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Bringing Open Science to Researchers and Students

Perspectives from Three Initiatives at the University of Graz¹

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1 This article is based on the talks “Fostering Open Science: Insights from two Bottom-Up Initiatives at the University of Graz” and “Teaching Open Science at the Department of Psychology” by the authors, which took place at the Open Science Conference at the University of Graz on April 14, 2025.

Zusammenfassung

Initiativen zur Förderung von Open Science nehmen eine Schlüsselrolle für den kulturellen Wandel zu einer offenen Forschungskultur ein: Sie bringen das Thema auf die Agenda der Forschenden, organisieren Events und Workshops. Wir präsentieren drei Initiativen der Universität Graz, die unterschiedliche Herangehensweisen verfolgen: Die Graz Open Science Initiative als Zusammenschluss lokaler Forscher:innen, das Arqus Open Science Ambassador Network als internationale Arbeitsgruppe des Arqus Universitätsverbunds und Initiativen auf universitärer Ebene am Institut für Psychologie. Wir fassen zusammen, mit welchen Herausforderungen diese Initiativen konfrontiert sind, und zeigen auf, inwiefern sie Erfolge bei der Förderung von Open Science verbuchen können.

Schlagwörter: Open Science Initiative, Gemeinschaftsbildung, Jungwissenschaftlerinnen und Jungwissenschaftler, Kulturwandel

Abstract

Initiatives to promote Open Science play a key role in the cultural shift toward an open research culture: they put the topic on the agenda of researchers and organize events and workshops. We present three initiatives at the University of Graz that pursue different approaches: the Graz Open Science Initiative as a collaboration of local researchers, the Arqus Open Science Ambassador Network as an international working group within the Arqus University Alliance, and university-level initiatives at the Department of Psychology. We summarize the challenges these initiatives face and highlight the successes they have achieved in promoting Open Science.

Keywords: Open Science initiative, community building, early-career researchers, cultural change

Introduction

In recent years, the research landscape has witnessed a gradual yet decisive shift towards more open, inclusive, and transparent modes of knowledge production and dissemination. While global awareness of Open Science (OS) practices has increased through formal recognition by key actors (e.g., UNESCO 2021), the uptake remains uneven across disciplines and institutions, often hindered by structural, cultural, and incentive-related barriers. Notably, frameworks such as Nosek's pyramid model of OS (2019, see also Nosek et al. 2015) highlight the layered nature of culture change, from individual-level norms and behaviors to institutional policies (see Figure 1), revealing that many successful transformations begin not with top-down mandates but rather with bottom-up grassroots initiatives, based on voluntary engagement of motivated researchers.

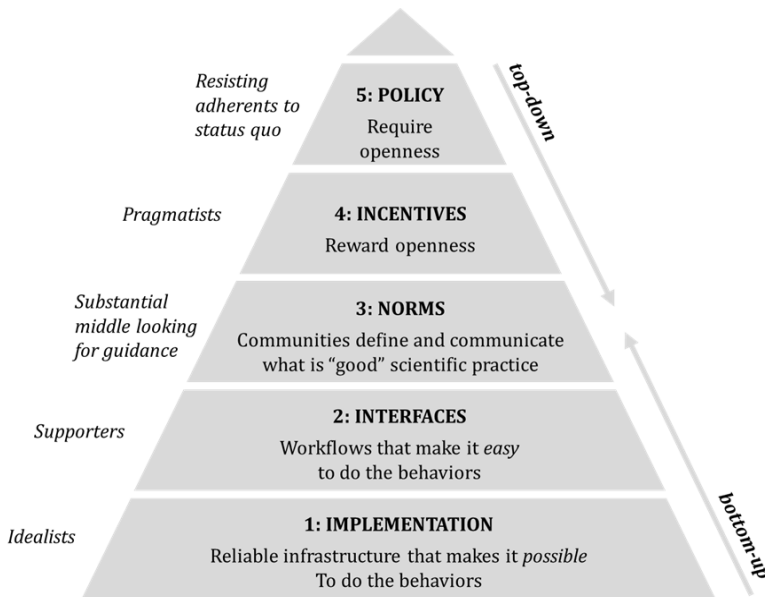


Figure 1: Pyramid model of culture change (adopted from Nosek 2019)

Within academic institutions, particularly universities, OS communities and local initiatives have emerged as vital engines of change (INOSC 2021; DGPs 2020). These bottom-up movements often begin with small peer-led communities. As these communities mature, they typically recruit new members, offer training, and provide

platforms for mutual support – sometimes even influencing broader institutional policies and infrastructure. Eventually, this may lead to top-down measures that further these practices.

