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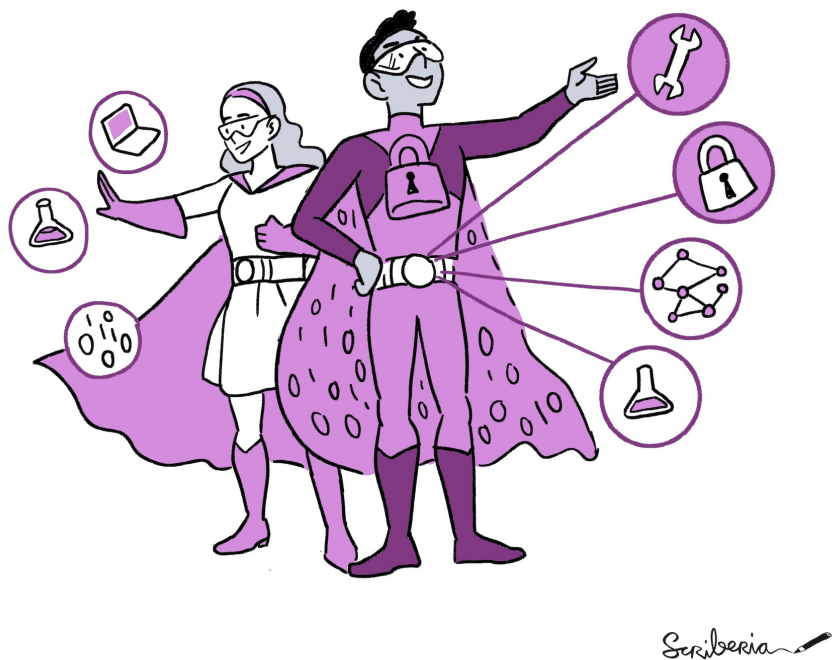


Figure 1. The Turing Way Community. This illustration was created by Scriberia with The Turing Way community, used under a CC-BY 4.0 licence. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5706310>

Stewarding artistic research data: Mediating practices, policies, and processes

By Madeleine Bergquist

As a librarian and data steward positioned within the evolving research landscape, I am increasingly struck by how current technological, political and regulatory shifts shape the conditions under which research is conducted. At a time when the development of artificial intelligence is causing concern about the integrity of research as well as of art, provenance and transparency have gone from being ideals to becoming necessary foundations for credibility. At the same time, geopolitical tensions around the world make the vision of a completely open research landscape difficult to realise. Add to this the policies of research funders and universities, which are increasingly requiring conscious data management, alongside a publishing landscape that profits from the concept of openness in research. There is also a multitude of national laws¹ and requirements that affect you as a government-employed researcher in Sweden and elsewhere. It is not surprising that some feel that it takes a full-time job just to understand the ecosystem in which research now operates. When will researchers have time to... do research?

Data Stewardship – a new role in research support at Lund university

The idea of data stewardship becomes relevant in this context. Issues of open research and support for data management have previously been handled by research support librarians at the University Libraries, but with EU directives and national requirements around data management a new administrative position has emerged. In many places where this new role is being establis-

1 For example: Data Protection Regulation, Freedom of the Press Act, Copyright Act, Ethical Review Act, Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act, Archives Act, Open Data Act, etc.

hed, it is regarded as essential for realising the vision of open research.² The Netherlands has had a network for practising data stewards for almost ten years³ and at the European level, a minimum skills profile for the profession has been developed via the European Science Cloud (EOSC) stating that a data steward should work with stakeholders to collect, quality-assure and make research data usable, support its transformation into research outputs, and guide decisions on openness in line with ethical, legal and social requirements.⁴ Despite the growing recognition of the importance of this role at both national and international levels, the practical implementation of data stewardship varies considerably across institutions and contexts. This variation highlights the complexity of the role and the challenges faced by those working within it. In the article “In the data steward’s shoes: An autoethnographic exploration of everyday challenges”, the authors describe their role, based on four case studies, as operating in a “buffer zone”, where they mediate between top-down rules – such as the FAIR principles, national policies for data sharing, and legal restrictions – and the concerns of researchers who prioritise knowledge production, academic freedom, and project-specific needs.⁵

A new unit has been established at Lund University, the Research Data Office, which funds a data steward for each faculty to at least 50%. In the summer of 2024, I was appointed data steward for the Faculty of Arts, and the idea is that my responsibility is to be the mediating link between the unit and the research environment at our faculty, as described above. In addition, it is our task to make the Research Data Office aware of the needs of researchers and to convey essential information from the unit to the faculty. At the same time, we data stewards act as a bridge to other units that researchers need to engage with during a project, such as IT services, university ethics advisors, the data protection officer, the legal department, and so on.

