RESEARCH ON RESEARCH INSTITUTE

META-MOMENT Country Case Study no. 2

A national case study supporting RoRI's report *Seize the Meta-Moment: how metascience is evolving*

Seize the Meta-Moment: Austria Country Case Study

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BACKGROUND

This working paper is part of a global comparative series produced for the Research on Research Institute's META-MOMENT project. Designed as a standalone analysis, it examines the institutions, investments, and governance structures that shape metascience within this specific national system. Together with 17 companion country studies, this paper provides the foundational empirical evidence supporting RoRI's overarching synthesis report, *Seize the Meta-Moment: how metascience is evolving worldwide*.

Produced in partnership with

AUSTRIAN PLATFORM for Research and Technology Policy Evaluation

fteval

FORWIT Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology, and Innovation

FWF Austrian Science Fund

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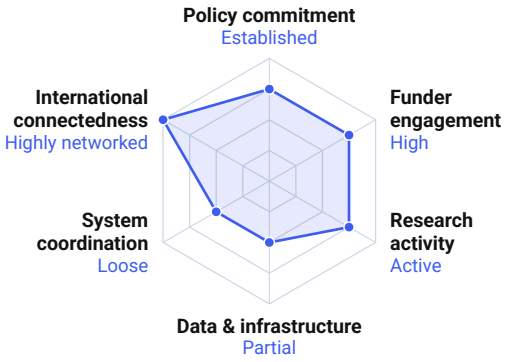
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OVERVIEW



Rings show four ordered categories per dimension.

Policy commitment **Established**

strong national and international network

Funder engagement **High**

a) strong tradition in program and process evaluations and b) drivers of policy development

Research activity **Active**

Applied: Extensive expertise in program and process evaluations Basic: internationally connected groups engaged in Metascience-related research

Data & infrastructure **Partial**

Mostly good data quality at the institutional level, but inadequate integration at the national level

System coordination **Loose**

many networks, but ones that often tend to operate in parallel with loose connections

International connectedness **Highly networked**

Active membership in several, metascience-related network

1. DEFINITIONS AND POLICY CONTEXT

- Terms used: The term has gradually gained traction following the Austrian Science Fund's (FWF) accession to the "Research on Research Institute" (RoRI) in 2019 and RoRI's strong presence at the "REvaluation Conference" in Vienna in 2024. As of now, however, "metascience" (or meta-science) is not an explicitly

defined national program in Austria. Instead, the field is commonly described by terms that are strongly policy- and practice-oriented. A survey of experts and the Meta-Moment Scientometric Overview have identified the following dominant concepts for Austria: “research, technology, and innovation policy”, “innovation studies”, “research evaluation”, “program evaluation”, “impact monitoring”, “science and technology studies”, “research impact”, “research management”, “research funding” and “open science”.

- Political Context and Framework Conditions: For the past 3 decades, the political consensus was for Austria to “catch up” with innovation leading countries, which has steadily increased public funding as well as resulted in a diverse (sometimes confusing) landscape of organisations and programs. Policy goals and strategies have also added up. The most important policy frameworks are the RTI Strategy 2030 (Strategy for Research, Technology, and Innovation), the Research Funding Act (FoFinaG), the Industrial Policy Strategy 2035, and the prospective Higher Education Strategy 2040. While there is need for more coordination overall, the Austrian culture of research evaluation has become strongly consolidated, particularly since EU accession in 1995, and is reflected in the Austrian Platform for Research and Technology Evaluation (fteval), which has nearly 30 members (though without the participation of universities).
- Priorities: The government’s current priorities lie in the areas of applied research, the commercialization of research results, economic and innovation priorities, as well as key technologies and resilience. It is generally argued that the system is highly path-dependent and that “tradition often trumps evidence,” which may be why the current government’s program mentions the idea of an “international system evaluation”.

2. INSTITUTIONS, ACTORS AND NETWORKS

The Austrian system is characterized by a multitude of actors, and a common criticism refers to its fragmentation.

- Key advisory and coordinating actors:
- The Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology, and Innovation (FORWIT) is a central advisory body for the federal government and publishes the annual STI Monitor to measure performance.