While these initiatives share the goal of OS, there is usually large variation in the specific topics they focus on, who their target audiences are, how they fit into the university system, and what methods they employ to achieve a shift towards OS. In this chapter we present insights and experiences from three different bottom-up OS initiatives at the University of Graz in Austria. We highlight their different approaches to promoting OS, including their focus topics, applied methods, and the unique challenges they encounter, as well as potential ways to overcome these. These exemplary experiences can serve as inspiration for people and researchers who want to promote OS, while also encouraging a critical reflection on its institutional implementation.

The Graz Open Science Initiative

Founded in autumn 2018, the Graz Open Science Initiative (GOSI) initially attempted to promote OS across all the universities in Graz.² As this was an ambitious task, the founding members at the time, Gabriela Hofer and Hilmar Brohmer (both PhD students from the Department of Psychology of the University of Graz at that time) and Tony Ross-Hellauer (postdoctoral researcher from the Technical University Graz at that time), began on a smaller scale by organizing events within a reachable realm and on varying topics, which we present in the following.

The first topic the members chose to address was the Open Access publishing system, as it is a broadly applicable topic relevant to people across research disciplines. They organized a movie night, as an accessible, low-threshold event for everyone. In a large lecture hall, they screened the free documentary movie “Paywall: The Business of Scholarship” (Schmitt 2018). Importantly, the organizers created an email list and accounts on popular social-media platforms to promote the event several weeks ahead. The advertisement drew approximately 15 attendees.³

2 Graz (State of Styria, Austria) is the second largest city in Austria and home to numerous universities, including the University of Graz, Graz University of Technology, Medical University of Graz, University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, Joanneum University of Applied Sciences, University College of Teacher Education Styria, Private University of Teacher Education Augustinum, and Campus 02 University of Applied Sciences.

3 Estimates are taken from pictures taken at the time and from core members recalling the events. They include colleagues recruited through word-of-mouth.

Following this initial event, several larger events were organized by GOSI in the years to follow. In spring of 2019, GOSI leveraged a half-day event on “Meanings of Reproducibility” consisting of a keynote, a panel discussion and several break-out / hands-on sessions, where participants contributed their perspective on what reproducibility entails in their field. In the pandemic years, three more events took place: Two “Open Science Days” were hosted primarily at the Department of Psychology, featuring keynotes followed by workshops on OS practices like data sharing and preregistration. The largest event to date was a panel discussion titled “Open Science meets AI,” in 2024. It brought together experts on OS, including university rectors and vice-rectors, general (research management) staff, researchers from all stages and several disciplines, and students.

These large events required several channels of advertisement as the team sought to engage diverse research communities in promoting OS on a broader and interdisciplinary level. The organizing team advertised the events on the universities’ event pages, via email lists and by directly contacting administration offices of research departments. Promotion posters (see examples below) were put up at the departments and on different social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram). For the Open Science Days, limited priority seats with lunch bags were offered to the first 25 persons to register, which created attraction due to artificial scarcity and the general appeal of free food. Overall, these comprehensive promotion strategies paid off as these events attracted between 30 (“Meanings of Reproducibility”) and 70 (“Open Science meets AI”) people.



Figure 2: Posters and topics of GOSI.

