

Data-Producing Methods in CRC 985: Recommendations for Research Data Management in Large Interdisciplinary Projects

CRC 985 - Functional Microgels and Microgel Systems

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Data can be found here: <https://dx.doi.org/10.22000/1793>

Software availability:

No software was specifically developed for this project. The associated Jupyter Notebook can be found within the above-mentioned dataset.

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Abstract. Within CRC 985, groups from a variety of chemical institutes, chemical engineering, physics, and the life sciences collaborate on research on microgel systems. Over a funding period of nearly 12 years, the CRC has produced numerous publications, which are associated with a large amount of underlying research data arising from many different methods. To gain a deeper understanding of this research data, the CRC 985 INF project has carried out a survey and thus gathered information on the data producing methods involved. Based on this information, recommendations for data exchange formats, data publication and archival for the current project are made. Furthermore, we propose solutions, especially for data organization and documentation, for similar, interdisciplinary projects.

1 Introduction

The collaborative research center (CRC)¹ 985 *Functional Microgels and Microgel Systems* has studied microgels, soft colloidal macromolecular compounds that find applications in many different fields for over two funding periods, the current third funding period being its final. The project brings together research groups from numerous chemical institutes, chemical engineering, physics, biotechnology, and the life sciences, with RWTH Aachen University, DWI - Leibniz Institute for Interactive Materials, the RWTH Aachen University Hospital (UKA), and Forschungszentrum Jülich (FZJ) cooperating with each other. In total, approximately 40 groups, currently involving approx. 90 principal investigators (PIs), post doctoral researchers, or doctoral researchers, have or are actively contributing to the project and over 300 scientific publications

1. CRCs are long-term yet temporary research projects funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). They can run a total of 12 years, with individual funding periods of 4 years.

11 have been produced so far.

12 In the first funding period, which began in 2012, the research data management (RDM) struc-
13 ture included a Microsoft SharePoint, while Mattermost was introduced as an instant-message
14 communication system. On this basis, information could be shared and communicated across
15 research areas as well as internally in smaller groups. Furthermore, during the previous funding
16 periods, a sample management system was integrated into SharePoint to simplify workflows by
17 providing sample history and tracking sample location, while implementing a universal naming
18 system throughout the project and assigning persistent identifiers (PIDs) [1]. However, until
19 this stage, data was shared and stored in a manner that did not follow any specific guidelines.
20 The best practice of the scientists was therefore to add metadata in the form of individually
21 written texts and to save raw measurement data in an individual project folder. Storing data
22 across projects with the same structure and making it accessible for future projects is challenging
23 with this approach. One reason for this is that different templates would have to be developed
24 individually for different tasks, or new software would have to be developed for this purpose
25 explicitly for this CRC. Similar statements regarding this problem description for projects of this
26 scale have been published in other CRCs [2], [3].

27 From today's point of view, proficient RDM requires much more, e.g., the sharing and archiving
28 of data according to the FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) principles that were
29 introduced in 2016 [4]. At their core, these guidelines build upon one another to ultimately
30 ensure a dataset's reusability. For research data, they carry implications for both those producing
31 the data, e.g., researchers, but also for those providing infrastructures such as research data
32 repositories [5]. Implementing practices and tools that enable FAIR throughout each stage of a
33 research project also facilitates FAIR in the long run. Large, interdisciplinary projects can benefit
34 from these practices as participants can more easily find, access, and (re)use data produced by
35 their collaborating partners or predecessors, e.g., from previous funding periods.

36 Fully functional RDM infrastructures and information standards are still a work in progress. The
37 German national research data infrastructure (NFDI) and its discipline-specific consortia aim to
38 move this progress along [6]. In the area of chemistry, NFDI4Chem strives to not only set up a
39 system of repositories for data sharing and archival, but also to establish minimum information
40 and format standards to ensure data remains reusable and interoperable [7]. These efforts should
41 inform the research communities' RDM practices, while the consortia also require researchers'
42 input to best suit their needs.

43 As part of the CRC 985 Information and Infrastructure (INF) project, we present an overview of
44 the diversity in a research project of this magnitude in terms of the number of data-producing
45 methods and the variety of associated data. A survey to gather relevant information lays the foun-
46 dation of this work. Based on this information as well as formal and informal exchange with CRC
47 project members, we discuss how to deal with such a variety of data in future projects in terms
48 of project preparation, recommended RDM practices in terms of storage, publication, archival
49 and the accompanying data formats, and communication and awareness among participating
50 researchers. Furthermore, as a project which includes many chemical and chemistry-related
51 disciplines, the information presented here can inform the efforts and goals within NFDI consortia
52 such as NFDI4Chem.

53 2 Methodology

54 Figure 1 shows the general approach taken for this work. Stage 1 focused on gathering information
55 within CRC 985. To this end, the INF project compiled a structured questionnaire to survey
56 the data-producing methods and workflows throughout the CRC. It then acquired contacts for
57 RDM-related topics for the various groups and distributed the first version of the questionnaire.
58 Reviewing the initial answers and exchanging information directly with the participants enabled
59 a revision of the questions and expansion of the questionnaire. On the one hand, the questionnaire
60 then directly included explanations on terminology and concepts such as metadata, and on the
61 other hand the survey became more specific to enable the INF project to gather the desired
62 information in a more targeted manner. These surveys and exchanges took place throughout
63 2021 through 2023.

