



MERIL Case study

Mapping mental health facilities in Europe

The challenge

The [ROAMER project](#) (A ROAdmap for MEntal Health Research in Europe) is an EU-funded project that ran from 2011 to 2015. It was carried out by 13 universities and research institutions across countries including France, the UK, Italy and Germany, with the project being coordinated by Biomedical Research Networking Centre of Mental Health (CIBERSAM) in Spain. The objective of the venture was to develop a road map of mental health and wellbeing research in Europe, in order to identify the gaps in regional resources for mental health studies. This ‘research on research’ was conducted to help establish the consortium’s mental health priorities for the next decade.

A key aspect of the project was to explore how funds are allocated to the various components of mental health and wellbeing research, including human resources as well as physical or digital research infrastructures (RIs). The latter goal - to build a picture of the funding of research infrastructures for mental health across Europe - relied on gaining detailed information about the location and nature of each RI. This posed geographical and language challenges, as the researcher on this branch of the project was based in France. Many countries do not thoroughly translate national databases of research projects and infrastructures, thus the language barrier could prevent a fully-informed picture of the research landscape being formed. A comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the RI landscape was important for meaningful recommendations to be made.

The solution

In order to effectively map mental health research infrastructures across Europe, the researchers took advantage of the [MERIL](#) (Mapping European Research Infrastructure Landscape) database, which provided the foundations for a map of RIs across Europe. The database collates information on RIs from many European countries, across multiple languages, and all scientific disciplines, and therefore enabled the ROAMER project to overcome the issue of having to locate and translate detailed information manually.

The comprehensive and regularly-updated list of RIs in the database provides the most up-to-date information about the availability of resources, holding over 1,000 RIs across all scientific domains, and is free to access. The number of mental health RIs alone informs the ROAMER mapping



project, but researchers could combine this with a list of all of the official EU-funded mental health research projects to establish an approximate ratio of infrastructure availability to research intent.

The impact

The MERIL database enabled the ROAMER project to curate an informative map of mental health RIs in Europe, and from this establish the six major priorities for mental health research over the next 10 years. The level of detail on each relevant RI provided by MERIL enabled the ROAMER team to develop a well-informed set of recommendations regarding the areas of mental health research that most needed attention.

Through the comparison of EU-funded research projects to the number of RIs available, ROAMER could say with confidence that there are too few research facilities available for mental health research.

The detailed keyword and filter searches provided within MERIL enabled fast and efficient identification of the RIs available for mental health research, establishing quickly that there were 239 potentially useful RIs for this discipline of the 600+ that are searchable in the database. The researchers were able to show the committee a list of the available facilities for the projects of interest, forming the basis of an official recommendation.

Without MERIL, the facility-based recommendations within the official reports of the ROAMER project would have been substantially more time-consuming, required more staff, and been near-impossible to achieve such a comprehensive picture of the RI landscape. The resultant priorities established from the project will go a long way to support progress in a historically under-funded area of research, with the ultimate aim of improving mental health across Europe.