Note: Word cloud (c) of topics covered in GOSI's ReproducibiliTea journal club

Such big events have the main advantage that they increase visibility for the importance of OS both for individual researchers and decision makers (like rectorates). However, GOSI also pursues the goals of helping researchers improve their individual research practices to be more transparent and reproducible and of providing a platform where people can learn from their peers. In order to achieve sustainable change, it is important to build an Open Science Community, where interested people can participate without barriers. A method that has been employed by many OS Initiatives worldwide is to have a journal club, which meets regularly. In 2019, GOSI installed the *ReproducibiliTea* journal club as bi-weekly or monthly regular format – a concept imported from the University of Oxford (Orben 2019). Conceptually, during a journal club meeting, one participant presents an interesting OS-related paper for about 15 minutes and steers a discussion on the topic for another 45 minutes. As researchers usually participate in their free time, it is important to provide a relaxed atmosphere – a core component of *ReproducibiliTea* is to actually provide tea and snacks to participants. At GOSI's *ReproducibiliTea*, participants are usually directly involved in choosing the topics and presenting the papers. Papers are either selected by the core team approaching people on certain topics or during an *Open Beer Review* – essentially an informal gathering of OS-interested people in a pub, where potential future journal club topics are presented and discussed. Figure 2c visualizes the breadth of topics covered in the 40 *ReproducibiliTeas* that GOSI has organized since Spring 2019.

Ideally the location where the “Teas” are held are easily accessible to researchers after work. At first, GOSI alternated locations at the Psychology Department of University of Graz and the Data Science Department of TU Graz to encourage participation from different departments and universities. Before the Covid-19 pandemic hit in Spring 2020, a relatively diverse crowd of scientists and students attended the journal club – starting from three to five people in the first couple of sessions and reaching up to 15 to 20 participants in late 2019 and early 2020. Incidentally, the topics were also relatively broad, covering various aspects of OS. During the pandemic years, GOSI shifted to online journal clubs, where the attendance number fell to about ten participants. Since then, as the current core team members are all situated at the Department of Psychology, there has been a natural shift over time to focus more on topics related to psychology (such as the preregistration of experiments). Topics also largely leveled off at reproducibility and transparency of science, which reflects the OS-related interests of the regular attendants. The number of participants – mostly early-career scientists – remained constant at about ten per session. As of 2024, the official GOSI website received its own domain as part of the University of Graz website (<https://graz-openscience.uni-graz.at/de/>). The topics

and presentations of past ReproducibiliTeas are provided to participants on the OSF platform (<https://osf.io/r3hcn/>).

Overall, GOSI underwent significant changes, starting from a broader and interdisciplinary perspective to a more psychology-focused perspective. Simultaneously, GOSI has faced several challenges in sustaining and broadening its activities. According to the experiences of the GOSI members, a recurring obstacle has been institutional resistance or indifference, particularly from higher-level researchers, who may hold misconceptions about OS. For example, they may dismiss an adoption of OS because they view preregistration as restrictive, or replication studies and data re-use as uncreative. Early-career researchers, on the other hand, are often more open but face other barriers: they are under strong pressure to publish, lack time and resources, and may be reluctant to adopt OS practices if their supervisors are skeptical or opposed. While this means that GOSI's events are mostly attended by early-career researchers, it also highlights the need for formats that lower participation barriers, such as informal gatherings or short, practical workshops. Another challenge is outreach beyond psychology. Although GOSI was founded with the ambition of building a city-wide OS network, its activities have gradually concentrated within the Department of Psychology. While this narrower focus has advantages for community building and relevance of topics, it limits interdisciplinary exchange. Finally, balancing accessibility for newcomers with sufficient depth for more experienced OS practitioners remains a constant task, requiring careful selection of topics and flexible event formats.

The Arqus Open Science Ambassador Network

The Arqus European University Alliance – as its name derived from the Latin term *arcus*, or *bridge* in English, implies – aims for the improvement of research collaborations among European universities. Since its foundation in 2018, nine universities in the EU have joined the alliance: beside the University of Graz, the universities of Granada, Leipzig, Lyon 1, Maynooth, Minho, Padua, Vilnius and Wrocław count as full members. Collectively, Arqus representatives at these universities brought forward several initiatives to identify and pursue ways to achieve shared goals.