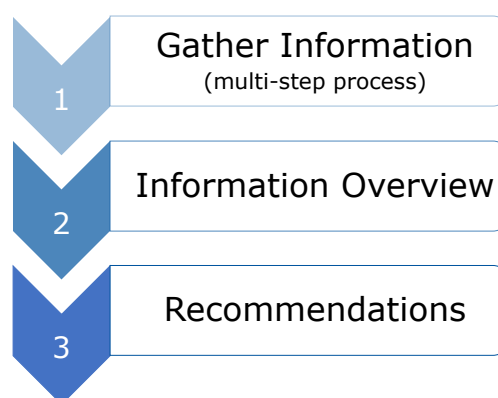


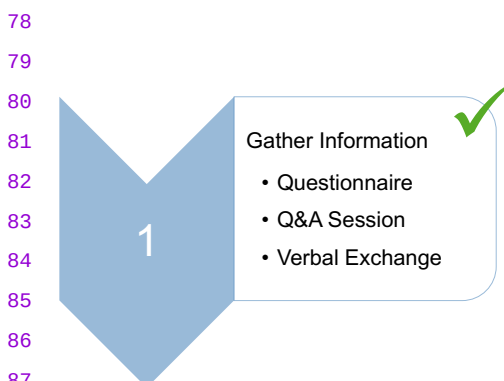
Figure 1: Targeted incremental approach to provide an overview of the project's scope and set the basis for future RDM improvements.

64 In the second stage, the INF project compiled an overview of the gathered information on data-
65 producing methods. This serves as a resource for CRC 985 and was therefore published on the
66 project's SharePoint for easy reference. Details from this table inform the Results section of this
67 work.

68 The third stage, recommendations, employs the data collected in the previous stage as well as
69 general information and feedback collected in a rather informal manner in question and answer
70 sessions as part of workshops or presentations. This informed the INF project on the needs of
71 the researchers. By drawing on knowledge provided by Fairsharing.org [8], re3data.org [9],
72 and NFDI4Chem [10] as well as central solutions offered by the RWTH Aachen University,
73 recommendations for current and future projects on infrastructure options, e.g. working data
74 storage, electronic laboratory notebooks (ELNs), and data publishing and archival services, are
75 made. Furthermore, areas that require additional work by infrastructure providers are pinpointed.

76 3 Results and Discussion

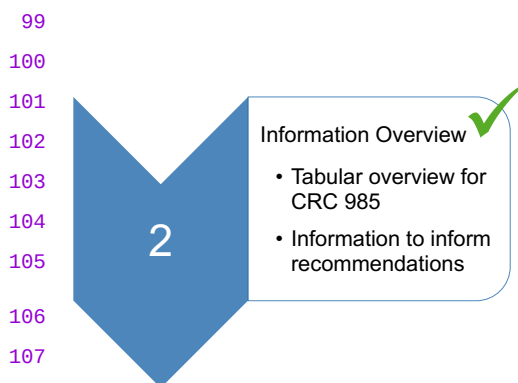
77 3.1 Stage 1: Gathering Information



88 **Figure 2:** Successful information gathering
89 through a questionnaire that was continuously
90 improved through question and answer sessions
91 and a close exchange with CRC 985 scientists.

92
93 overview of the methodological diversity as well as other RDM-related concerns, enabling the
94 INF project to provide suggestions to facilitate RDM in the CRC 985. Therefore, by combining a
95 questionnaire as a living document with a close exchange between the data-producing researchers,
96 the first phase was successfully completed (Figure 2). All versions of the questionnaire as well
97 as the completed documents be found within the dataset published on Radar4Chem [11].

98 3.2 Stage 2: Information Overview



109 **Figure 3:** Successful information overview that
110 tabulates all methods and resulting data volumes
111 within CRC 985.

112
113 numerical methods, cover a broad context of disciplines. This rather coarse-grained depiction
114 summarizes the methods into wider categories, yet, it should be mentioned that the amount of
115 devices and setups employed throughout the CRC gives rise to a large variety of data, including

The questionnaire created at the beginning of this study was used as a living document. Therefore, updates to the questions occurred throughout the first stage to better explain the questions and thus acquire more detailed information, as outlined in Section 2. The questionnaire successfully gathered information in a structured manner and allowed for a baseline to gain more detailed information. This required close face-to-face exchange between the research project members and members of the INF project. In addition, the INF project held seminars for researchers to raise awareness with respect to RDM. Subsequent question and answer sessions gave a further

The full content of the information gathered falls outside the scope of the results reported here, with the focus being placed on information regarding data-producing methods, the produced data volume, the generated data types, and data documentation, and working data storage and organization.

The questionnaires resulted in a tabular overview of the data-producing methods employed throughout the CRC 985. Figure 4 provides an overview of these methods by research area, indicated by institute or department names. As shown, the wide variety of methods, from spectroscopy to microscopy to

116 differences in the data output sizes and file types, even within a specific method. In total, 40
117 method categories were reported throughout the project. As this reporting was primarily volun-
118 tary and researchers may acquire, develop, or even switch methods as a project progress, this
119 number is approximate.

120 Figure 5 exhibits the resulting multitude of data output sizes. The majority of the methods produce
121 data at or below the 1 GB mark, while five methods, namely high-resolution microscopy methods,
122 such as superresolution fluorescence microscopy or tensiometry, and numerical methods, cross
123 or go far beyond that mark.

124 The survey results provide an overview of commonly used data formats for raw and exported
125 data. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.3, with reported data formats provided
126 in Table 1. During exchange with researchers and due to the responses presented below, it was
127 clear that standard formats were not necessarily well-known, however, and therefore guidance
128 on data formats is required. This information was included on the shared overview table on
129 the SharePoint for project members to reference. An anonymized version of this table is also
130 provided in the published dataset [11].

131 The questionnaire also addressed data documentation, especially regarding (uniform) metadata.
132 The responses reveal that, for most groups, very little uniform, machine-readable metadata is
133 recorded unless it is contained directly in the output data files. However, this information may
134 not always be contained in the exported version of the data, with which many members reported
135 working. Relevant information is often included directly in the file name, analog or electronic
136 laboratory notebooks, or digitized in plain text, Microsoft Office, or Microsoft Excel files. Only
137 one group mentioned using controlled vocabularies.

138 It should be noted that, in some cases, project members, especially doctoral students, expressed
139 concerns in terms of data storage best practices, which data should be stored, published, and
140 archived at which stage data should be stored and/or published (raw vs. exported or processed
141 data), data organization, backup systems, and data formats. This was often expressed in informal
142 conversations or workshop or seminar settings.