I personally also see the role as a kind of “translator” and “guide” between practice and guidelines, and as a coordinating hub regarding data manage-

2 M. Jetten, M. Grootveld, A. Mordant, M. Jansen, M. Bloemers, M. Miedema & C. W. G. van Gelder, *Professionalising Data Stewardship in the Netherlands: Competences, Training and Education. Dutch Roadmap Towards National Implementation of FAIR Data Stewardship*, (Zenodo, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4623713>

3 Thematic Digital Competence Centres, *Data Stewards Interest Group* (n.d.), <https://tdcc.nl/dsig/> (Accessed 9 March 2026).

4 K. K. Hansen, A. White, L. Horton, B. Koteska, P. Rauste & N. van Leersum, *Data Steward: Minimum Viable Skills Profile* (Zenodo, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16760455>

5 A. Marmier, S. Stepanovic & T. Mettler, “In the Data Steward’s Shoes: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Everyday Challenges”, *IASSIST Quarterly*, 49:4 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.29173/iq1172>

ment support, where personal contact with researchers is perhaps the most important thing. It has been very valuable for me that, after two decades of working as a librarian at the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, I have a reasonable understanding of both artistic research and its institutional context. The relatively small structure of the faculty has also facilitated the work required in connection with this form of interpretation. I would argue that it has been an extra layer of “translation” for me – between scientific and artistic practice. Because how do you proceed when there are no established metadata standards, no subject repositories for data sharing, and very little knowledge in general about, for example, data management plans, storage, how to handle personal data, and archiving? And above all, how can you support researchers working in fields that are grounded in knowledge traditions beyond the scientific?

This does not differ significantly from working as a librarian; however, we have always had an interpretive role.

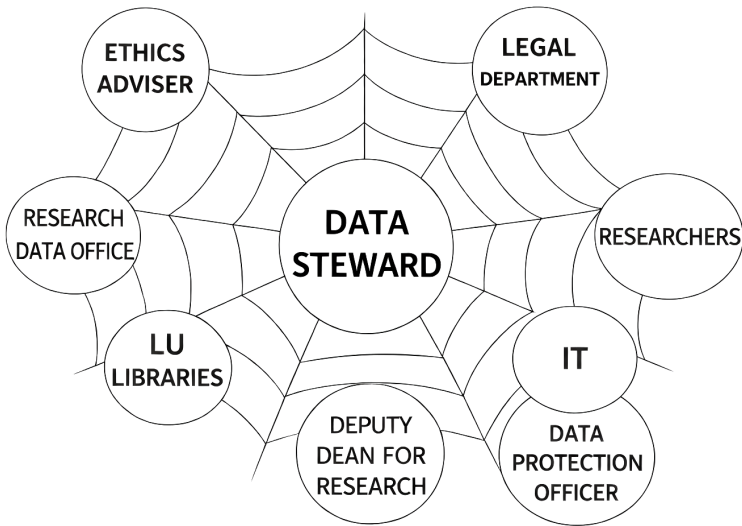


Figure 2. Organisational overview of the data steward function. Illustration generated with the assistance of the AI tool ChatGPT Edu (OpenAI), 2026.

Some thoughts on research data in artistic research

I had hardly heard the term “data steward” before I took up my position, which was maybe not surprising since the definition of research data has been subject to debate in artistic research and, to date, there is no consistent definition within the field.⁶ In the discourse on research data in artistic research there has been, especially within certain art forms like visual and performing arts, concerns about getting closer to the premises of scientific research. For example, in a report by Konstex⁷ on open science and research data in 2022, the argument is made that systematisation and standardisation are perceived to result in undesirable consequences for the field, including an increase in unnecessary bureaucracy.⁸ In addition, issues of copyright, co-creation, and sensitive content are often raised as obstacles to data sharing in artistic research. At the same time, there is an awareness that we do not operate in a vacuum, and both Konstex and the Swedish Research Council⁹ are calling for clarification and adapted infrastructures to meet existing requirements.