- The Austrian Platform for Research and Technology Evaluation (fteval) is the most important institutional network for evaluation culture. It brings together ministries, funding agencies, and research institutions and develops evaluation standards.
- Funding organizations: The Austrian Science Fund (FWF) and the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) are the central funding agencies. FWF and FFG conduct extensive research on program evaluations and its decision-making processes, including within the framework of RoRI (FWF). The Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft has established the Open Innovation in Science Center. The Vienna Science, Research, and Technology Fund (WWTF) plays also a role in the field of evaluations and is itself a provider of evaluations and studies.
- Ministries: The main actors at the government level are the BMFWF (Federal Ministry of Women, Science, and Research), the BMWET (Federal Ministry for Economy, Energy, and Tourism), and the BMIMI (Federal Ministry for Innovation, Mobility, and Infrastructure).
- Other stakeholders: The Open Science Network Austria (OANA) and subsequently Open Science Austria (OSA) have advanced open science strategies, while the Austrian Agency for Scientific Integrity (OeAWI), with its 76 institutional members, is responsible for investigating scientific misconduct.
- Data Use for Decision-Making: The “Plattform Registerforschung” has strongly advocated for access to data from public registries and official statistics. This is now being implemented step by step through the “Austrian Micro Data Center (AMDC)”

  Funding agencies have access to detailed microdata on funded projects; see, for example, FWF, FFG, and WWTF. Data on rejected projects can, for data protection reasons, either only be made available in anonymized form or must be treated as confidential, making it difficult to link them across systems. Evaluations often take place on a very granular level at the program or funding agency level, but far-reaching systemic reforms based on this data are rare.

3. RESEARCH ACTIVITIES: COMMUNITIES, TOPIC

AND METHODS

Research on the research system is not centrally coordinated in Austria but is distributed across various specialized centres and institutes:

- Reproducibility and Open Science: One of the most internationally visible meta-scientific groups is the Open and Reproducible Research Group (ORRG) at Graz University of Technology, led by Tony Ross-Hellauer (0000-0003-4470-7027)
- Science and Technology Studies (STS): The Institute for Science and Technology Studies at the University of Vienna (e.g., Ulrike Felt (0000-0001-7506-4234), Katja Mayer (0000-0003-1184-595X), Maximilian Fochler (0000-0002-8601-3210)) provides important qualitative and social science perspectives on research cultures and open science

  The University of Vienna has also established a Scientometrics Working Group.

- Replication Studies and Economics: At the University of Innsbruck, a group of economists (including Michael Kirchler (0000-0002-5416-2545), Juergen Huber (0000-0003-0073-0321), and Felix Holzmeister (0000-0001-9606-0427)) is conducting research specifically in the field of "metascience," particularly on peer review, crowd science, and replication studies; see also the recently funded project “Metascience - An Investigation of Research Heterogeneity”
- Socio-Ecological Transformation: The group led by Stephan Pühringer (0000-0003-2902-1895) at the University of Linz focuses, among other things, on the effects of economic thinking in the areas of knowledge production and knowledge transfer.
- Non-university institutes: A large portion of quantitative and systemic “research on research” is conducted by non-university institutes such as WIFO, IHS, ZSI, AIT, Joanneum Research, Technopolis, or WPZ as part of commissioned studies.
- New Players: Recently, Gerald Schweiger (0000-0002-0778-5774), Vienna University of Technology, whose research focuses on data science for smart buildings and energy systems, has participated in Metascience studies.

- Methods: There is a highly developed practice of program evaluation. The use of AI-supported methods to analyse large amounts of data across institutions is increasingly being discussed.

4. OPPORTUNITIES, RISKS, AND CHALLENGES

- Opportunities:
- Improved data availability: The new Austrian Micro Data Centre (AMDC) at Statistics Austria and efforts to establish a National Research Portal (e.g., through RIS Synergy) offer significant opportunities for a more systemic, causal analysis of the Austrian system.

  The FWF has recently expanded the metadata of funded projects back to 1974 and made an Open API available, and is funder of OpenAlex.