143 Thus, the survey provided sufficient results to obtain an overview of the methodological diversity
144 and generated data that led to the successful completion of the second phase (Figure 3). In
145 addition to the data-producing methods, other foundational aspects and concerns regarding RDM
146 were collected and will be addressed in the following.

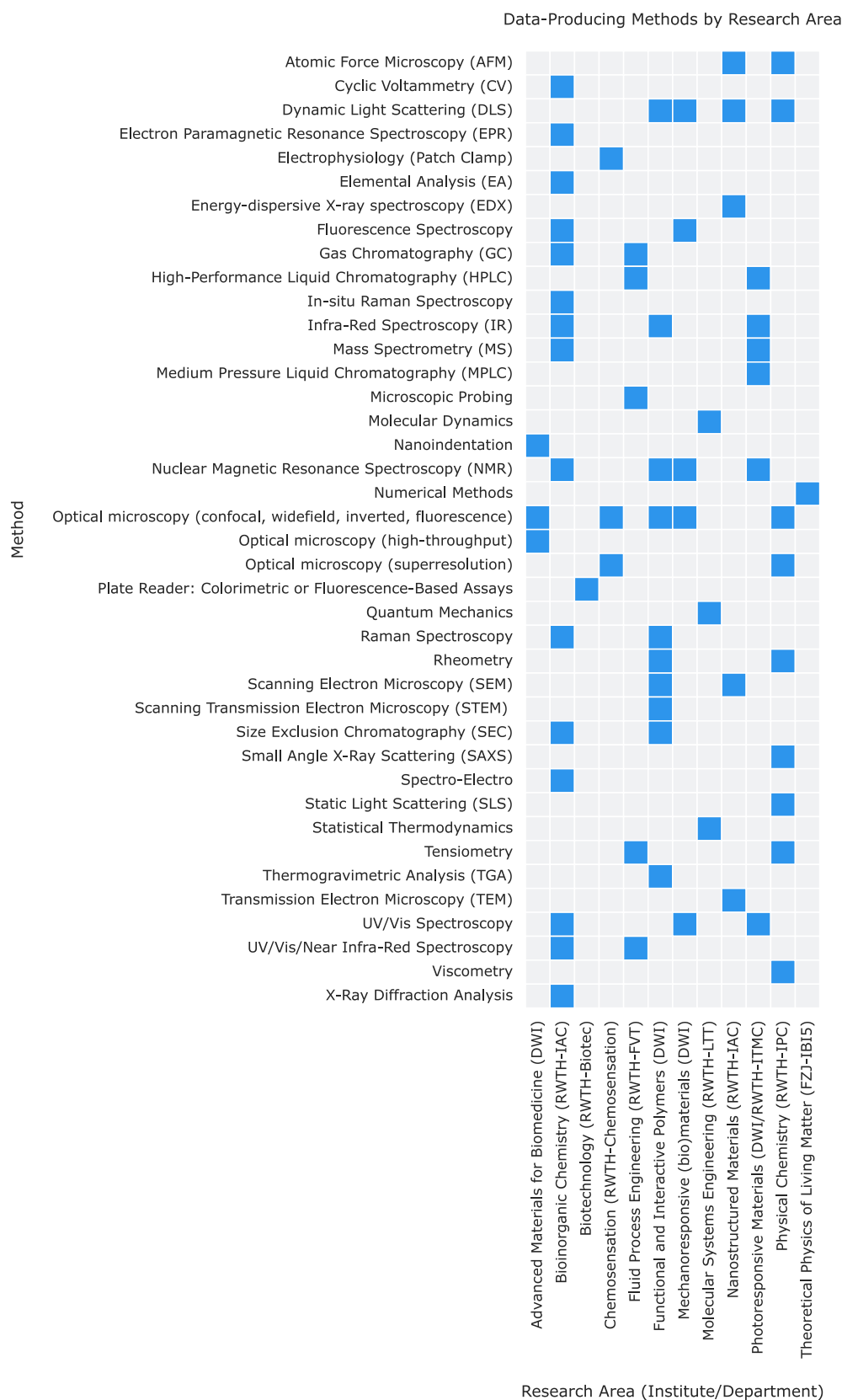


Figure 4: Methods reported according to their area of research in CRC 985. The employed or available methods range from spectroscopy, to microscopy, to numerical, representing the variety of disciplines involved in the project. Nevertheless, many methods are common to chemistry-related research. In total, 40 method categories were reported.