Following its Mission Statement (Arqus 2019), researchers and librarians from the Arqus member universities released a comprehensive position paper on Open Science as a joint statement of the member universities (Kaier et al. 2022): In addition

to a framework and definition of Open Science⁴, it included a list of aims and recommendations for implementing OS at the member universities, including the establishment of a supporting network of OS ambassadors. These ambassadors would act as role models and advisors. They should inspire and engage researchers in practicing OS, giving (discipline specific) support and sharing best practices. Further, they should provide recommendations for implementing OS within the alliance (e.g., infrastructures, needs, policies/guidelines, academic teaching, open research agenda setting). As a community of practice, engaged experts should contribute OS specific content like training materials or for various dissemination formats.

After a one-year identification process, most of the member universities announced suitable candidates for ambassador positions. There was no selection process. Instead, Arqus aimed at offering a variety of OS-related competences and welcomed all interested researchers, whose involvement in the Arqus Open Science Ambassador Network (AOSAN) was completely voluntary. At the University of Graz, four researchers have initially agreed to this role (Hildrun Walter, Gabriela Hofer, Hilmar Brohmer, and Sandra Grinschgl).

At their first official meeting, hosted by the ambassadors of the University of Graz in summer 2024⁵, the eight active ambassadors from the Arqus universities agreed to three priority tasks: i) setting up an Open Science website as part of the Arqus Plaza online platform (<https://plaza.arqus-alliance.eu/>), which may entail resources and webinar videos for interested researchers and students; ii) organizing an OS webinar series in collaboration with the ENLIGHT alliance (a network for higher education); and iii) establishing the network as a community of practice. Since then, the AOSAN works on these points.

In general, the establishment of the AOSAN is confronted with significant opportunities as well as notable challenges. On the positive side, its formation enables the reflection of OS issues from multiple perspectives, fostering a rich exchange of ideas across European universities. It also offers the chance to mobilize a broader

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- 4 The definition was comprehensive and included several aspects of Open Science: Beside Open Methods or Open Data that are relevant for replicability and reproducibility of research, it also entailed Open Education (i.e., making educational teaching resources accessible), Open Innovation (i.e., co-creation of innovative ideas and products among actors from academia, business actors or the civil society), and Citizen Science (i.e., the active participation of lay persons in knowledge generation through research).
 - 5 It has to be noted that as the Arqus member universities partly provide top-down funding to organize such events, AOSAN can technically be seen as a hybrid bottom-up and top-down initiative to a degree. However, the majority of the work occurs additionally to the actual job of the researchers involved.

community of scholars and practitioners, thereby generating synergistic effects that amplify collective impact in the future. However, the inherent complexity of OS, the risk of a diffusion of responsibility among members, and the areas of tension between different disciplines and stakeholders (e.g., Graz has a strong focus on psychology, whereas in other universities this focus may be on humanities) can complicate the development of a common strategy. Moreover, the financial and administrative burden associated with setting up a robust online infrastructure to provide members with OS resources poses a considerable challenge in the foreseeable future. Finally, translating abstract principles of openness in academia into concrete, actionable practices requires ongoing effort and collaboration. However, this latter point is particularly important, as a community of practices (see point iii above) can only be successful if a practical use for all members can be highlighted.

For this purpose, one of the first actions of the AOSAN is the creation of a joint microcredential program in science communication, with a special focus on OS practices: Students should learn to design dissemination plans of their research, which incorporate preprints, FAIR data, and permissive licensing. They should also train their communication skills by producing concise, audience-tailored texts based on their own strategies. The program is scheduled to start in 2026.

Another concrete action of AOSAN is to define criteria for an Arqus Open Science Award, which should be given to early-career researchers for outstanding use of OS practices in research projects. However, because of the broad approach to OS, the criteria have to be sufficiently concrete, understandable and feasible for applicants. In several online meetings since summer 2024, the task force decided to split the award into three categories to account for the range of OS topics: one for transparent practices in research, one for open-source developments and tools, and one for citizen science projects. Applicants should then transparently describe i) how their research project is related to one of these OS topics, ii) what individual challenges the researchers overcame to realize their project, iii) what the added value of this project is with regard to OS.

Overall, for the few months of its existence, the AOSAN successfully used broad criteria translating them into a more concrete measure for awarding OS engagement. The initial inspiration for an award came from the Department of Psychology at University of Graz, which has its own award for more specific practices.

