

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO



# What motivates me to engage with Open science, and to study researchers' perceptions and experiences of OS policy?

2020-10-20 KIRJOITTANUT [JUUSO P ALA-KYYNY](#)

"The current OS policy emphasis of the altruistic researcher and one-size-fits-for-all guidelines, do not make Open science policies tangible at the micro level of everyday research practice. – I firmly believe that gaps between the Open science policy and research practice are an unintended consequence", writes project manager and researcher **Erika Lilja** in her article. Lilja's article is a response to Think Open blog's Open Access Week's (October 19–25, 2020) challenge in which people working in science as researchers, specialists etc. tell what motivates them – personally – to foster open science. [See other responses here \(in Finnish\)](#). You are also welcome to participate in this challenge on Twitter with the topic tags [#WhyOpenScience](#) or [#MiksiAvoinTiede](#).

*Text: Erika Lilja*

For me, many of the goals of Open science (OS) and various OS policies – understood as the justification, management, prioritization, and funding of basic scientific research based on the advancement of Open science – are easy to sign. I am, after all, a big fan of the research excellence talk and find it amusingly interesting to follow from time to time. However, and definitely not least, because I am a research administrator, I also want to put my hands in the deep dirt for ensuring researchers' accessibility to knowledge resources, for promoting collaboration and improving the quality of research – and with quality I refer to quality assured by high standard peer reviews and transparency, not to the fit for purpose.



*"Despite many researchers welcome OS activities, they have difficulties in coping with OS policy implementation", says Erika Lilja, a project manager at the University of Turku and a researcher working with her thesis.*

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Studies on the evolving Open science policy landscape, however, highlight the obvious uncertainty of the success of Open science policies. Despite many researchers welcome OS activities, they have difficulties in coping with OS policy implementation. Gaps between OS policy and research practice exist and are manifested in the already very familiar conflicts and challenges continuously expressed by researchers and heard by, for example, many of us research administrators.

In even a somewhat pervert way, these discussions fascinate me since they reveal the different ways science is being valued on the level of everyday research practice and on the different levels of research policy, governance and management. After being involved for many years with Open science policy issues, it has become quite clear, how differently an individual researcher or a research group and university management or "the representatives of the whole research community" see these policies. Not even once or twice, have I found myself pondering how many of us being involved in the promoting of Open science governance have really thought about the underlying motivations or policy (not Open science) origins. Has the new public management logic, the neoliberal agenda and economic valuation of science become too much of a no-brainer, so that we in the university administration and management have forgotten to even ask what kind of openness we value and why? Have we really considered the values behind OS policies? Or have we bought them from outside, accidentally, since there is this promise to act virtuously for science?

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Quite recently, a colleague of mine asked if researchers who, based on my study (forthcoming soon on [Science and Public Policy](#)), feel Open science policy alienation are not early Open science adapters but rather late movers, or even laggards. I answered that I would not like to classify researchers into any category such as the suggested one, since the situation for an individual researcher is far more complex than just the decision of adopting a new technology – Open science, or rather openness of science defined in certain ways and for certain reasons in OS policies – and it deserves to be recognized as such. However thankful we must be for that we have Open science enthusiasts, trendsetters and innovators, who do not stop amazing me due to their commitment and ability to arrange time for Open science, I still do not think that complying with Open science policies is an attitude or a simple adopting issue at first, the second or even the third. We need OS enthusiasts, change agents, and opinion leaders, if we must continue to use the wordings of the diffusion of innovation theory, but at the same time, I wish we all

remembered that very rarely are we experts in all areas of science, scientific practices, cultures and situations.

The current OS policy emphasis of the altruistic researcher and one-size-fits-for-all guidelines, do not make OS policies tangible at the micro level of everyday research practice. When researchers experience the 'dilemma of openness' and try to interpret OS policies, they are entering into sites where they perceive OS policies as fruitful, pointless, or even threatening the future of and trust in science and inequality. Regarding research data, studies have even shown that researchers are unable to construct a 'doable' problem of open data, which makes it impossible for researchers to comply or cope with Open science policies.

The current OS policy emphasis of the altruistic researcher and one-size-fits-for-all guidelines, do not make OS policies tangible at the micro level of everyday research practice. Regarding research data, studies have even shown that researchers are unable to construct a 'doable' problem of open data, which makes it impossible for researchers to comply or cope with Open science policies.

OS policies risk losing ties to specific individuals and contexts, and openness becomes governed by the generalised principles of economic value, as is pointed out in many studies. Researchers express care over research participants as well as over the scholarly community and other researchers, and this too, is not an attitude issue, or has not so much to do with adopting a new technology, but it means that researchers are truly worried about the effects OS policies on the quality of research and trust in science. Even though Open science goals include improving the quality of research and increasing trust in science, the quality of the peer review systems in OA publishing channels, public openness in data sharing and prioritising economic interest in OS policies, for instance, seem to arouse anxiety and a tendency towards policy alienation. In my opinion, this is very unfortunate.

For sure is all this why I think that I need to study the experiences and perceptions of researchers on Open science policy. Not just because there is a risk of creating disengagement and policy alienation if researchers view OS policies as risky and unrewarding, but also because I wish to be able to make a responsible difference for there is so much to desire in the ideals of Open science.

I firmly believe that gaps between the OS policy and research practice are an unintended consequence. They might be due to the lack of researchers' influence on policy decisions that affect them.

Despite the obvious new public management (NPM) logic and economic valuation driving Open science policies forward on the research community level governance of Open science, I firmly believe that gaps between the OS policy and research practice are an unintended consequence. They might be due to the lack of researchers' influence on policy decisions that affect them. The disadvantage, however, does not require intent nor does it care whether researchers had the time to participate in these policy decisions or not.

Therefore, I find it most important that we in the research management and administration positions remember to take off our NPM glasses and take some time to read Robert K. Merton – be his time over and forgotten or not, or maybe even manifested in the current OS policy conflicts – or Kate Morton's *Clockmaker's Daughter*, a wonderful historical fiction told from multiple points of view over the course of decades.

Wishing us all a passionately curious Open access week!

**Erika Lilja** ([ORCID](#), [@LiljaErika](#)) works as Project Manager at the University of Turku. Lilja is currently preparing a dissertation on open science. Lilja was also carrying out *Atlas of Open Science and Research in Finland in 2019*, an overview of open science policies and activities in Finland.

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