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Survey on researchers requirements and practices towards Cultural Heritage institutions

Documentation and analysis

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Giving access to high quality Cultural Heritage data and metadata

Arts and Humanities research is mainly based on the analysis of "human traces" - such as artefacts, pieces of art, written documents, audio and video recordings, photographs, etc. – that are most of the time preserved by Cultural Heritage Institutions (or CHIs). To preserve, study and promote these objects, an increasing number of heterogeneous digital data is produced by CHIs, but also by Arts and Humanities scholars themselves. For instance, digital Cultural Heritage data include natively digital documents (like qualitative or quantitative datasets, digital photographs, transcriptions, etc.), digitized resources of all kind (such as scanned texts, digitized images or 3D models, etc.), but also attached metadata, annotation or further enrichments. In this regard, access to high quality Cultural Heritage data and metadata is essential to ensure high quality research in Arts and Humanities.

Data sharing is indeed a key issue in the future development of Digital Humanities. According to this vision, enabling access to and promoting the reuse of Cultural Heritage data are thus crucial to create new collaboration and new research, facilitate the development of an open publishing environment for Arts and Humanities research, and reinforce the adoption of digital methods and workflows amongst researchers.

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[1] https://team.inria.fr/almanach/

However, in their relations with CHI, scholars seem always facing the same recurring problem: « There is no generally valid rule as to how they can quote, duplicate and furthermore republish in their scholarly work[2] ». This situation is clearly a hindrance for both CHIs and scholars, to develop new research on the one hand, and on the other to gain visibility. It is now essential to tackle this issue by providing a clear and comprehensive framework that enables interactions between CHIs and Arts and Humanities scholars.

Offering a comprehensive framework for researchers and CHIs

To provide such a framework, we propose to design a common and generic online environment regarding all aspects relevant to access to and reuse of Cultural Heritage data and metadata. This initiative is supported by APEF[3], CLARIN ERIC[4], DARIAH-EU[5], E-RIHS[6], Europeana[7], IPERION-CH[8] and PARTHENOS[9].

In this regard, we need first to identify all the actors taking part in the reuse of digital Cultural Heritage data, in order to take into account their specific needs and to delineate the form of their engagement. Five actors have been identified: first and foremost Cultural Heritage Institutions and researchers, but also research institutions, data centers, and Cultural Heritage laboratories.

We need then to identify their priority needs in terms of data sharing and reuse. As a first step, we have chosen to focus on interactions between Cultural Heritage Institutions and researchers.

In order to tailor the scope of this web environment to its prospective users, several workshops[10] have been already conducted with CHIs to gather their insight and get a better understanding of their needs. The survey presented here was also conceived and realized as an explorative part in the creation and development of this online environment aiming at

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[2] Laurent Romary, Mike Mertens, Anne Baillot, "Data fluidity in DARIAH – pushing the agenda forward", *BIBLIOTHEK Forschung und Praxis*, De Gruyter, 2016, 39 (3), pp.350-357. <hal-01285917v2>
[3] www.archivesportaleurope.net
[4] www.clarin.eu
[5] www.dariah.eu
[6] www.erihs.fr
[7] www.europeana.eu
[8] www.iperionch.eu
[9] www.parthenos-project.eu
[10] In Berlin and Paris in November 2016, and in Dublin in February 2017

simplifying Cultural Heritage research. It specifically addresses researchers and aims at having a clear understanding of:

- Difficulties encountered by scholars when they explore collections and exploit Cultural Heritage data;
- Their needs concerning the reuse of Cultural Heritage data;
- Their willingness to share the data they create during their research activities (with CHIs and peers).

In user-centered design (such as it was used to conceive the survey presented here), this development step is called **user research**. It helps prevent misconceptions about user requirements, behaviors or motives, as much as possible. User research requires **empathy** with the users, taking into account their personal experience and relying on the knowledge they bring. In order to achieve a balanced development, the output should introduce a distance towards this type of information, by specifically questioning and/or observing them. This was formalised in the concept papers derived from the workshops minutes regarding the position of the representatives of cultural heritage institutions. Still, the expectations of another major type of users remained unexplored, namely the researchers.