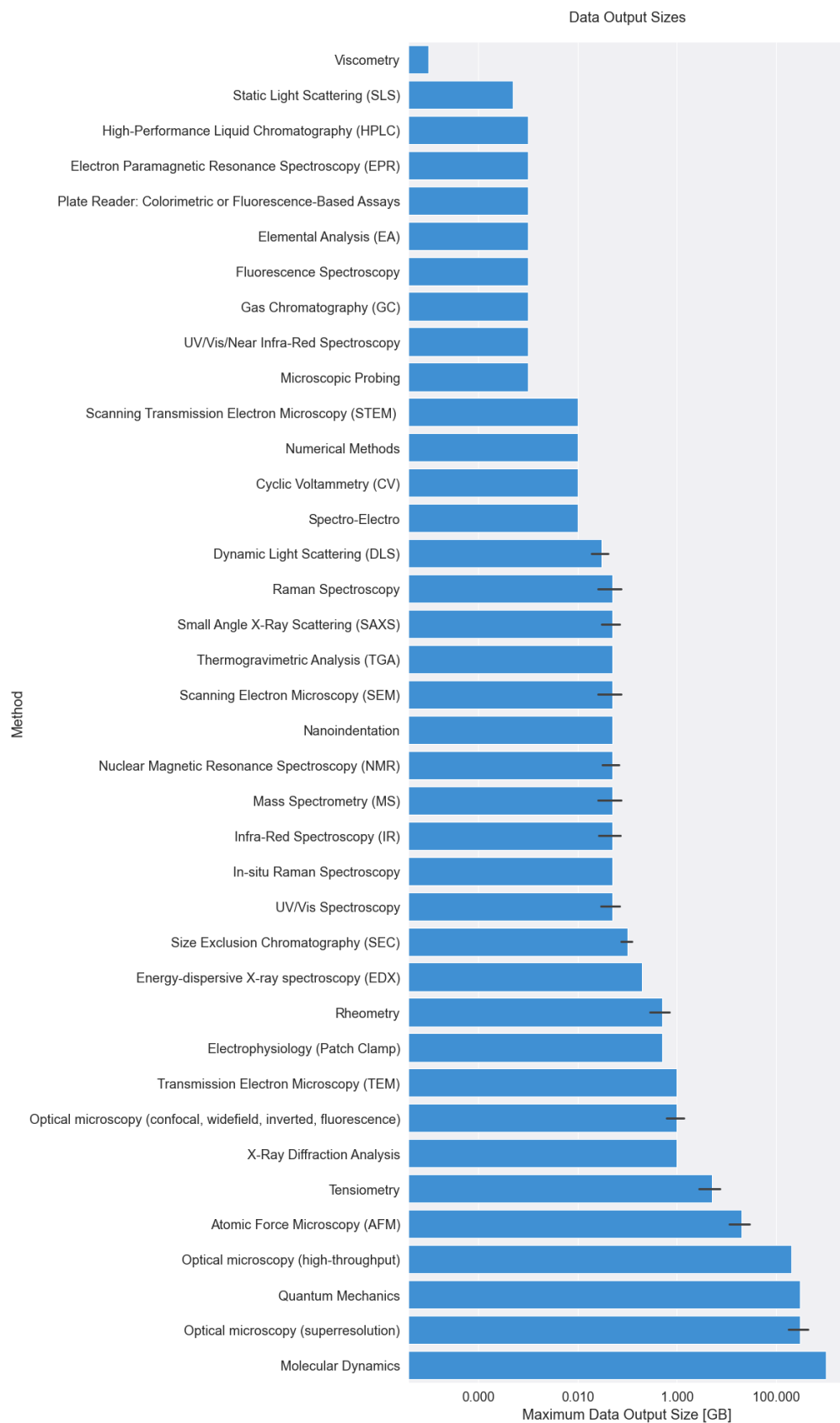


Figure 5: Methods and their output data sizes reported in CRC 985. Most reported output sizes are smaller than 1 GB, with numeric and imaging methods far beyond that point and up to 1 TB. Where applicable, error bars indicate the standard deviation of the data output sizes reported for specific methods.

147 3.3 Stage 3: Recommendations

148 Based on the knowledge gained from the presented results, we derived the following recom-
149 mendations as outlined below. On the one hand, the data-producing method types and file sizes
150 influence aspects such as data publication platforms and recommended file types. On the other
151 hand, the project participants' accounts allow to directly address the concerns and advise on
152 research data management best practices accordingly.

153 The main concerns reported were:

- 154 1. Knowledge and implementation of data organization basics and best practices regarding
155 working data storage and structure
- 156 2. Internal data reuse, e.g., the ability to easily build upon a predecessor's work
- 157 3. Access to storage space for large amounts of (raw) data
- 158 4. Data exchange format standards
- 159 5. Knowledge of data documentation best practices and minimum information (metadata)
160 standards
- 161 6. Publishing data underlying a journal article publication, e.g. which repository best suits
162 the research data and data access control (open access vs. closed access options)

163 These concerns were largely reported on a group and not necessarily a project-specific level.
164 Many are also interlinked and can thus be grouped together. Therefore, in the following, we will
165 discuss and make recommendations for data organization within a group, which involves working
166 data storage and organization, data formats, data documentation, including minimum information
167 (metadata) standards as well as archival (covering points 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 above). Together, these
168 points ensure data can be reused by others within the group and also prepare data for publication
169 and reuse by those outside of an organization or project. Then, we recommended repositories
170 based on discipline and/or data acquisition methods employed, and how to reference this data
171 within a journal article (covering point 6 above). Lastly, we will outline how individual groups
172 can tie this all together into collaborative work in a large, interdisciplinary project.

173 These recommendations fit the data lifecycle, depicted in Figure 6.



Figure 6: The research data lifecycle depicts the typical stages of research data throughout a project. These includes the planning of the project, which includes detailed planning on which research data will be generated or re-used as well as how it will be stored during and archived after the project. The active research phases include the data production and analysis phases, after which the data is preserved and access rights are determined, such as open-access in a public repository or closed access in an institutional archive. Those who have access to the data can then re-use it in the next project. At this point, the planning stage restarts the cycle [12].

174 3.3.1 Data Organization and Documentation

175 Proper data organization, first and foremost, ensures that those currently working with the data
 176 can do so efficiently. Furthermore, it enables others to easily understand and therefore reuse or
 177 build upon the data, from future doctoral students in the same group to external researchers with
 178 whom the data may be shared. A plethora of information exists on the topic; in order to condense
 179 this information for group members, the INF project held a workshop on data organization basics.
 180 This information was also outlined on guides posted to the CRC's SharePoint. Therefore, we will
 181 not go into detail here on organizing directory structures, data backup, and versioning. Rather,
 182 we will provide the essential points and then elaborate on supporting infrastructure.

183 Working project data should be centrally stored, either using institutional server or rented server
 184 space from the university's central service providers. Research data storage on individual hard
 185 drives should be avoided, while the centralized storage may be synchronized to local devices
 186 using various services. Working data should be organized by overarching projects, wherever
 187 possible, using templates for project directory structure, while access to directories should be
 188 controlled on an administrative level. Furthermore, this organization and structure should be
 189 well-documented, e.g., in a group level data management plan as well as plain-text README

190 files contained within the directory structure. This not only aids in onboarding new group
191 members, but also provides a reference for (external data) stewards or data managers, e.g., those
192 involved in INF projects, while providing contextual information for data publication as well as
193 for after the project has ended.

