by their specialized technical expertise. They provide access to expert consultation, instruments, technologies, data processing and analysis, computing systems, services and trainings for scientific purposes. In general, Research Infrastructures of these categories are embedded and operated in academic research settings, at the forefront in their field of expertise, operate cutting-edge instruments and constantly develop their services and the

professional competencies of their staff. The RIs are governed by an institution/consortium which regulates a.o. access of researchers and customers or users transparently.

A RI of national relevance (e.g., Swiss Light Source SLS) plays a significant, usually unique role in the European (or international) research infrastructure landscape. It provides services to a significant number of researchers at national level and typically involves more than one discipline. It also has an international outreach and is prioritised by the institution's management for strategic development. The RI proves scientific excellence (evaluation by the SNSF).

A RI of interinstitutional importance (e.g., Swiss High-field NMR Facility) is prioritised by the institution's management for strategic development. The RI proves scientific excellence (evaluation by the SNSF). It provides services at interinstitutional level for a significant number of researchers (either interdisciplinary or disciplinary). Collaboration ("shared" criterion) between institutions can be considered at different levels, such as co-funding, joint governance, shared usage or joint implementation of the RI.

swissuniversities sees a need to define the process for coordination of both types of RIs and to address respective modalities of funding in both cases.

Vision

swissuniversities supports the vision of a coordinated and co-funded Swiss landscape of RIs (encompassing core facilities/specialised staff as well as data infrastructures), with a focus on RIs of national relevance and RIs of interinstitutional importance, under the control of a clear and lean governance where all (types of) HEIs, SERI and SNSF are simultaneously represented. The Swiss RI landscape should orient itself on the values of cutting-edge quality, uniqueness in devices/size/services (for some RIs), availability and accessibility to all researchers in Switzerland and a reasonable balance between synergies and necessary redundancy, as well as between centralized and decentralized facilities.

Purpose

The purpose of this strategic vision on RIs is to successfully develop and maintain cutting-edge RIs of national relevance and RIs of interinstitutional importance in order to secure and foster Switzerland's position as a number one innovative research location.

Objectives

With its strategic vision for RIs swissuniversities aims at:

- Improving identification of RIs of national relevance and securing their funding at the federal level;
- Ensuring the optimal coordination and mutual transparency of all processes of setting-up RIs of national relevance, in order to create synergies, strategic bundling and prevent duplication as far as possible;
- Securing specific national co-funding for the two types of RIs of national relevance and interinstitutional importance, taking into account that the HEIs always also invest in RIs and pay for the operation of RIs.

Recommendations

It is advisable to establish different coordination and evaluation processes for RIs of national relevance and RIs of interinstitutional importance, as they diverge not only in terms of sheer

numbers, definition and relevant criteria for selection, but also in operational and investment budget, size, user community, uniqueness.

While the submission of new (or major upgrades of) RIs of national relevance to SERI's roadmap process can be narrowed down to a handful of projects through the criterium of "uniqueness" (= lean selection, evaluation and decision process), the RIs of interinstitutional importance are more numerous and heterogenous, thus requiring a self-coordination and selection process (recommendation) managed by the Vice presidents for research (VPsRES), along the lines of the current swissuniversities-internal 2027 Roadmap process.

swissuniversities recommends strongly to have adequate federal specific funding for both categories (RIs of national relevance and RIs of interinstitutional importance) as well as sufficient cantonal matching funds wherever cantonal HEIs are the host institution.

swissuniversities recommends the integration of the current findings into all succeeding strategic processes concerning research infrastructures on the two types of RIs, both central to Switzerland's competitiveness in research, including a RI budget on federal level and making (if necessary) proposals to the law to fund (at least) RIs of national relevance and to at least co-fund RIs of interinstitutional importance at cantonal HEIs.

Annex: RIs of National Relevance and RIs of Interinstitutional Importance

Definition, Criteria, Process and Funding in accordance with the Strategic Vision on National Research Infrastructures (RIs) in Switzerland

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	RIs of national relevance	RIs of interinstitutional importance
General Definition <i>Based and further developed on the working definition according to the VPsRES discussion on March 12, 2025</i>	<u>RIs of national relevance</u> and <u>RIs of interinstitutional importance</u> (encompassing core facilities/specialised staff as well as data infrastructures) are shared research resources that offer services to researchers and customers and may charge user fees. RIs are defined by their specialized technical expertise. They provide access to expert consultation, instruments, technologies, data processing and analysis, computing systems, services and trainings for scientific purposes. In general, Research Infrastructures of these categories are embedded and operated in academic research settings, at the forefront in their field of expertise, operate cutting-edge instruments and constantly develop their services and the professional competencies of their staff. The RIs are governed by an institution/consortium which regulates a.o. access of researchers and customers or users transparently.	
Definition <i>Based and further developed on the working definition according to the VPsRES discussion on March 12, 2025</i>	A <u>RI of national relevance</u> (e.g., Swiss Light Source SLS) plays a significant, usually unique role in the European (or international) research infrastructure landscape. It provides services to a significant number of researchers at national level and typically involves more than one discipline. It also has an international outreach and is prioritised by the institution's management for strategic development. The RI proves scientific excellence (evaluation by the SNSF).	A <u>RI of interinstitutional importance</u> (e.g., Swiss High-field NMR Facility) is prioritised by the institution's management for strategic development. The RI proves scientific excellence (evaluation by the SNSF). It provides services at interinstitutional level for a significant number of researchers (either interdisciplinary or disciplinary). Collaboration ("shared" criterion) between institutions can be considered at different levels, such as co-funding, joint governance, shared usage or joint implementation of the RI.
Criteria for selection/coordination process	Uniqueness (decisive criterion) - closely linked to devices and expertise - not necessarily correlated with size - the label of unique <u>RI of national relevance</u> can facilitate cooperation at the European level	swissuniversities' selection criteria for RM27 hold in principle ¹
Process	Lean Roadmap process lead by SERI for a limited number of RI of national relevance (small number)	Coordination process of VPsRES similar to the current 2027 Roadmap process
Funding (on an abstract level)	Investment: Federal Running costs: Co-funding	Investment: Federal and host HEI (depending on provider / "Trägerinstitution") Running costs: Co-funding
	Funding from other sources such as the private sector are possible and encouraged in both cases	

¹ See [2027 Swiss Roadmap for Research Infrastructures Selection criteria used by swissuniversities](#).