Open Science at the Department of Psychology

Following the replication crisis of several non-replicable research findings in Psychology (Open Science Collaboration 2015), there has been a movement towards sharing of data and materials, as well as preregistration to enhance transparency of research in this field (Eich 2014). But even though researchers in psychology usually have some awareness of OS practices, one of the main challenges appears to be the slow uptake of these practices (Hardwicke et al. 2024). As they require specific methodological skills and knowledge⁶, actively learning these practices is necessary.

It is therefore vital that students learn OS practices as part of their general methodological training. Some researchers at the Department of Psychology integrated the teaching of OS in the curriculum. As one of the first OS-related courses of that kind, Clemens Brunner started offering optional Master level courses on the open-source programming languages *Python* and *R* in 2015. Although not being explicitly mentioned in the curriculum, a recent internal survey showed that several teaching researchers (appr. 10–20 % of the department, who responded to the survey) regularly integrate some OS techniques in research-oriented courses on the Bachelor level or during Master theses supervision. In 2021, Katja Corcoran and Hilmar Brohmer conceptualized an optional Master course directly aimed at enhancing students' skills in and knowledge about transparency in research: "Open Science Practices". Importantly, in this course students set up a comprehensive preregistration (either for a hypothetical topic or for a Master thesis) as the main course requirement, preparing them for their later research.

The Doctoral School of Psychology under Stephan Vogel and Katja Corcoran started promoting OS more explicitly in 2023 on their webpage and integrated optional course units on OS as part of the curriculum. Moreover, as another measure to facilitate OS, the Doctoral School implemented an Open Science Award in spring 2024. This is awarded to a PhD student, who had first-authored a peer-reviewed paper in the previous year that incorporated OS practices like open data, material sharing and preregistration. The awardee is announced at the biannual Doctoral Congress to ensure that other PhD students and supervisors become aware of this award and the support of the Doctoral School for OS. Importantly, another internal survey showed that more than 80 % of PhD students and supervisors are in favor of such an award. Currently, the Doctoral School scouts continuous funding sources for this award in the future.

⁶ For instance, open data should come with analysis code, which requires statistical coding skills; or a preregistration requires knowledge of how to conduct a statistical power analysis.

Overall, the Department of Psychology has made some progress on implementing OS in teaching in recent years (Brohmer and Hoffmann 2025). These measures, which are organized bottom-up by interested researchers at institutions like the Doctoral School, could be readily applied by other adjacent departments at the University of Graz (e.g., Sociology, Economics, Marketing, Environmental System Sciences or Educational Sciences). However, concrete integration of OS in the curriculum is still lacking. Previous attempts of creating mandatory courses on OS practices or integrating OS into existing courses into the Bachelor curriculum proved difficult and encountered resistance. This might be due to the complex and time-consuming procedure for any changes in a curriculum, but also due to misconceptions surrounding OS practices and their value for research quality, which are especially detrimental if held by senior researchers and decision-makers (see below and Brohmer et al. 2025 in this volume). This is why actively creating awareness and involving more senior staff members in OS debates or events (e.g., by GOSI) are of particular importance to make sustainable change.

Effects and Challenges

Our elaborations in this chapter are based on our personal experiences as part of the initiatives highlighted above. We hope that they can serve as examples for how challenges can be addressed and how sustainable effects can be achieved. It is important to note that we do not perceive these changes as the results of one individual initiative but rather as a sum of the persistent efforts of several initiatives and individual people, some of which are not mentioned in this paper. The effects and challenges we perceive will be summarized and synthesized in the following.

The relative longevity of GOSI (since 2018) and its regular formats has potentially put Open Science more strongly on the agenda at some university departments. Specifically, at the Department of Psychology we perceive reciprocal effects: GOSI, members, who are mostly also members of the Department of Psychology (see Figure 3), partially advocated for Open Science teaching early on. Nowadays, there are more graduate student courses on OS than some years ago. Consequently, we now perceive a sustained awareness and interest among several ECRs at the department. This may also contribute to an uptake of OS in dissertations over time, which can be observed at the Department of Psychology (Brohmer and Hoffmann 2025).

