

# EARS in 2023

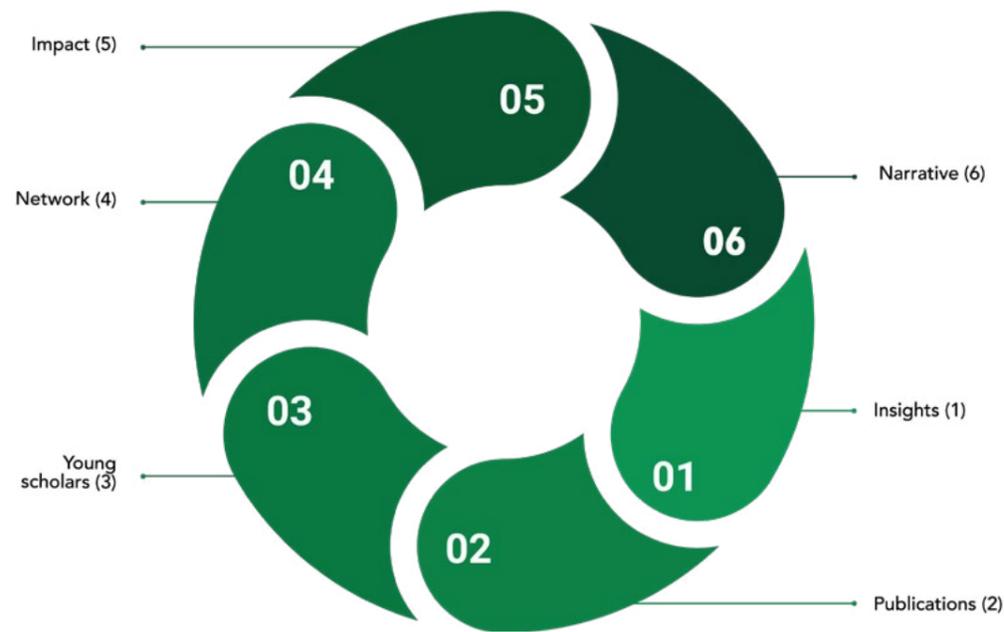


Annual report



EARS is a European network of faculties and departments of Theology and/or Religious Studies. We aim to make religious knowledge visible to society and relevant to the public domain, thereby bridging the gap between academia and society. We do so in order to contribute to the preservation of the heritage of values Christianity handed over to our societies. We use various instruments to do so, including a dashboard, website, social media, round tables, and conferences - all supported by an international team of analysts.

EARS operates based on six focus points. They strengthen each other and are intertwined. The six pillars jointly lead to our key results.