There are several ways of exploring user needs in **user experience methods**, between **individual interviews**, **focus groups** or **surveys** for the most prominent. We chose the latest mainly for commodity reasons: it was easier and less time-consuming to design a survey that we would post online and communicate to researchers through mailing lists. With this method, we get less qualitative information from the users than we would get from interviews, but we gain quantitative value by having more responses. In this case like in many others, the survey allows us to gather representative data from the respondents in order to build specifications during the design of the product. Besides, at the beginning of the design process, the team has a preliminary vision of the overall direction it wants to bring to the project. The team can formulate assumptions or hypotheses about user characteristics. Surveys are efficient to confirm or reverse such assumptions. Lastly, it is easier to communicate **quantitative results** through this type of questionnaire because they allow for visual representations, such as histograms, charts, scatter plots, etc. Not only do those graphics help comprehend the results of a questionnaire quickly, they are also easier to display and explain to stakeholders.

With these different purposes in mind, we chose to use **Limesurvey**, a tool for building questionnaires and posting them online. It is a free and open-source application that is comparatively simple to handle.[11]

Structure of the survey

Four main categories of questions are usually addressed to the participants of a questionnaire:

- **Demographic** questions: who are they?
- **Behavior** questions: what do they do?
- **Opinion** questions: what do they think?
- **Knowledge** questions: what do they know?

All these types of questions were addressed in this questionnaire (for a total of 36 questions). Its general structure is as follows: an introduction, the questions divided in four parts, the thanks and a contact address.

In a **short introduction,** the purpose of this study was explained as clearly as possible, but without revealing too much. This way, we hoped to prevent influencing the respondents:

« *We would like to learn more about researchers' practices and their experiences with Cultural Heritage Institutions when they are engaging in transactions involving Cultural Heritage Data reuse. This information will help us identify any issues and obstacles you may have encountered, in order to design an online solution that would ease collaboration, exchange and information retrieval.* »

This part is insofar of importance as it helps raise the curiosity of the respondent by giving him/her a clear idea of the survey's relevance and purpose. At this point in the survey, we also indicate the likely duration for completing the survey (15min).

The **core of the survey** was built during a brainstorming session bringing together the members of the project team, where every piece of information that seemed important was listed. It appeared that the questions could be grouped into four distinct parts, depending on their main topic:

1. The **sociological** background of the respondents

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[11] https://www.limesurvey.org/

2. The **experience(s)** they had with Cultural Heritage Institutions
3. Their **practices** / **habits** / **behaviors** as researchers
4. Their **requirements** towards an online tool (what features they would like)

A first version was sent to a small group of researchers as a **pre-test** around December 1st, 2016. Pre-testing is essential in order to identify poorly designed questions, whether they are hard to understand or too ambiguous. It also helps measure the time required for completing the questionnaire and adjust its length if necessary. We were able to come down to 15-20 minutes average duration.

The final version was released on December 15th, 2016. It was made available online and broadcasted through various channels: mainly by mailing lists (French DH list, French Open Access list, etc.), but also on Twitter. It remained accessible for respondents for two months and a half.

Results

The goal of this study was to obtain a clear overview of the way(s) in which researchers are used to interact with Cultural Heritage Institutions (CHIs) when they need their data. Such an overview covers the feelings they can have (positive or negative) towards their experiences with CHIs as well as what they more generally think of Open Access, licenses, research publications, citation, etc. The information gathered in this manner will be used to design a **user-friendly platform**, well aware of the researchers' needs on this matter.

Preamble: the main biases in responses to be aware of

● **Acquiescence**: generally speaking, it is easier to answer "yes" to a question, rather than a "no" that can appear as a form of antagonism / opposition.
● **Social desirability**: the respondents tend to answer questions in a way that will look their best, under a perspective more "desirable" than reality. On the contrary, the less gratifying responses are minimized.
● **Halo effect**: frequently, the first answers given by a participant influence his/her later answers. This effect is mainly visible when several Likert scales[12] follow each other

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[12] A Likert Scale is the sum of responses to several Likert items. These items are usually displayed with a visual aid, such as a series of radio buttons or a horizontal bar representing a simple scale. This is a very useful question type when you want to get an overall measurement of sentiment around a particular topic, opinion, or experience and to also collect specific data on factors that contribute to that sentiment.

on the same matter. In that case, the participant tends to check all the boxes being on the same "side" of the scale.