194 As for research data documentation, without specialized tools, text-based metadata templates
195 in the form of YAML or JSON can also be employed. Based on such a template, details for
196 each dataset are maintained and stored next to the data itself, thereby recording the minimum
197 information for an experiment, measurement, or sample as agreed upon by the group, and
198 by following existing community standards, where available. While raw data files should
199 be maintained in read-only folders within the project structure and may contain all necessary
200 information, text-based metadata files can provide further documentation, especially when the
201 raw data is contained in proprietary data formats. These templates should be established in the
202 planning phase of the research data lifecycle and updated when required throughout the data
203 production and analysis phases (see Figure 6).

204 This covers very basic data storage and management that does not employ any specialized tools or
205 infrastructure, besides a well-managed institutional server, directory structure, and documentation
206 using agreed-upon templates. It provides group members, especially junior scientists, with the
207 framework to operate in an efficient and organized manner, while producing transparent results
208 that are (re)usable by other group members. However, sophisticated tools and platforms exist,
209 and are being continuously updated and improved, to further assist researchers in effective
210 research data management.

211 In many natural sciences, the laboratory journal stands as the staple of research documentation.
212 However, analog journals are not machine-readable and do not necessarily follow uniform
213 documentation standards. Digital counterparts, electronic laboratory notebooks (ELNs), offer
214 a powerful solution to managing working data and, especially, documenting research in a
215 digital manner. These platforms exist with a wide variety of styles and target user groups, from
216 the more synthetic chemistry focused Chemotion ELN [13]–[15] to the broadly customizable
217 eLabFTW [16], [17], both of which are used within the CRC 985.

218 For ELNs, it is important to continue to follow data organization and documentation best practices.
219 While some ELNs, such as the Chemotion ELN, strive to adhere to minimum information
220 standards for supported methods, highly customizable instances or unsupported methods require
221 high-level organization from within the group or institute. As with the templates outlined
222 above, groups or institutes should agree on the information to record for their experiments and
223 create templates for the ELN. eLabFTW, for example, enables custom metadata and allows
224 for the creation of experiment templates. Chemotion has recently also expanded to include
225 LabIMotion [18] which enables custom modules for non-chemistry or not yet included methods.
226 Therefore, an ELN must be centrally managed and documented within the group, analogues to
227 the basic data organization and storage outlined above. This includes providing templates and
228 usage guidelines, as well as training group members.

229 In cases where ELNs are not quite suited or increased storage is required while metadata man-
230 agement is at the forefront, the RWTH Aachen IT Center has developed Coscine (short for
231 Collaborative Scientific Integration Environment) [19], [20]. This platform primarily aims to

232 organize and manage working research data in ongoing projects. On a group level, Coscine
233 offers various storage types, called resources, with a storage quota of up to 125 TB per project for
234 participating universities or groups involved in NFDI-related projects. Custom metadata applica-
235 tion profiles can be generated to fit group needs, which result in a fillable metadata form that
236 includes metadata validation for input values. Data within a project or sub-project is organized
237 into resources, each of which has been assigned a specific application profile and a persistent
238 identifier (PID) in the form of an ePIC [21], which leads to a contact page. Therefore, groups
239 can customize their data documentation and storage structure to fit their needs and incorporate
240 community-specific minimum information standards. Details pertaining to the collaborative
241 aspects of this platform will be discussed in Section 3.3.3.

242 Working from a basis of well-structured and well-documented data organization, established
243 during the planning phase and implemented during the data production phase of the research data
244 lifecycle (Figure 6), provides the foundation for RDM in collaborative projects. Maintenance
245 of these practices and proper onboarding of group members ensures adherence and avoids
246 uncertainty.

247 3.3.2 Data Formats

248 Vendor software typically directs data formats for output data, which may be proprietary. Data
249 export options often exist, as reported throughout the project. Interoperable data requires open
250 and standardized data formats, which do not exist for every method [22]. For many methods,
251 open export formats such as TEXT and comma-separated values (CSV) were reported, however,
252 the associated metadata may be lost or incomplete upon export. A workaround, as outlined above,
253 involves maintaining complete and well-structured metadata in plain text-based file formats,
254 within ELNs, or on platforms such as Coscine. In the case of standard open formats, tools such
255 as ELNs and research data repositories may only accept certain standard data formats or may
256 automatically convert the data accordingly [23]. Furthermore, vendor software may also include
257 converters for such formats. As standard open data exchange formats exist for certain analysis
258 methods within the CRC and since many of them were not mentioned in the survey responses,
259 we gathered recommendations and summarized these in Table 1, sourcing information from
260 FAIRsharing [8] and NFDI4Chem's Knowledge Base [10], as well as the Chemotion Repository
261 documentation [24].

262 This information has also been shared on the CRC 985 SharePoint along with the method
263 information outlined above. Gathering this information specifically arose from communication
264 over the common misconception that data should always be published as CSV or TEXT files.
265 While this may present a solution for data types for which no standards have been established,
266 standards for certain data types do, indeed, exist and may simply lack awareness.