- Metascience as a unifying element: There is an opportunity to better integrate existing traditions in science studies, technology assessment, and quality assurance to promote institutional learning.
- Risks:
- Fragmentation and dependency: The data landscape is fragmented, and there is a problematic dependency on commercial providers for bibliometric data, leading to a loss of data sovereignty.
- Related actions: There is a tendency for certain topics to be addressed multiple times across various national and international networks, which leads to capacity overloads (e.g. DORA, CoARA, Research Assessment, Research Culture)
- Reduction to control mechanisms: There is a risk that metascience will be reduced to mere quality management and performance monitoring rather than triggering a profound reflection on research culture.
- Limited impact: In this historically path-dependent system, evaluation results rarely lead to genuine structural consequences (“tradition beats evidence”).

- Key Challenges (Critical Perspectives): The FORWIT Council recently addressed once again the key shortcomings of the research and higher education system in Austria:
- Input-output efficiency deficit with insufficient funding options for implementation
- An overly complex higher education and research system
- Inadequate career models for early-career researchers
- Overly hierarchical organizational structures
- Insufficient competitive research funding

5. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Central evaluations/strategies: Important reviews are scheduled for the years 2025 to 2027, including the midterm evaluation of the RTI Strategy 2030, which has already taken place, and the new higher education strategy for 2040.
- Call for a reorientation of content: Voices within the system warn that the increasing use of AI could merely lead to measuring already known problems in the incentive system in an even more sophisticated way, rather than clarifying fundamental questions about the future of science (discovery vs. efficiency).
- Focus of the evaluation: It is expected that the focus of metascience will continue to shift toward topics such as resilience, economic security, technological sovereignty, and concrete societal/economic impact.

6. NATIONAL/GLOBAL SYSTEMS, CAPABILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURES

- National vs. European Development: Austrian science policy and the Metascience agenda are strongly influenced by the European Union and initiatives from Brussels. National programs often adopt priorities set at the EU level (e.g. Open Science, Citizen Science).
- Lack of national infrastructure: One of the most pressing demands at the national level is the establishment of a dedicated "Current Research Information System" (CRIS) to link micro-level data

transparently and independently of major publishers. For example, while a concept for a national research portal is available that would significantly improve data quality, it has not been implemented yet.

- Metascience diplomacy: Austria is exceptionally active on the international stage. The fteval networks and institutional connections (including TAFTIE, Science Europe, and RoRI) serve as important instruments for the transfer of policies and evaluation practices between systems.

7. HIGHLIGHTS FOR COMPARISON WITH OTHER NATIONAL SYSTEMS

- "Tradition trumps evidence" coupled with high stability: Austria is characterized by a research system that, on the one hand, is very well-funded, but on the other hand it heavily depends on public funds and therefore operates in a conservative and path-dependent manner. Genuinely evidence-based governance measures are only slowly gaining ground against established traditions.
- High value placed on academic freedom: In Austria, academic freedom is regarded – in part for historical reasons – as a nearly sacrosanct asset. This protects funding organizations from being overly exploited for political purposes and enables a strongly “bottom-up” driven approach, which is considered a major strength of the system.

  A pioneering role without the “metascience” label: Although the term “metascience” is rarely used, Austria is a pioneer. For nearly 30 years, the fteval platform has fostered a highly professionalized culture of program evaluation. In subfields such as Open Science and quality-oriented evaluation expertise, the system is exceptionally well-positioned internationally.

  In 2004, the FWF was one of the first funding agencies worldwide to adopt an open access policy and is now a co-founder, funder or an active member of several metascience-related networks and infrastructures such as Science Europe, Global Research Council, Research on Research Institute, cOAlition S, Barcelona Declaration, CoARA, DORA, CrossRef, Europe PubMedCentral, Directory of

Open Access Journals (DOAJ), SciPost, OpenAlex, OAPEN Library, Open Library of Humanities, and Open Research Europe.