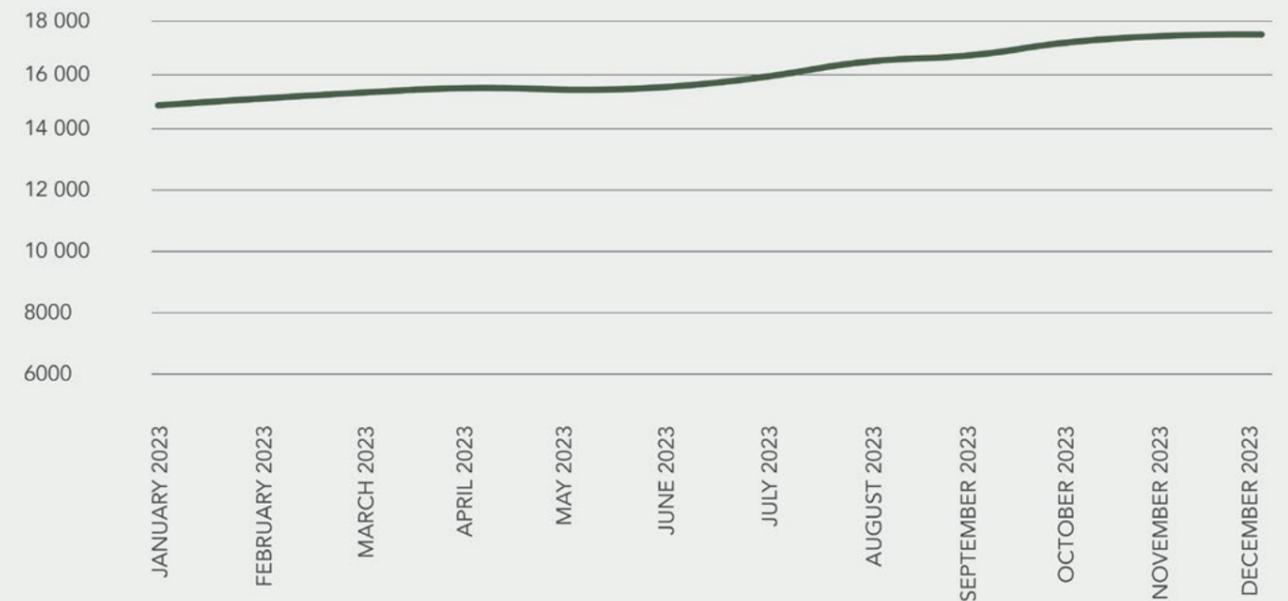


## I. Insights

The EARS dashboard ([www.earsdashboard.com](http://www.earsdashboard.com)) is a database of summarised articles published in leading European media across 25+ countries. The dashboard shows the importance of religion in the public domain and enables users to gain new insights into religion and society.

**Results 2023:** In 2023, we added 2,917 summaries to the dashboard, an average of 243 per month. This is a 9.4% increase compared to 2022. These regular contributions to the dashboard enable us to maintain a database that includes many developments on religion and society from the European news. In addition, since all articles are summarised in English, EARS contributes to making this critical knowledge widely available. The dashboard was visited by 3,160 visitors in 2023.

## Summaries on the EARS dashboard



## II. Publications

13 analysts from 11 different countries are currently part of our team and write articles about current issues regarding religion and society. In addition, they write whitepapers, weekly comments with their own analysis, and dossiers on larger topics at a European level. All articles and other documents are published on the EARS website ([www.ears.eu](http://www.ears.eu)) and on Facebook and LinkedIn.

**Results 2023:** In 2023, we published 98 original articles and 14 weekly comments. In addition, we published an interview series on *the future of religion*, speaking with scholars such as Linda Woodhead, Philippe Portier, Bénédicte Lemmelijn, Graham Ward, and Mathew Guest.

62,388 people visited the EARS website in 2023, compared to 49,009 visitors in 2022 (a 27% increase), 45,000 visitors in 2021, and 13,000 visitors in 2020. In addition, the number of people following the EARS Facebook page rose from 7,381 to 7,491 throughout the year, despite the fact that we did not run any paid advertisements for our page this year. We also gained 78 new LinkedIn followers without any paid page advertisements, bringing the total to 710.