267

Table 1: Data exchange formats recommended by FAIRsharing, NFDI4Chem, and the Chemotion Repository for selected methods reported within CRC 985 and common data formats or file extensions reported throughout the project. Formats sourced from FAIRsharing.org are cited accordingly, while those listed on NFDI4Chem’s Knowledge Base and the Chemotion Repository Documentation are denoted accordingly. We recommend the adoption of formats printed in bold font.

method	data exchange format or file extension	data exchange formats within CRC 985
Chromatography	ANDI-MS [25]	CSV
	CSV ^a	PDF
	TXT ^a	.vdt .gcd
Colorimetric or Fluorescence-based Assays	-	.ruc (raw) ASCII (export including meta-data)
	Computational Chemistry	CHARMM Card File Format (CRD) [26]
Cyclic Voltammetry (CV)	TXT ^a	ASCII
		.log
		.cosmo
		.energy
		.out
		.gjf
Electrophysiology (patch clamp)	-	.xyz CSV (processed)
		.dat
Electron Paramagnetic Resonance Spectroscopy (EPR)	TXT ^a	.spe
Elemental Analysis (EA)	TXT ^a	TXT (export)
Energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX)	-	TXT
		JPEG (export)
		PNG (export)
Fluorescence spectroscopy	JCAMP-DX ^a	OPJ
		FDS
		TXT (export)
		PDF (export)

268

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(Continued)

IR Spectroscopy (IR)	JCAMP-DX [27] ^a	.ispd
	AnIML [28] ^b	TXT (export)
		PDF (export)
Mass Spectrometry (MS)	JCAMP-DX [27]	.d
	AnIML [28] ^b	.bad
	mzML [29] ^a	Xcalibur Raw file
		TXT
		.jws
Mechanical Surface Analysis (nanoindentation)	- (standard data model: CWA 17552:2020 [30])	TXT
Microscopy	OME-TIFF [31]	.nid
		.spm
		.jpk-qi-image
		.jpk-qi-data
		TIFF ^e
		LIF
		DM4 (TEM)
		JPEG (export)
		PNG (export)
		AVI (video)
		CSV
TXT		
NMR	NMR-STAR [32]	.mrnova
	CCPN [33]	FID
	NMR-ML [34]	PDF (export)
	NMReData [35] (assign- ments) ^a	
	AniML [28] ^b	
	JCAMP-DX (raw) ^a	
Raman Spectroscopy	JCAMP-DX ^a	.icRaman
		AniML [28] ^b
		.sps
		TXT (export)
		CSV (export)
		.spc (export)
	.xlsx (export)	

(Continued)

Rheometry	-	.rdf .tri .iwp CSV (export)
Dynamic Light Scattering	CSV ^b	ASC^d .dts .zmes^d CSV (export) TXT (export)
Static Light Scattering	-	.d80 .txt (export, not all parameters included)
Small Angle X-Ray Scattering (SAXS)	-	.mpa .info .edf .dat
Spectroelectrochemistry	-	.str8 TXT (export)
Tensiometry	PNG (contact angle measurements) ^a	.krs .zip (export, contains all .krs and XML)^d XLSX (export or analysis results)
Thermal Analysis	-	.stad .spp TXT (export) CSV (export)
UV/Vis Spectroscopy JCAMP-DX^c	CSV ^a .dsw .bsk .bkn .str .jws .jwb .ksd .sre (ASCII) TXT (export) CSV (export)	

(Continued)

X-Ray Diffraction Analysis (XRD)	CIF [36] (single crystal) ^a .xyd (powder) ^a	binary encoded frames (images) .p4p .hkl .res CIF .x
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^a NFDI4Chem Knowledge Base^b under development according to FAIRsharing.org^c Chemotion Repository^d (meta)data accessible by common tools271 ^e preferably method-specific TIFF-formats that include extended metadata

272 The existing standard data exchange formats listed in Table 1 provide guidelines on formats
273 to chose from, while recommended standards and common formats are highlighted in bold
274 font. The exact format choice for each method will depend on available software and export or
275 conversion tools and also the formats data types specific repositories will accept for publication
276 (see, for example, Chemotion Repository requirements in [24]).

277 Notably, many methods do lack specific standards, for which the above-mentioned practice of
278 documenting data appropriately and sharing data along with the associate metadata in open,
279 text-based formats is advised. As the varying efforts such as the NFDI consortia continue their
280 work, more standards will become available. Furthermore, minimum information standards
281 will continue to direct how data should be formatted and documented, further guiding format
282 standards.

283 Table 1 as well as the published overview [11] also serve to inform the standards community
284 on which formats researchers are employing in their day-to-day work and where standards are
285 lacking. It may also serve providers of ELNs and repositories in terms of which formats are in
286 use and which may be supported by their tools.

287 Where standards are not yet available, providing data in an accessible format is advisable. For
288 example, in dynamic light scattering, devices supplied by Malvern Pananalytical commonly
289 provide data in files with the .zmes extension. While not necessarily a standard format, the data
290 may be accessed and viewed using common SQLite tools. Similarly, dynamic light scattering
291 data provided in ASC files may be accessed by common text editors. Many of these include
292 metadata alongside the data, while exporting to TXT and CSV files may not and additional
293 metadata annotation would be required.

294 As with data organization and documentation, format standards must be agreed upon as part of
295 the planning stage of the data lifecycle (Figure 6), communicated within the group, and updated
296 as more standards become available.

297 3.3.3 Collaboration

298 Up until now, the discussion has focused on the group level. Having a well-documented approach
299 to data organization, documentation, and the tools used helps in identifying how collaborative
300 projects such as CRCs and the contained sub-projects can best manage data.

301 The CRC 985 INF project addressed sample tracking throughout a collaborative project involving
302 many different groups and institutes in previous funding periods [1], as described in Section 1.
303 This system aimed to solve a specific problem with sample traceability within the project, while
304 enabling project members to directly attach associated data to a sample. However, as shown
305 in Figure 4, some research within the CRC may not involve physical samples. Furthermore,
306 SharePoint relies on database storage that cannot accommodate larger data sets. It is therefore
307 not suitable for all methods and the associated (raw) data, e.g., superresolution fluorescence
308 microscopy (SRFM) and numerical methods. For these cases, other systems can provide the
309 necessary solutions. It should also be noted that the metadata describes the sample rather than
310 any attached data, and therefore would still require external documentation to fully describe the
311 dataset belonging to the sample if not included directly within in the files.

312 A shared or central ELN instance, that is used by all the members of the project, could provide
313 one solution, yet, this did not prove realistic in this CRC for multiple reason, from varying user
314 and group needs to the lack of a centralized solution offered by the university. As individual
315 groups and institutes have indeed implemented ELNs, exchange formats between these could
316 assist in collaborations in such projects. Solutions here may be provided by exchange formats
317 between ELNs, a goal of initiatives such as the ELN Consortium [37], which currently involved
318 ten ELN providers, including those mentioned above.