In trying to make sense of this tension and how “research data” can be understood in artistic research, I have found philosopher of science Sabina Leonelli’s relational understanding of data particularly helpful. She argues that research data should be understood as relational, meaning that it has no neutral fixed value, and should not be seen only as facts for evidence. Instead, data gains significance only in the context of a specific research question. With this view, the definition of research data comes from the interaction between the researcher, the process, and the material. What constitutes data in one project may be something completely different in another.¹⁰ Material that functions as documentation in one context may function as analytical basis, research results, or a starting point for new artistic production in another. Given the variety of methods in artistic research, I believe this is why it is so difficult, if not impossible, to reach agreement on one clear definition. At the same time, however, this approach means that artistic research does not need to adapt to scientific ideals to appear legitimate, but can develop its

6 Cf. J. Holm, “...för vetenskap sysslar vi inte med. En diskursanalys om forskningsdata och öppen tillgång inom konstnärlig forskning” (Master’s thesis, Uppsala University 2023), <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-512276>

7 Konstex is a national network for higher education institutions in the arts.

8 M. Bårtås, E. Røed & J. Landgren, *Om öppen vetenskap och forskningsdata* (Konstex, 2022).

9 Swedish Research Council, *Research Review 2023: Artistic Research* (Swedish Research Council, 2023), <https://www.vr.se/english/analysis/reports/our-reports/2023-01-26-research-review-2023-artistic-research.html> (Accessed 9 March 2026).

10 S. Leonelli, What Counts as Scientific Data? A Relational Framework, *Philosophy of Science*, 82:5 (2015), p. 810–821, <https://doi.org/10.1086/684083>

own ways of understanding, using, and creating data. Instead of imposing a notion of research data as something objectively verifiable, researchers therefore need to define for themselves what material is informative in relation to the project and the method.



Figure 3. The Turing Way Community. This illustration was created by Scriberia with The Turing Way community, used under a CC-BY 4.0 licence <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5706310>

Navigating openness in artistic research

A common misconception is that FAIR data is equivalent to open data. This is a recurring theme in the documents I have read, which assume that artistic research data, in general, cannot be shared in accordance with the FAIR principles.¹¹ In this context, it is important to remember that the FAIR principles are guidelines, not strict requirements that must be fulfilled in every single case. Technically, it is possible to publish sufficient FAIR metadata in a repository to describe a set of information data without publishing sensitive material and that is fully accessible online. Other disciplines do this all the time. However, it is not certain that all research material *should* be shared simply because it *can* be shared technically and legally, and this is where the ethical aspect that is missing in FAIR, but included in the CARE principles,¹² becomes so important. While the FAIR principles focus on how data can be made technically reusable, the CARE principles emphasise ensuring that data are used in an ethical and equitable manner. These two sets of principles should be understood as mutually reinforcing and complementary.

If data first acquire meaning in a context and are then transferred between actors, the ethical and legal issues surrounding the material also change. Open data that are harmless in one situation may, when combined with other data, create risks or undesirable situations that the researcher who published or shared the dataset may not have considered. This is relevant in artistic research, where information from artistic processes can easily be misunderstood if taken out of context. In this setting, a data steward can provide support for researchers in addressing ethical considerations related to data management and sharing. This may include contributing to the preparation of ethics review applications, clarifying data management and governance practices, identifying potential risks associated with data use and re-use, and ensuring that ethical, legal, and regulatory requirements are considered early in the research process.

Sabina Leonelli argues that openness is not merely about improving technical capacities for sharing resources, but about sustaining meaningful research relationships and fostering connections without reinforcing epistemic injustices. She calls for an open research movement that embraces diverse perspectives and contends that social and ethical practices are more

¹¹ Cf. Bärtås, Røed & Landgren, *Om öppen vetenskap och forskningsdata*.

¹² Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics. Cf. Research Data Alliance. International Indigenous Data Sovereignty Interest Group, *CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance* (Global Indigenous Data Alliance, 2019), <https://www.gida-global.org> (Accessed 9 March 2026).

crucial than technical standards for achieving genuinely shared knowledge production. A purely technical view of openness, she warns, can undermine equitable access and epistemic diversity by excluding researchers who lack the resources to meet technical requirements; therefore, openness must be grounded in social and ethical commitments to support, rather than marginalise, diverse research communities.¹³ In this sense, her statements can be read as articulating a sociotechnical perspective on openness.

I find this particularly applicable to artistic research, where collaboration and joint processes are key elements, and where the work is often difficult to fit into conventional scientific frameworks and standardised models. However, technical tools that support searchability and findability are essential for new relationships to emerge, and this could generally be improved to reach beyond the immediate community, including within the field itself.