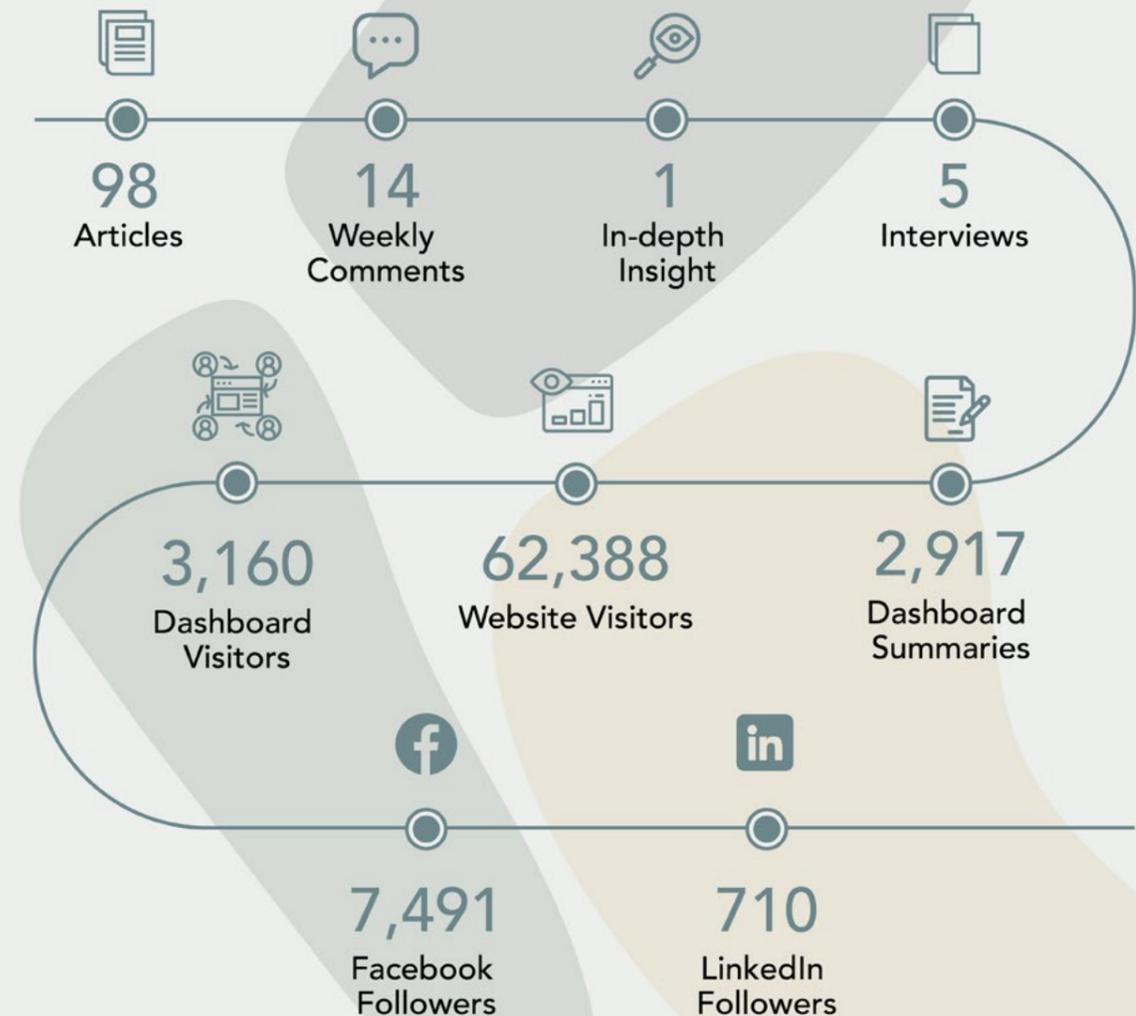
In April 2022, our application for a Google Grant was approved. This program for non-profits allows us to advertise on Google at no cost. During 2023, we ran such Search Engine Advertising (SEA) campaigns for both the website and the dashboard. The advertisements for the website were viewed by 252,197 people throughout 2023. 20,988 of these clicked on the advertisement, leading to a click-through rate of 8.32%. The advertisements for the dashboard were viewed by 12,774 people and 964 of those clicked, resulting in a click-through rate of 7.48%. We are very satisfied with these results, as a 5% click-through rate is required to maintain the Google Grants. On top of that, the Google Grants have greatly contributed to our increase in visitors to the website this year.

## III. Young scholars

An international team of EARS analysts writes the dashboard summaries and website publications. Some of them have a background in theology, while others do not. We see that a new generation of theologians is rising: one that feels attracted to theology, but not within the current study. We see it as a goal to attract this younger generation.

**Results 2023:** The fact that young people without a background in theology are interested in theological matters is very stimulating to EARS. It implies that we are able to reach a different target audience than the regular theology student. Our analysts are responsible for updating the dashboard, as well as writing all publications, including articles and weekly comments.

## Publications & Visitors 2023





## IV. Network

The EARS network consists of three circles. The member faculties and departments are the first and closest circle within the EARS network. Second, we have participants at round tables and other events. Third are policymakers, academics, journalists, politicians, and others interested in the connection between religion and society.