After 2 months and a half, we collected **109 responses**. The respondents came from **23 countries**, mostly Europe. France is overrepresented (45 respondents), mainly because the survey was spread by a French research Institution, and posted to two French research mailing lists[13]. The age distribution is balanced (about one quarter for each age group), as well as the discipline distribution. Four big disciplinary fields were proposed and borrowed from the PARTHENOS typology[14] :

- **Study of the past** (including Ancient History, Medieval History, Modern History, Art History, Epigraphy, etc.)
- **Language-related studies** (including Literature, Linguistics, Philology, Language Technology, etc.)
- **Archaeology, heritage and applied Discipline** (including Cultural Heritage, Archives, Libraries, Museums, preservation experts, Digital curation / edition, etc.)
- **Social sciences** (including Sociology, Political Science, Geography, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, etc.)

It appears that a third of the respondents (31,2%) did not recognize themselves in the proposed disciplinary fields and chose the "Other" option. 11 of them specified their research domain in their own words in the comment area:

- "Aesthetics"
- "Architecture and urbanism"
- "Arts"
- "Didactics"
- "Digital Art History"
- "Education"
- "Environment"
- "Ethnomusicology"
- "History of philosophy"
- "Psychoanalysis / Psychiatry"

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[13] The survey was sent on two French mailing lists : "dh" (French Speaking discussion list about digital humanities) and "accès ouvert" (French Speaking discussion list on Open Access for French-speaking community).

[14] See the « D2.1, Report on User Requirements » (https://goo.gl/3IwI5J), delivered by PARTHENOS, that gives a definition as well as a classification of the different research communities in humanities and social sciences.

- "Semantic web"

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. First, not all respondents felt involved in the categories proposed, which may suggest that they were not exhaustive enough. We can also note that we reached researchers who do not belong to Arts and Humanities communities (e.g. "Psychoanalysis / Psychiatry" or "Environment") and therefore did not recognize themselves in the proposed disciplinary fields. Second, the perception of one's discipline is clearly not unequivocal. For example, with "Digital Art History" and "History of philosophy", the respondents considered themselves outside the broad spectrum of "Study of the past", although they could legitimately have considered themselves included.

The respondents were then asked to disclose their "current research position" by picking one of the options proposed. A substantial disparity emerged since 40% described themselves as "technical experts" or "engineers". It was only logical to deduce from this that a fair proportion of the respondents has technical skills and a good digital literacy, which is confirmed by the global ranking they stated: above 50% at 4/5 and 5/5 :
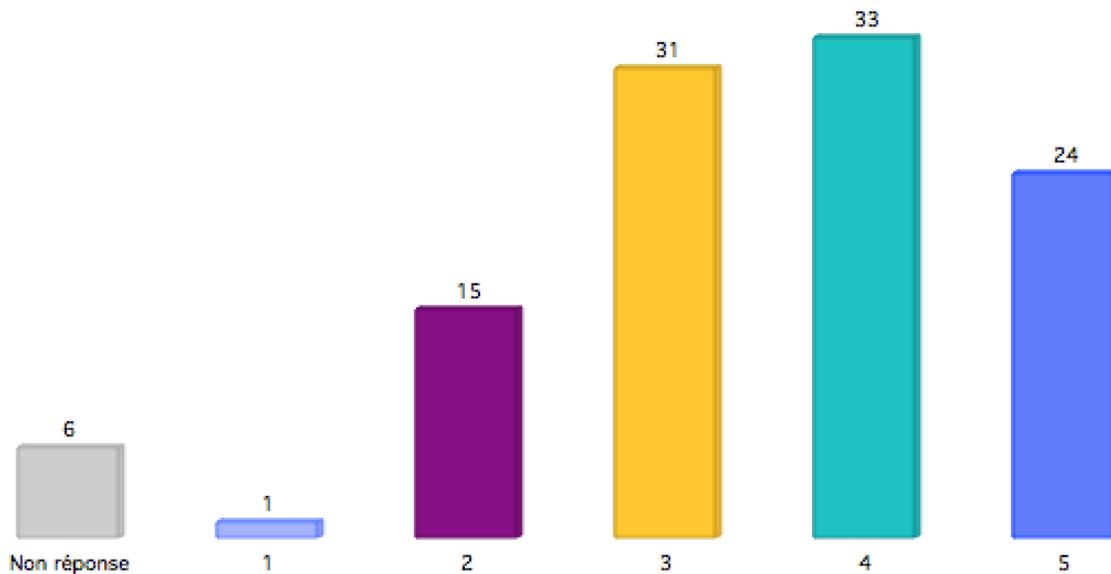
How would you rate your digital literacy on a scale from 1 to 5 ?