Reflections on becoming a data steward in the arts

So how does one work in practice as a data steward at an arts faculty? Well, perhaps this is precisely what makes my new position so fascinating, that it is in flux, that the role is not “finished”, not fixed, not yet standardised. This is currently emerging in an ongoing dialogue and mutual learning between myself, researchers, infrastructures, and stakeholders, and I imagine that this may be the case everywhere. We have only just begun. At the national level, symposiums have started discussing these issues in the context of artistic research, and within our national network for research support librarians in the arts, we also share experiences on supporting data management. The other day I had a meeting with two data stewards that support artistic research in the Netherlands, and we agreed that there is a need for an international network for us who support data management in the arts. However, the discussion is, so far, very general and I feel a bit lonely sometimes in daily practice.

Despite this, I believe I have had both a more difficult and an easier time than other data stewards at Lund University. For example, the fact that there is no strong tradition of data management in the field of artistic research allows flexibility for customised ways of working with the issue, where it is a matter of thinking together with the researchers. How can we address this within existing conditions, without compromising the unique nature of artistic research?

13 S. Leonelli, *Philosophy of Open Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p. 52–65.

And if that is not possible, how can we “translate” practices or even create new tools?

Marmier et al. (2025) argue that a data steward should work closely with institutional decision-makers to promote more flexible, context-sensitive frameworks for data management to avoid ending up in a grey standardised area between top-down and bottom-up perspectives.¹⁴ And something that has really been valuable for me is having close access to our research dean and having the right to attend, speak, and make proposals in the Research and Research Education Committee at the faculty. The fact that we immediately engaged in a major project in the form of developing a subject-specific repository and tool for data management, Art Files, where I work together with active researchers and other support staff to tackle challenges, has been essential. Both for our collective learning and for how the form of my role is emerging and finding its place in the faculty. The same applies to our Advanced Study Group at Pufendorf, Creative Data Lab, where I listened to how artistic researchers think about data management, but also tried to provoke questions from my perspective and that of the Research Data Office, to drive the discussions forward. I have also followed a couple of projects at the faculty where I met with researchers at different stages of the process to talk about the phases of data management to understand what needs arise where.

From my point of view, growing support for data management is certainly needed at our faculty. This may take the form of check lists, examples, and subject-specific manuals, but I really think that personal guidance is particularly valuable in our research environment right now. This could be in the form of discussions about artistic control and ethical considerations related to openness and publishing, as well as broader conversations about how to conceptualise data in a certain project or straightforward guidance on metadata documentation or advice on a data management plan. During recent years, I have received extensive training from the Research Data Office, which has significantly strengthened my competence in research data support. But I am still very much in the learning process myself.

I have also spent a lot of time adapting existing templates and support materials, such as the Lund University README template and guidelines on how to present GDPR information to research participants, to better suit the research conducted here. Together with the University Archive, I am also currently adapting the Lund University disposal plan for research documents for the faculty, which in turn raises new questions about selection and power in

¹⁴ Marmier, Stepanovic & Mettler, *In the Data Steward's Shoes*, p. 13.

archival practice, a discussion that requires its own text. None of these tools should be seen as static, but rather as test documents that are intended to be revised in response to evolving knowledge, needs and practices.



Figure 4: The Turing Way Community. This illustration was created by Scriberia with The Turing Way community, used under a CC-BY 4.0 licence. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3332807>

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to emphasise once again that provenance and transparency in good research practice are more important than ever. At the same time, the field of artistic research needs to develop its own practices, articulate its needs, and take ownership of the issue rather than treating data management as irrelevant to the discipline. Otherwise, there certainly is a risk that it will be pushed into the already established norms of data-intensive fields. In this context a data steward can facilitate dialogue, highlight best practices, and help ensure that digital objects – whether they are regarded as data – are intelligible, ethically handled, and preserved over time. I believe the aim, both in my own role and with the Art Files project, is to make it as easy as possible for researchers to comply with laws and policies and reduce the administrative burden. But I also hope to support researchers in making data management an integral part of the research process, in ways that are meaningful to them, their practice and the discipline in general. I am confident that the work of data management within our faculty can contribute to strengthening the quality, transparency, and long-term sustainability of the research conducted here and hopefully contribute to supporting artistic research in positioning itself as an ethical, strong and credible field.

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