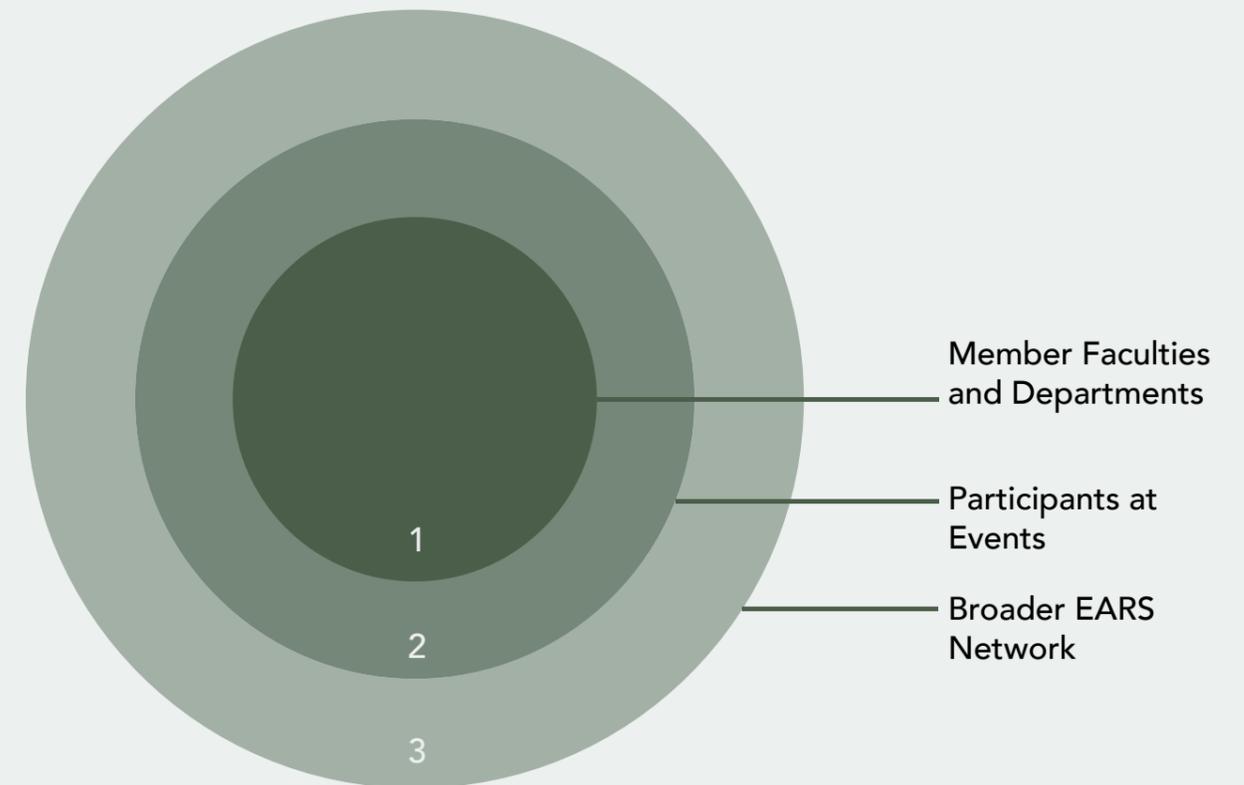
**Results 2023:** We see great value in expanding our broader network and have continued to work on this in 2023. Over the year, our network increased from 314 to 364 individuals (a 16% increase). Across all individuals directly invited to the EARS network, 37% accepted the invite in 2023.