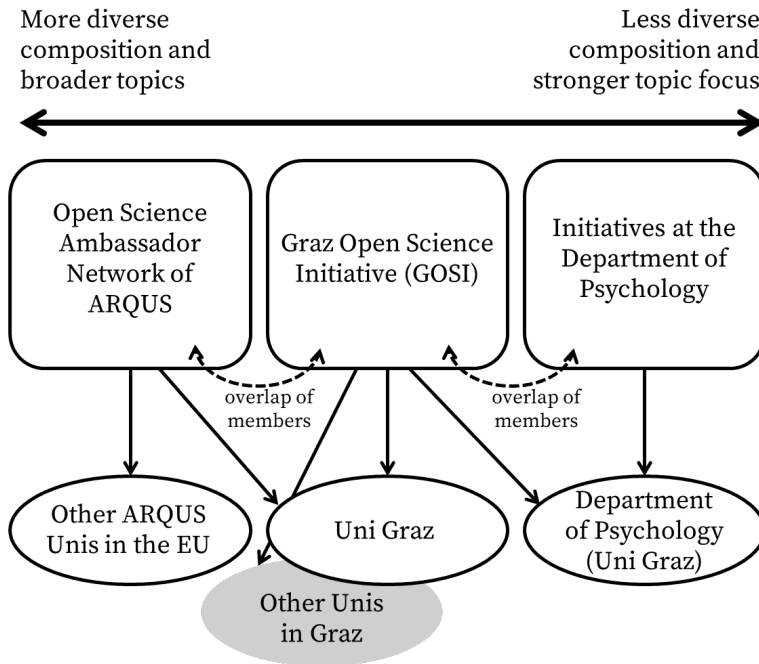


Figure 3: Schematic representation of the different Open Science initiatives

Note that the Department of Psychology is part of the University of Graz, which is part of the ARQUS alliance; vertical arrows signify the target group of the initiative

Another effect is the appreciation of OS through awards. First introduced at the Department of Psychology for doctoral students, a similar award (but with much broader, inclusive criteria) was quickly conceptualized by the AOSAN for the higher level among Arqus member universities. Incentivizing OS is one important measure to bring ECRs on board. However, ideally, incentives become obsolete over time as norms become more firmly established.

The present initiatives had to overcome several internal and external challenges. Starting a bottom-up initiative becomes increasingly more difficult with the level on which this initiative is situated, as potential contact persons and interested allies may not be readily identifiable. Within universities and their departments, this may be somewhat easier as word of mouth circulates rather quickly, which can be seen with GOSI in the later phase. However, for AOSAN, it was difficult as the network needed to be coordinated between different European universities. Finding the

“right” people for an initiative and sustaining their support must then be paired with clear communication, regular exchange and straight-forward tasks, which are not (too) burdensome for members as most people involved in OS initiatives do this in their spare time. Particularly the organization of large-scale events takes a lot of time that initiative members with regular jobs in academia often cannot afford. As the University of Graz is formally committed to Open Science Policies (Universität Graz 2019, 2023, 2024), more concrete steps for the implementation of OS, such as increased institutional support, funding for these initiatives, as well as recognition of such efforts as research activities, would be necessary.

Moreover, defining the scope comes along with integrating many viewpoints and topics, focusing on specific ones, but also abandoning some others. For the AOSAN this became obvious in their first meeting, where they tried to find common ground for webinars and align ideas for engagement across universities. Also, for GOSI, this has been and still is a challenge, however, somewhat differently: When the focus shifted to transparency and reproducibility related issues in psychology, this meant that other OS issues temporarily received less attention. It may also come with a more subject-specific audience (e.g., ECRs from psychology), who then show up more often to regular events (e.g., journal clubs). Hence, it is challenging to find a balance between concrete foci and inclusive topics that can bind audiences and guests to an initiative, while occasionally attracting newcomers. A solution for this would be to have a larger variety of journal club topics at different levels of OS competence – however, due to the aforementioned voluntary nature of the initiative and lack of funding, this is currently not feasible.

