

EOSC Support Office Austria: Visions, needs and requirements for research data and practices

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This interview is also available for download: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7758011>

In 2015 the vision of a federated system of infrastructures supporting research by providing an open multi-disciplinary environment to publish, find and re-use data, tools and services led to the launch of the [European Open Science Cloud](#) (EOSC). Against this background, bodies such as the [EOSC Association](#) on the European level and the [EOSC Support Office Austria](#) on the national one have been established.

Within this framework and since research has always been at the heart of EOSC, we are eliciting visions, needs and requirements for research data and practices from researchers who are located at public universities in Austria. Let's see what Communication Scientist Maria Schreiber has to say!

“I trust that researchers generally adhere to good scientific practice!”

KF: Would you please briefly outline your field of research?

MS: My research field is the intersection of visual communication and social media. I mainly do qualitative research including online ethnography, but also larger amounts of data. Roughly speaking, I want to know what people do with images on the internet. The context in which they do this can be completely different and can range from activism to health and illness to intimate family communication.

KF: What types of data do you primarily work with in this context?

MS: I work primarily with audio recordings, audio-video recordings, interview data such as transcripts, image data, screen capture data and field notes in ethnographic research. I collect interview data by approaching selected informants and asking them if they would make themselves available for individual or group

interviews. Such interviews are recorded. They are the audio or audio-video recordings from which both German and English transcripts are finally produced. Depending on the topic and the question, interviews are being transcribed with varying degrees of accuracy.

“In research with external or international partners (...) access to such data is usually challenging. Especially when working collaboratively and in parallel.”

The screen capture data is created during various online interviews in which users tell us and at the same time show us how they use the internet and what exactly they do on the screen. We collect this kind of data manually and not automatically. Image data are mostly screenshots from social media, but also image files that users provide from their own collection.

KF: What is the flow of an ideal typical research process in your discipline - from collecting or reusing the data to analysing and interpreting it?

“With qualitative research, we also face another challenge in the context of data sharing: with the reuse of the data, the whole context would be lost.”

MS: We collect the data and then save them as doc, xlsx, jpg, png - or if they are already analysis files as NVivo and MAXQDA files - directly on our university's server. We should also save them on an external hard drive also provided by the university. In research with external or international partners, however, access to such data is usually challenging. Especially when working collaboratively and in parallel on the same data sets and documents.

KF: Are there other challenging areas in your research where, for example, infrastructures, services or tools would make your work easier?

MS: Maybe such services already exist and I just do not know it. However, since I deal a lot with image files – I work a lot with screenshots – it would be great if there were online tools that would take the effort of collecting this type of data off me and I could generate data not manually, but automatically, and also tagged with date and project name.

KF: Is there any other metadata that should be added to your research data?

MS: In the case of image files, these are specific numbers – files are numbered consecutively – and date, as well as URL if applicable; for Instagram accounts, for example, the accounts

and names of the account holders, image texts, hashtags, the number of likes and dislikes, or the number of followers. We usually collect metadata in Excel tables. Here, too, it would be more practical to use software or online tools instead of Excel spreadsheets.

KF: The topics of "international research partners" and "collaborative work" have already been raised. May I ask about your approach to data exchange?

MS: In the current international research project, local teams process the raw data in the respective national languages. This data will probably not be exchanged. The actual exchange will begin with the first evaluation data and should then become more intensive. At least that is how we currently envision it. It is questionable whether we have the time to exchange raw data as well. That would start with the translation of interview data into English. We often exchange data via cloud services, although the aforementioned difficulty still exists.

KF: What will happen to the data at the end of the research project?

MS: We have drawn up a data management plan for the funding body. We often deal with sensitive data - especially in the current research project on trust and health. So presumably, we will neither want, nor be able to release the data.

With qualitative research, we also face another challenge in the context of data sharing: with the reuse of the data, the whole context would be lost. Qualitative research, however, is enormously context-sensitive. Qualitative data could even be described as a kind of cooperative product of researchers and the researched. This does not make it less valuable in principle for secondary analysis, but it does make it more

difficult to deal with. In order to use them again, it would probably require a great deal of contextual information and metadata, since, for example, it would have to be known who created, processed, analysed and interpreted the data, when, how and why and under what limitations. Providing all this information would be an enormous effort in terms of time.

“Qualitative research (...) is enormously context-sensitive.”

KF: Do you think there are research questions that make it more important to share qualitative research data anyway?

MS: Yes. Especially as far as my field of research, communication studies, is concerned, (interview) data from the early days of the internet would be interesting. We probably have a gap here, because especially in the case of internet use, even short periods are interesting, because forms of use change rapidly.

KF: Assuming you could access such data, what criteria would it have to fulfil for you to reuse the data?

MS: It would make sense to have key data on the interviewees, classic socio-demographic data as well as additional information that would provide insight into their social and cultural background. This would be, for example, occupation and family circumstances. The original research question would also be relevant. It would also be helpful to know who conducted the interview or which institution in which country is behind it: I trust that

researchers generally adhere to good scientific practice. It has to do with some kind of institutional authorisation and the reputation of the research institution.

If the data came from a person without an institutional background, it would be more difficult. I would then like to have more contextual information to be able to decide whether the data is valid, or – in the worst case – made up.

KF: I understand. Thank you very much for the interview.



Dr. Maria Schreiber is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Salzburg. As a fellow of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, she was part of the interdisciplinary DOC team project Image Practices. She was a guest at the Research Training Group "Sichtbarkeit und Sichtbarmachung", at the University of Potsdam and at the Digital Ethnography Research Center at RMIT University in Australia.

She completed her PhD in Journalism and Communication Studies at the University of Vienna in 2017 on "Digitalen Bildpraktiken" (Springer 2020). She is PI of the Austrian team in the Chanse project "Travis - Trust and Visuality in everyday digital practices" (2022-2025).