319 Another option is using Coscine. Its intent is to create a collaborative work environment. Roll
320 management occurs on a project level, therefore, members can be given access to their respective
321 sub-project, with all data relevant to the project collected and documented in one place. A
322 REST API (Representational State Transfer Application Programming Interface) also allows
323 for automated data workflows, e.g., between local servers or ELNs and the platform. As such,
324 metadata, data, and identifiers may be mirrored between platforms, giving members a working-
325 group agnostic option. Its large storage capacity assists researchers where local servers or systems
326 that rely on a database structure such as SharePoint and some ELNs reach their limits. The system
327 has been used for groups producing large amounts of data within the CRC, such as tensiometry
328 and other imaging techniques.

329 In large interdisciplinary projects, one-size-fit-all-systems prove difficult. However, having
330 clear guidelines for individual groups that enable FAIR allows for these systems to be linked to
331 one centralized system that facilitates data sharing. Due to a lack of a REST API, the CRC's
332 SharePoint and therefore the original sample management system prove difficult for automated
333 workflows. Coscine and the major ELNs do offer solutions here, which therefore enable one
334 central platform for data sharing and collaboration within a project, while local systems are
335 maintained.

336 In the process of this study, besides the questionnaire, the sample management system was
337 also optimized, leading to more information when storing data. This study thus also directly

338 contributed to improved data management, and shows that for specific cases it can be helpful to
 339 use a variable platform as is desired for future data storage.

340 3.3.4 Data Publication and Archival



351 **Figure 7:** Several recommendations could be
 352 made for active data storage, including data
 353 formats, documentation, and archival for a project
 354 on the scale of CRC 985.

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Where possible, community-specific repositories are preferred, as these are able to provide detailed metadata templates, enabling researchers to fully describe the published data. When using general or institutional repositories, adding as many (optional) metadata fields is best practice, while providing plain-text README files for additional context. As institutional repositories may be used for reporting purposes, importing published datasets is also important, analogous to text publications. Within these categories, we make the following recommendations for data sharing and archival CRC 985, outlined in Table 2, which completes the final objective of this study (Figure 7).

363 **Table 2:** Repositories recommended for CRC 985 and projects with similar data types. Institutional repositories correspond to research institutes involved in the current project.

Repository	Type	Description [8]	Date Size Limits
Jülich DATA [38]	institutional	A registry service to index all research data created at or in the context of Forschungszentrum Jülich, which may also be used to publish research data and software.	10 GB per file (depends on Dataverse installation); prefers links to larger datasets [39]

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RWTH Publications Research Data [40]	institutional	As part of the general RWTH Publications repository, data and software can be published by all RWTH Aachen University members and affiliates.	100 GB per file; 1 TB maximum over all files (gigamove) [41]
Chemotion Repository [42]	discipline-specific	The repository supports the storage of data related to chemical samples or reactions, with a focus on data from synthetic and analytical work. While not a requirement, data may be submitted directly via the Chemotion ELN.	None; might limit it to 50 MB in future [43]
Cambridge Structural Database (CSD) [44]	discipline-specific	Established in 1965, the Cambridge Structural Database (CSD) is the a repository for small-molecule organic and metal-organic crystal 3D structures. Database records are automatically checked and manually curated by one of our expert in-house scientific editors. Every structure is enriched with chemical representations, as well as bibliographic, chemical and physical property information, adding further value to the raw structural data.	50 MB per file; 100 MB for the total size of files uploaded; exception for bigger files via email contact [45]

(Continued)

Inorganic Crystal Structure Database (ICSD) [46]	discipline-specific	The world's largest database for fully determined inorganic crystal structures and contains the crystallographic data of published crystalline inorganic structures. Organometallic and theoretical structures have been added within the past years.	None; contact for file sizes > 10 TB [47]
ioChem-BD [48], [49]	discipline-specific	IoChem-BD is a digital repository of Computational Chemistry and Materials results. A set of modules and tools aimed to manage large volumes of quantum chemistry results from a wide variety of broadly used simulation packages.	default 1 GB per upload; > 100 MB not to be uploaded by web interface [50]
NOMAD Repository & Archive [51]	discipline-specific	The NOMAD Repository and Archive stands for open access of scientific materials data. It enables the confirmatory analysis of materials data, their reuse, and repurposing. All data is available in their raw format as produced by the underlying code (Repository) and in a common, machine-processable, and well-defined data format (Archive).	32 GB per upload (maximum of 10 non-published uploads per user) [52]

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RADAR4Chem [53], [54]	chemistry - general	A low-threshold and easy-to use service for sustainable publication and preservation of research data from all disciplines of chemistry. Currently, exclusive to publicly funded research institutions and universities in Germany.	10 GB per project [53]
Supra- bank [55]	discipline- specific	Curated, open resource for intermolecular interaction.	10 GB per user (can be adapted) [56]
zenodo [57]	general	EU discipline-agnostic repository for data and other research results.	50 GB per data set [58]

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368 Certain repositories are also tied to ELNs, therefore providing direct data and metadata workflows.
369 Going a step further, data may also be converted to standard open formats, as is the case with
370 Chemotion ELN and Chemotion Repository, as mentioned above.

371 The published data should then be explicitly referenced via their DOI within the article using a
372 data availability statement, which journals are increasingly requiring [59]. They may also be
373 cited within the article itself. Especially in cases which involve multiple published datasets, this
374 provides additional context for the reader.

375 Within the CRC, aside from the repositories of the respective institutions, the Chemotion Reposi-
376 tory, for those using the Chemotion ELN, RADAR4Chem, as well as the two institutional reposi-
377 tories (see Table 2) have been fairly accepted. These guarantee storage and accessibility for 10
378 years or more, conforming with German Research Foundation (DFG) requirements; the data
379 herein is therefore successfully be deemed archived, while it can also be accessed and reused in
380 accordance with the research data lifecycle in Figure 6.