APPENDIX

A. Key Policies

fteval: Austrian Platform for Research and Technology Policy Evaluation

- Evaluation Standards for Research, Technology and Innovation Policy, Evaluation Standards for Research, Technology and Innovation Policy - fteval Repositorium, https://repository.fteval.at/id/eprint/387
- Nützlichkeit und Nutzen der Programmevaluationen im Bereich der österreichischen FTI-Politik. Metaevaluation der Programmevaluationen 2003-2014. - fteval Repositorium

FORWIT: Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology, and Innovation

- Analysis of the higher education system - FORWIT
- FTI Monitor
- ÖSTERREICH 2030 50 FRAGEN FÜR DEN WEG ZUR INNOVATIONSSPITZE

BMFWF: Federal Ministry of Women, Science and Research

- Austrian Research and Technology Report 2025, https://www.bmfwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:52afff52-7dee-4103-bb40-e7c2485d6420/ftb_2025_en.pdf
- Austrian RTI Strategy 2030 and Evaluierung der FTI-Strategie 2030 zur Hälfte der Laufzeit - fteval Repositorium
- Der ERA-NAP: Forschungsbericht und Evaluierung 2025
- Hochschulstrategie 2040 - Bundesministerium für Frauen, Wissenschaft und Forschung
- Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology, and Innovation. (2026). Analyse des österreichischen Hochschulsystems. FORWIT. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19521681

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  FWF: Austrian Science Fund

- FWF's rules on the quality and transparency of evaluations and studies: > 30 metascience related studies on external program evaluations, studies on outcomes of FWF projects, ex-ante peer review and surveys on the FWF.
- CoARA Action Plan Austrian Science Fund (FWF) 2025 incl. Bias Prevention, Assessment Criteria, Equal Opportunity and Diversity, Open Science, Integrity and Ethics, Cooperation

  FFG: Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft mbH

- Auswertungen und Berichte

  WWTF: Vienna Science and Technology Fund

- Evaluations and Studies

  OSA Austria Community Blog

B. Key Organisations

1. Networks/Platforms/Politics

fteval: Austrian Platform for Research and Technology Policy Evaluation, Contact: Isabella Wagner

fteval promotes the quality, transparency, and utilization of research and technology policy evaluation in Austria. It acts as a central hub for dialogue among evaluators, policymakers, and research institutions.

The fteval repository provides a unique source which collects and makes accessible evaluation reports and studies from the fields of science, research, technology and innovation policy in Austria.

FORWIT: Austrian Council for Sciences, Technology, and Innovation, Contact: Thomas König

FORWIT serves as an independent advisory body to the Austrian federal government on all matters related to research, technology, and innovation policy. It provides expert analyses and strategic recommendations to strengthen Austria's competitive position.

2. Research Institutions (Applied)

AIT: Austrian Institute of Technology GmbH, Contact: Michael Dinges

AIT is Austria's largest non-university research institute, focusing on applied research in areas like energy, mobility, health, and digital safety. It acts as a highly specialized research and development partner for industry.

IHS: Institute for Advanced Studies: Contact: Angela Wroblewski

IHS is an independent, non-profit research institute specializing in the economic and social sciences. It conducts high-quality applied research and provides evidence-based policy advice to public institutions.

ZSI: Centre for Social Innovation, Contact: Katja Mayer

ZSI is a scientific institute that focuses on the social embedding and impact of innovations. It conducts research, provides advisory services, and implements projects at the intersection of society, technology, and science policy.

Joanneum Research: Contact: Michael Ploder

Joanneum Research is a leading applied research organization focusing on technology development and transfer. It supports business and industry through innovations in materials, health, digital technologies, and climate.

WIFO: Austrian Institute of Economic Research, Contact: Jürgen Janger

WIFO is a non-profit, independent economic research institute. By providing the highest quality in research, economic policy advice and communication, the Institute bridges the gap between basic academic research and economic policy application.

Technopolis (Vienna), Contact: Katharina Warta

Founded in 1989 as an academic spin-off of Sussex University (UK), Technopolis Group is an international research and consulting organisation working for the public sector. Starting as a frontrunner in the science, technology and innovation policy sector, we have grown and diversified our areas of expertise and solutions to climate change and environment, digital transformation, education and skills, life sciences and health, and international cooperation.

WPZ Research, Contact: Brigitte Ecker

WPZ Research is an independent and autonomous research institute that supports the transfer of basic and applied research into scientific and economic policy practice. WPZ Research contributes above all to the further development of evidence-based (i.e. scientifically based) policy advice in the fields of science, business and education.