In 2023, we continued sending out our monthly newsletter to our contacts. This newsletter still scores very well compared to other nonprofit organisations in terms of open rates and click rates. 42.7% of newsletter recipients opened the EARS newsletter in 2023, which is a 14.5% increase from 2022. The average open rate for nonprofit organisations is 25.2%. In terms of click rates, 13.9% of EARS newsletter recipients clicked on a link, which is an 18.8% increase from 2022. The average click rate for nonprofit organisations is 2.8%. With only limited efforts, such as posting the newsletter registration link to social media and directly reaching out to interesting people, we have increased the number of contacts receiving our newsletter from 518 in December 2022 to 588 in December 2023 (a 14% increase).

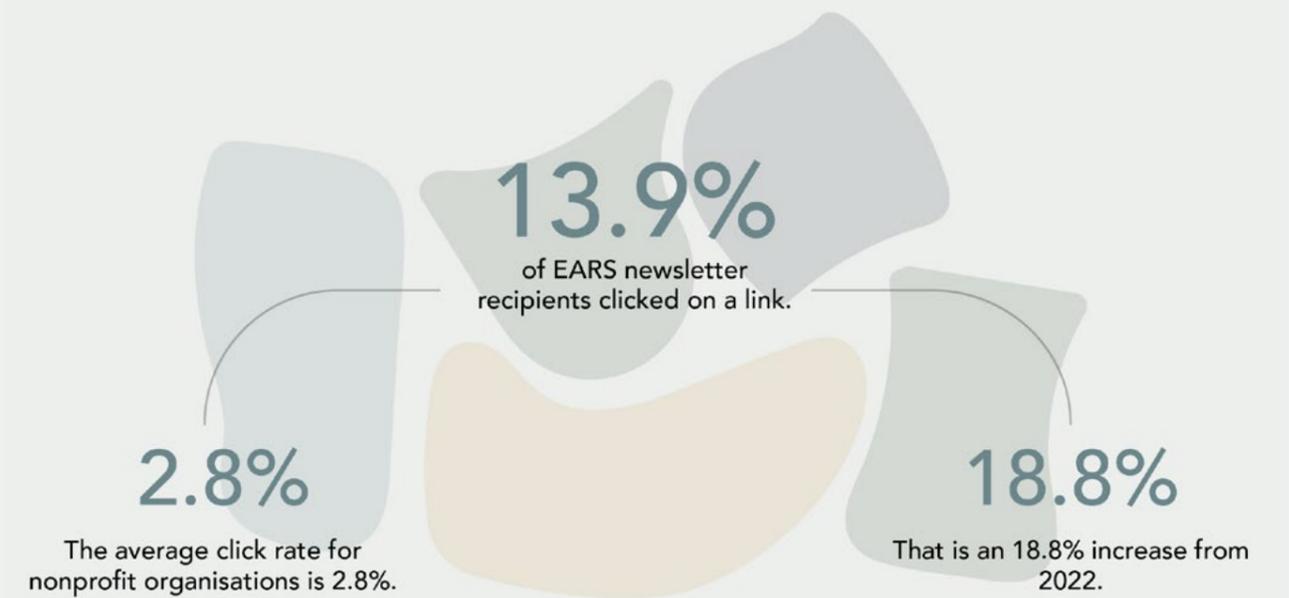
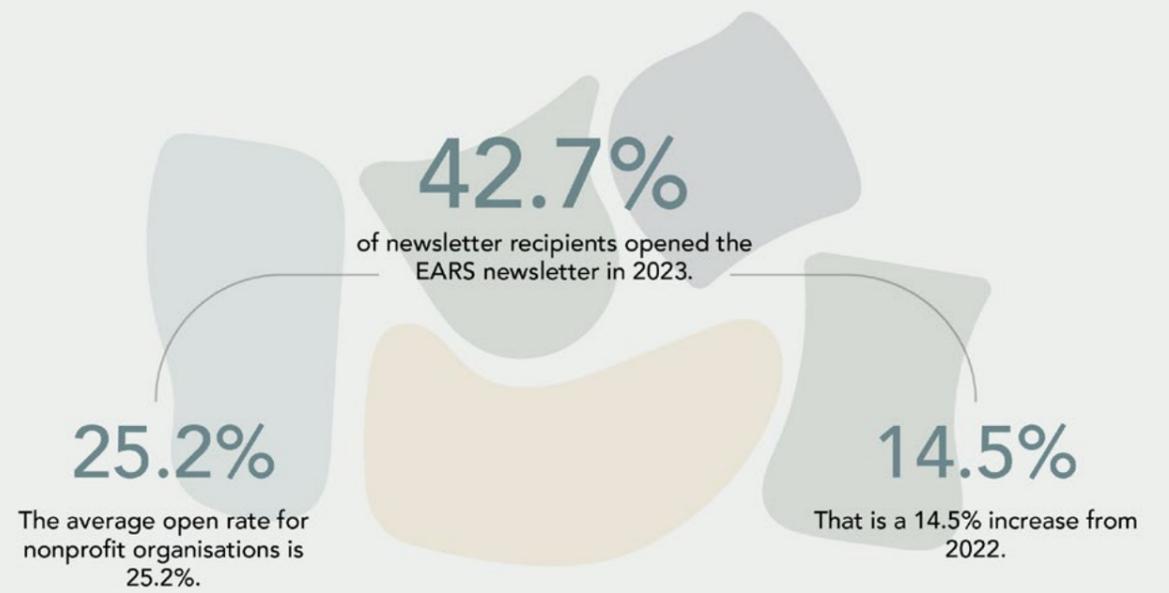
## V. Impact