381 As shown in Figure 5, much of the data volume falls into smaller sizes, with imaging and
382 numerical methods requiring larger storage if all data were to be published. Therefore, much of
383 the produced can be published without too much concern for data volume. For some methods,
384 such as Atomic Force Microscopy, not all extracted data must be published, yet the scripts
385 employed to do so could be. Hence, the data may be reproduced in the same manner when
386 needed, while the published data volume is held to a minimum in cases where repositories limit
387 quota. Furthermore, repositories may offer more quota upon request.

388 Typically, however, projects will amass more data than that, which has been published. This
389 therefore requires additional archive resources. For project members in CRC 985, the above-
390 mentioned Coscine also serves as an archiving space. The entire SharePoint, including the
391 sample management system will be archived under the CRC's Coscine project, while members
392 can gain access to the system to archive their data as needed.

393 3.4 Possible Requirements for Future CRCs and INF Projects

394 The overarching role of INF projects within the CRC has largely been left out of the above
395 discussion. These central projects, however, can play a vital part in setting up and implementing
396 the above aspects.

397 Three aspects were identified within the CRC 985 INF project that should be considered for
398 future projects:

- 399 1. Support for project-wide data management plans and guidelines during project planning
400 stage
- 401 2. End-of-life plan for implemented infrastructure solutions
- 402 3. Sustainability of software solutions

403 To elaborate on 1., many workflows within research groups evolve naturally to fit the needs of
404 those carrying out much of the practical work, i.e., the individual doctoral researchers. However,
405 these tend to be highly individualistic and can be difficult to alter in order to streamline data
406 workflows. Therefore, providing clear guidelines on data organization and associated tools is
407 vital both within the group, but also across the project and should be established in the planning
408 phase. INF projects need to be involved at this stage and assist with infrastructure planning
409 and selection. Thus, overarching solutions can be available at the beginning of a project to
410 avoid implementing solutions and tools and altering workflows during ongoing work. Thus,
411 individual workflows can then be developed within a given framework that facilitates data
412 storage, documentation, and exchange.

413 In terms of 2., the selected solutions require a detailed end-of-life management. It will not always
414 be possible to foresee which services and dependencies may become outdated over the lifetime
415 of a project. However, precautions to safeguard any and all data managed by these services in a
416 structured manner must exist.

417 As for 3., the software solutions developed by the INF project, e.g., data workflow scripts, should
418 be designed to outlive the project. The aspect of maintenance comes into play. Therefore, INF
419 projects should directly include individuals within the groups who are able to maintain these
420 solutions after the INF project is no longer available.

421 Overall, detailed, high-level planning for data management and the implementation of infrastruc-
422 ture solutions should involve INF projects at a very early stage of the project. Then, throughout
423 the project, members must be onboarded and continuously informed on common practices,
424 guidelines, and policies to ensure adherence.

425 4 Conclusion

426 Information on the data-producing methods and the associated data formats and data sizes in CRC
427 985 were collected in order to gain an overview of the diversity and derive RDM concepts and
428 structures for CRCs. The collected information is based on a structured survey, which collected
429 most of the details on the methods themselves, while formal as well as informal discussions in

430 various settings provided further feedback and deeper insight. Based on the information as a
431 whole, recommendations for this ongoing as well as future projects are made.

432 The gathered information paints a picture of the varied disciplines and the accordingly varied data
433 types and sizes. This underlines the need for standardized open exchange formats, as many of the
434 open export formats reported do not necessarily contain the required complete information in the
435 form of structured metadata to fully understand the acquired data. In order to assist in this, tools
436 from plain-text metadata templates to structured ELNs and data management platforms provide
437 essential machine-readable solutions for data documentation, assisting in data interoperability
438 and reuse.

439 The workflows and the RDM practices for each stage of the research data lifecycle (see Figure 6)
440 should be clearly defined and documented on a group level in advance. This information can
441 then feed into large projects such as CRCs, enabling informed decisions regarding RDM and
442 collaboration within the planning phase. In this way, data stewards within the INF project can
443 then establish policies, workflows, and infrastructures for collaboration within these institutional
444 frameworks while working closely with researchers.

445 For projects of the size of CRC 985, a one-size-fits-all solution, such as a uniform ELN and
446 repository where all (meta)data can be recorded in a well-structured manner, does not exist due
447 to the variety of analytical and experimental methods employed and the associated different
448 data formats and size requirements. Therefore, discipline-specific solutions found on a group
449 level require collaboration platforms that support RDM. Within CRC 985, Microsoft SharePoint
450 serves as such as collaboration platform, however, expectations regarding RDM evolved over
451 the project duration. FAIR data requires more structured and defined metadata on various levels.
452 More appropriate platforms for RDM have become available, including platforms such as the
453 RWTH Aachen University's Coscine. This shows that, in addition to a minimum standard which
454 should be defined a priori to the data production phase of the research data lifecycle (see Figure 6),
455 a certain flexibility should also be implemented to meet evolving requirements in later funding
456 periods.

457 With the requirement to publish all data underlying a text publication, ELNs and RDM platforms
458 can greatly assist researchers' workflows in FAIR data publication and archival in subject-specific
459 repositories by providing automated workflows. With much of this work still being in-progress
460 by infrastructure providers, future research projects will be able to greatly benefit, while current
461 work provides vital insight for these efforts.

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468 6 Roles and contributions

469 **Nicole A. Parks:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing, Visualization, Data Curation –
470 original draft

471 **Konstantin W. Kröckert:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft

472 **Fabian Claßen:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft

473 **Walter Richtering:** Project Administration, Writing - review & editing

474 **Mathias Müller:** Project Administration, Writing - review & editing

475 **Sonja Herres-Pawlis:** Project Administration, Supervision, Writing – review & editing

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