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Towards FAIR phytolith data - first steps down a long and winding road

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The phytolith community has in recent years started to move towards the standardisation of phytolith data through the development of a common nomenclature and guidelines for morphometric studies. However, the routine adoption of these standards is still not straightforward. Indeed, a recent assessment of open science practices in phytolith research has found that only a very small percentage of studies adheres to the FAIR principles of making data Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable.

Prompted by these results and the need to raise awareness of the positive returns for our discipline for interoperability and wider data sharing, we initiated an open science working group leading to a project that is taking the first steps along the FAIRification journey for the phytolith community.

The project aims to conduct a FAIR evaluation of a large set of diverse phytolith data, and also draw on the results of a community survey concerning current data sharing practices and attitudes, to build a collaborative strategy to move forward with the FAIRification of existing data and guidelines to ensure future FAIR phytolith data. We understand that this is an issue that cannot be completed without consensus in the phytolith community and therefore we want to encourage participation in this project from all phytolith researchers.

In this presentation, we will explain how researchers can get involved through completing our survey, providing existing datasets for our FAIR evaluation and attending training sessions to FAIRify datasets. These initial efforts of training for FAIRification will create tools for use in the wider phytolith community, as it is important that we address the need for open science skills training in our discipline. The widespread adoption of open science practices is a challenge we must embrace to move our discipline into the era of open research.