Resistance to OS topics is another challenge, which becomes most apparent in specific fields. In psychology, members of the initiatives occasionally encountered severe criticism towards OS, which is often based on misconceptions, some of which we want to present here:

1. “Open Science” is sometimes equated with predatory-publishing issues in the “Open Access” publishing system, leading to a rejection of all OS topics all together (including reproducibility and transparency);
2. Open Access – some think – automatically means that researchers need to pay for publications, if these should be made publicly accessible. But this ignores that there are credible Open Access publishers, who raise low or no fees at all (i.e., diamond Open Access journals).⁷

7 Moreover, many journals allow green Open Access publishing, where the final accepted version of a manuscript can be shared on a repository or preprint server without additional charges, see <https://openpolicyfinder.jisc.ac.uk/>.

3. Study preregistration is sometimes seen as a means to burden researchers with needless formalities that do not go beyond mere virtue signaling, chaining them to their confirmatory analyses (which is not the purpose of preregistration, see Brohmer et al. 2026 in this issue);
4. Some argue that data sharing is not feasible in psychology because raw data often contains personal or sensitive information. While it is true that in certain cases data cannot and should not be shared, the principle of data sharing should still be applied wherever possible – for example, through minimally reproducible datasets that protect participants while enabling transparency.
5. Replication studies and reproducibility checks – corner stones to assure the robustness of science and often promoted by OS proponents – are sometimes frowned upon as non-creative, as if some researchers “cannot come up with their own ideas”.

Much of the reservations towards OS may stem from the final challenge we want to address, namely that many senior researchers have a hard time changing their research routines to integrate OS – potentially because they never learned about OS in the first place (Houtkoop et al. 2018). To overcome this challenge, OS needs to be integrated in method education from the beginning on to assure future generations of researchers do not face this challenge anymore.⁸ Until this is achieved, bottom-up initiatives like the ones presented in this article remain substantial for grassroots awareness building for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

The three initiatives presented here, which work at different levels in the context of the University of Graz, report success in making graduate students and early-career scientists more aware of diverse OS practices through regular events (GOSI), teaching graduate courses (Department of Psychology), and broader frameworks for engagement (Arqus). Balancing broader and more focused topics, promotion strategies for events, as well as incentives for OS (e.g., the awards) proved to be useful to bring OS to the agenda of more and more researchers. However, as norms for OS are still in the making, broader goals of the initiatives are far from being reached thus far.

8 On a larger scale, some research fields have made progress in establishing the norm of OS. For instance, in psychology, some large associations (e.g., DGPs, 2023; American Psychological Association, 2024) have issued statements and guidelines in favor of OS, which may contribute to a top-down change over time.

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Short Biographies

Hilmar Brohmer studied social and behavioral sciences in Germany, Norway and the Netherlands. He completed his PhD in Graz between 2016 and 2020 in social psychology. He is a founding member of GOSI, part of AOSAN, and is doing research on Open Science.

Katja Corcoran studied in Germany, where she received her PhD at the University of Würzburg. In 2013, she started at the University of Graz as the head of the Social

Psychology section. Her two main research interests revolve around social cognition and environmental behavior.

Gabriela Hofer completed her PhD in Graz between 2018 and 2022 at the Differential Psychology section. She is a founding member of GOSI and part of AOSAN. In her research she investigates interindividual differences in the perception of the self and others.

Silvia Erika Kober did her PhD in psychology at the University of Graz in Austria from 2009 to 2012, where she developed an interest in neurofeedback and brain-computer interfaces. She habilitated in 2019 and works in the Neuropsychology section since then.

Živa Korda studied psychology in Slovenia and the Netherlands before coming to Graz in 2021. She completed her PhD in the Creative Cognition Section in 2025 and since then works as post doc on eye-tracking research. She became a core team member of GOSI in 2023.

Hildrun Walter completed her PhD in plant sciences in 2016 and switched her focus to the research on science communication afterwards. She is working at “Die 7. Fakultät”, where she organized conferences and workshops. In 2023 she became part of the AOSAN.

Sarah von Götz studied psychology in Graz between 2017 and 2023. Afterwards, she served as a research assistant at the Cognitive Science Section, where she dealt with the public perception of health information and became a core member of GOSI in 2024.