3. Research Institutions (Basic Research)

Department of Science and Technology Studies (U Vienna), Contact: Maximilian Fochler

Department of Banking and Finance, University of Innsbruck; Contact: Michael Kirchler (Expert in Metascience)

KNOW Center Graz, Research Center for Data-Driven Business & Big Data Analytics, Contact: Tony Ross-Hellauer

The Know-Center is a leading European innovation and research center for trusted artificial intelligence and data science. It specializes in bridging the gap between basic research and practical data-driven business applications.

Institute of Technology Assessment of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Contact: Michael Nentwich

Stephan Pühringer | Institute for Comprehensive Analysis of the Economy

Gerald Schweiger | TU Vienna

4. Funders

OeAW: Austrian Academy of Sciences, Contact: Hubertus Schmid-Schmidsfelden

Austria's largest non-university research and science institution which is also a learned society and a research funder.

WWTF: Vienna Science and Technology Fund, Contact: Michael Strassnig

WWTF is the largest private non-profit funding organization for science and research in Vienna.

FWF: Austrian Science Fund, Contact: Falk Reckling

The FWF is Austria's central funding organization for basic research. It is dedicated to supporting the continuous development of Austrian research through mostly bottom-up, highly competitive, independent peer-reviewed grant programs.

LBG: Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft, Contact: Thomas Palfinger

LBG is a research organization specializing in the health sciences and the humanities. It emphasizes interdisciplinary and translational research, often involving stakeholders from civil society and clinical practice to solve complex societal challenges.

FFG: Österreichische Forschungsförderungsgesellschaft, Contact: Sabine Mayer

The FFG is the national funding agency for industrial research and development in Austria. It supports applied research, technological innovation, and infrastructure deployment to strengthen the competitiveness of the Austrian economy.

C. Key Initiatives / Investments

- Austrian RTI Strategy 2030 and Evaluierung der FTI-Strategie 2030 zur Hälfte der Laufzeit - fteval Repositorium
- Der ERA-NAP: Forschungsbericht und Evaluierung 2025
- Hochschulstrategie 2040 - Bundesministerium für Frauen, Wissenschaft und Forschung

D. Data Sources / Evidence

- FTI Monitor - Rat für Forschung, Wissenschaft, Innovation und Technologieentwicklung
- Datawarehouse Hochschulbereich
- STATISTICS AUSTRIA
- Austrian Micro Data Centre

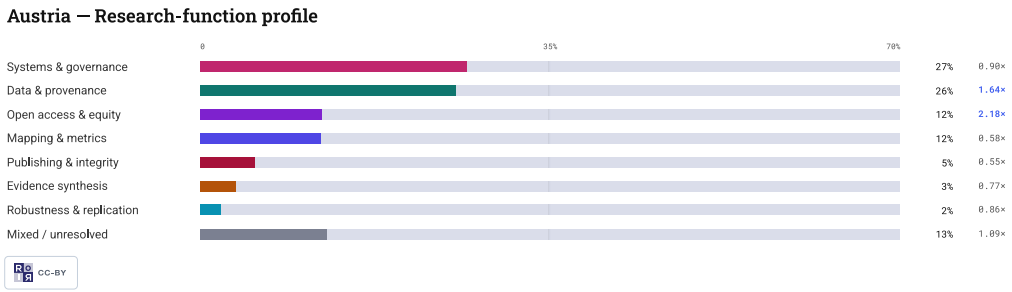
E. Interviews conducted

- Based on a questionnaire, 8 responses to 14 questions were received (Note: Most respondents were confused by the complexity of the questionnaire and were unable to answer some questions or could only answer them incompletely because doing so would have been too time-consuming.)

META-MOMENT ATLAS PROFILE

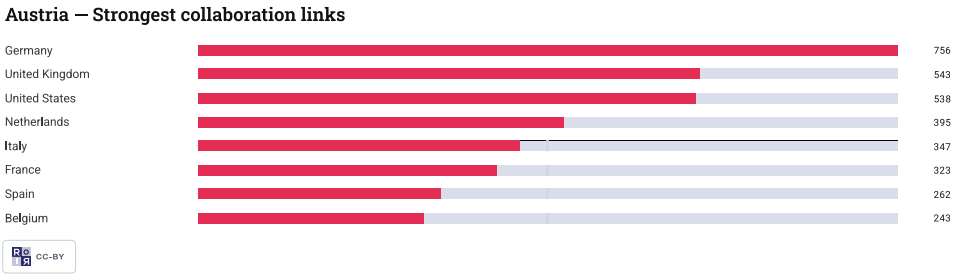
This section, drawn from the META-MOMENT microsite, places Austria in the project's metascience atlas. The atlas counts 3,148 works with at least one author affiliated with Austria, or 1,935 works by fractional author share.