All the elements above contribute to a certain impact. By impact, we understand first of all the visibility and relevance of the EARS tools and materials (dashboard, round tables, articles, etc.) in academic and social structures. Secondly, impact involves the capacity of EARS to cooperate with other disciplines, as well as with institutions such as the CoE. Finally, impact includes the valuable and effective exchange - at an institutional level - between departments and faculties, and the connection between individuals and organisations, around the theme of a value-driven society.

**Results 2023:** We have taken great steps in increasing the visibility of EARS. We have established new connections and increased the number of network members, social media followers, website visitors, and newsletter recipients. Being involved on a high level in strategic and cross-disciplinary discussions remains a long-term goal for EARS.



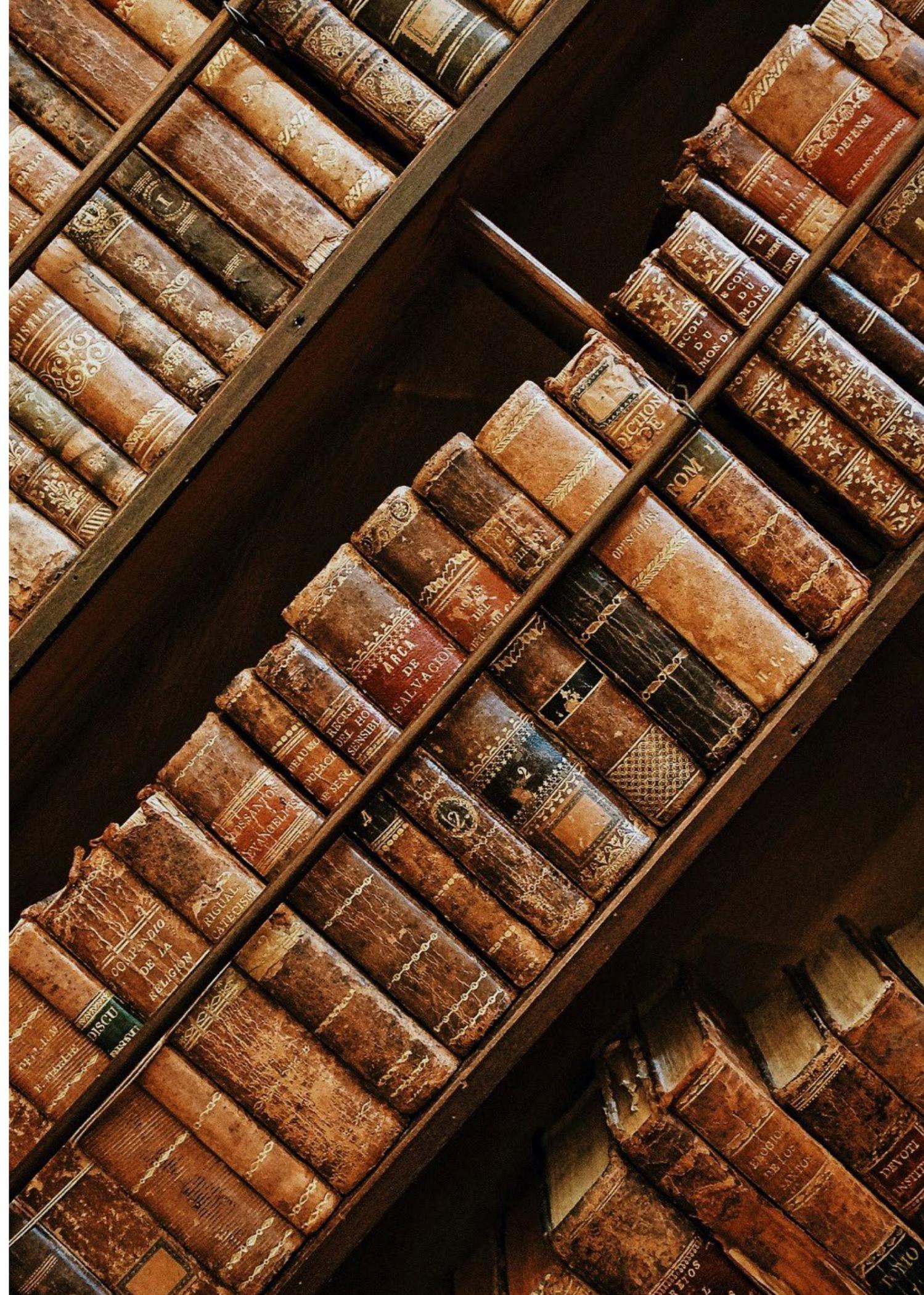
## Open and click rates EARS newsletter



## VI. Narrative

With more and more faculties of Theology and Religious Studies closing, we see it as essential to approach theology in a different way, based on a different narrative. It is time to innovate the way we look at religion. Theology and Religious Studies are not just important for faithful, but for all of society. This is due to the fact that values and morals become more and more important in our society and that input and reflection is desperately needed. Religions involve knowledge that have shaped a culture, from concepts such as solidarity and freedom to the importance of ratio and the soul. A society without a soul, and therefore without art, values, morals, science, and social cohesion, will fall apart. To reach a younger generation, we should build on this new narrative of theology. Not only to facilitate continuity of the discipline, but also to show the role that belief plays in today's societies.