This should by no means lead to an overall generalization of all researchers being comfortable with digital tools. Here, the bias of the dissemination via Digital Humanists channels certainly impacted the balance in the represented digital skills.

Lastly, a majority of the respondents are affiliated to a research institution (85%).

The first question about the contact made by the researcher with a CHI for a data reuse purpose is a "filtering" one: if the participant answered "no", he/she was not concerned by a series of questions dealing with that particular experience (the transaction between the researcher and the institution). In total, 25% of the respondents never needed to contact a CHI for obtaining data in their research activities. Cross-tabulated result shows a balanced distribution among the "no".

The serendipity can play a significant role in transactions between researchers and CHIs: 30% of the "yes" respondents reached an institution after having discovered one of its collection, as opposed to those remaining who picked the "research issue" as the main reason for contact. This can be taken into account in the framework of the web platform to be developed, for instance by highlighting "popular collections" in a certain way, or by proposing some kind of recommendation engine leading towards interesting collections for a researcher (based on his/her previous research, his/her domain, etc.). The platform should be conceived in such a way to incite the institutions to disclose more information online about their collections, to make them more visible and as a consequence more "discoverable".

The **type of material** the respondents are interested in varies a lot. Since this insight emerged from answers to an open question, we recoded the responses to group them inside meaningful categories. But the question might have lacked precision, and a wide range of responses appears to be too ambiguous for a relevant analysis. For example, "photos" as a written answer with no contextual information is hard to disambiguate because it can refer to two different types of items: the physical object itself, a photograph, that the researcher wants to study; or the means of access to any kind of material, such as texts or artefacts, that the researcher needs to take a picture of, for subsequent analysis.
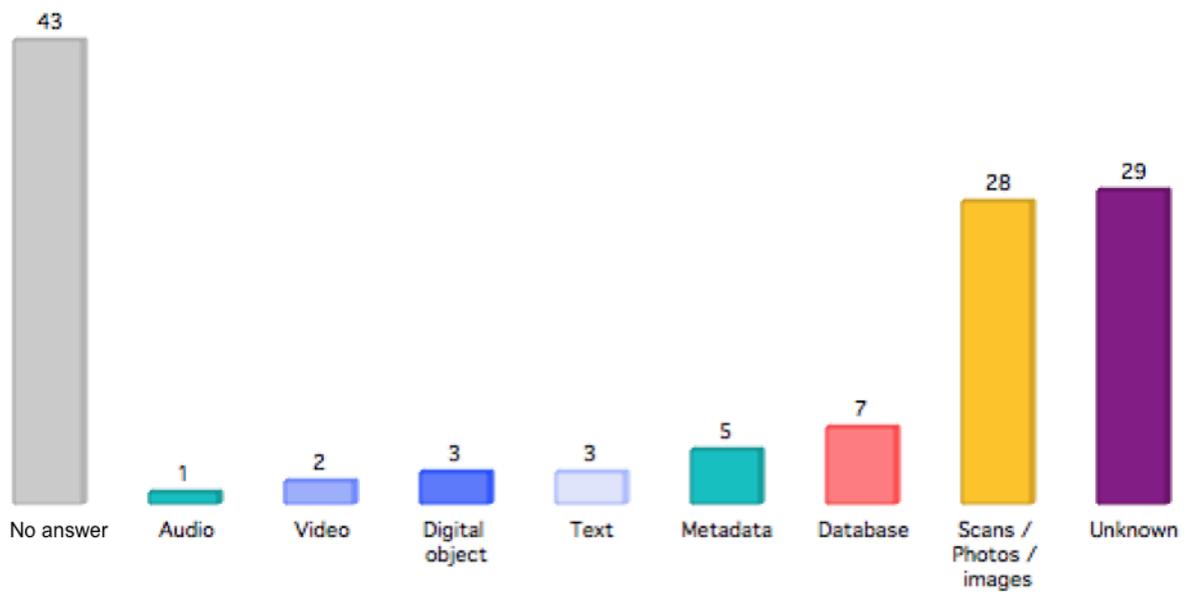
What type of material was involved in the transaction? (recoded)