Research-function profile



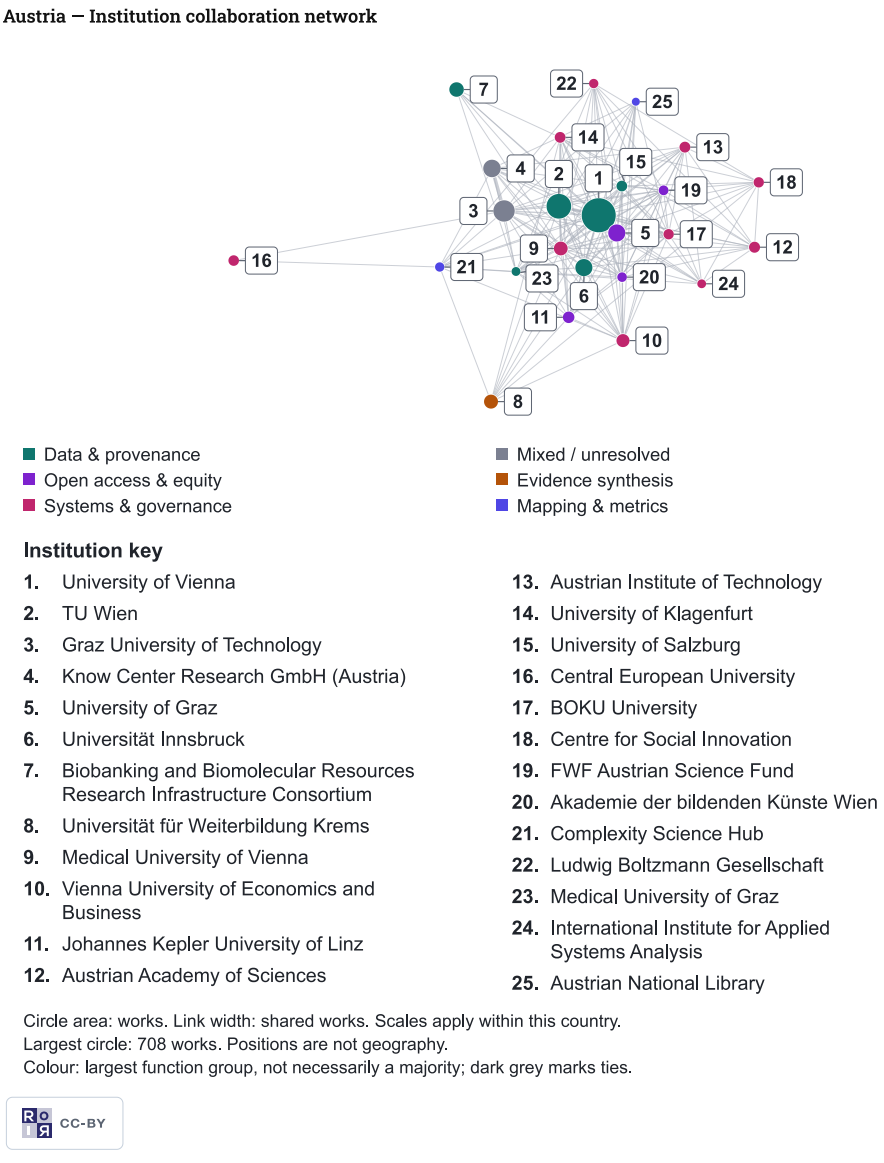
Works by research function: the atlas's seven reviewed functions, with Mixed / unresolved shown for comparison. Source: META-MOMENT atlas.

Strongest collaboration links



Countries with which Austria shares the most co-authored works in the atlas. Source: META-MOMENT atlas.

Institution collaboration network



Institutions in the country's co-authorship network in the atlas. Source: META-MOMENT atlas.



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