**Results 2023:** This is a long-term goal. If we wish to reach a younger generation, we should also work on the narrative of theology. This is necessary to facilitate the continuity of the discipline.



## Finances

In 2023, the costs for EARS to operate came to a total of €198,500. These are net costs including VAT and including in-kind contributions from, among others, ftrprf B.V. and the Faculty of Religion and Theology at VU Amsterdam.

## Ambitions 2024

In 2024, EARS aims to further develop its position as an independent platform that contributes to value-driven European societies. EARS envisions its external network, currently consisting of 364 academics, politicians, journalists, and others, to be at the core of its activities. EARS provides a platform for these network members to publish their work, to attend inspiring events, to gain new insights and knowledge, to connect with other members, and have the conversation on value-driven European societies. In addition, we will aim to greatly expand the size of the network. EARS is moving towards two core values: EARS *inspires*, and EARS *connects*.

EARS *inspires*, tells stories, shares knowledge, and creates new perspectives. EARS makes visible how religion still plays an important role in Europe, and explains the value of religion in European societies.

In addition, EARS *connects*. It brings people and organisations together. EARS bridges gaps between religious and secular, building new connections. By connecting people and organisations, looking beyond their differences, EARS helps to understand where others are coming from. We strive to actively contribute to the new narrative for our times, driven by values, focussing on connections, and moving away from polarisation.





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