Nevertheless, the vast majority of respondents indicate that "scans" form the basis of day-to-day research in Humanities and Heritage disciplines. This type of material needs to be addressed first and foremost, but without excluding others like audio/video, metadata or databases, which are also requested for research.

When interacting with the CHIs for data reuse, researchers need to gain **solid information on the reuse conditions** of the objects that are at the core of the transaction. That requirement can sometimes be difficult to meet. This is why we asked respondents to express their feelings about their personal experience. Almost half of the respondents claim to have been guided by the institution itself when looking for that kind of information ("agree" and "strongly agree" added).
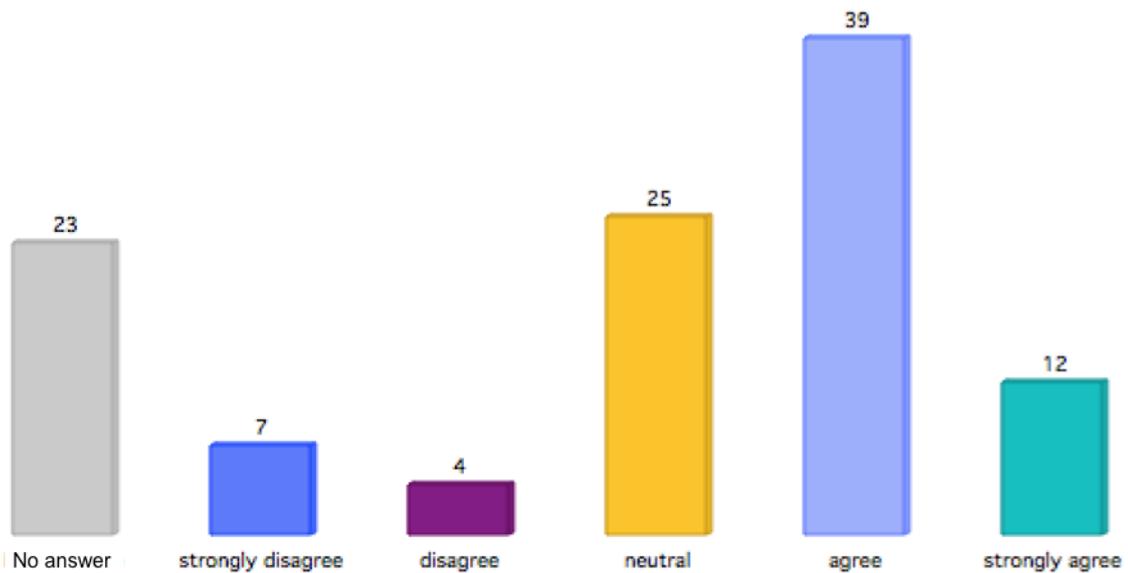
About the data reuse conditions of the institution concerned:
Did the CHI guide you effectively in your request ?

The same researchers were mostly satisfied with the quality of the reuse conditions they were asking in terms of understandability. Overall, the transaction system seems to be working well: there was no big dissatisfaction towards CHIs accompanying researchers in their project, excepted for the fact that they claim to have faced obstacles in accessing the data they asked for.
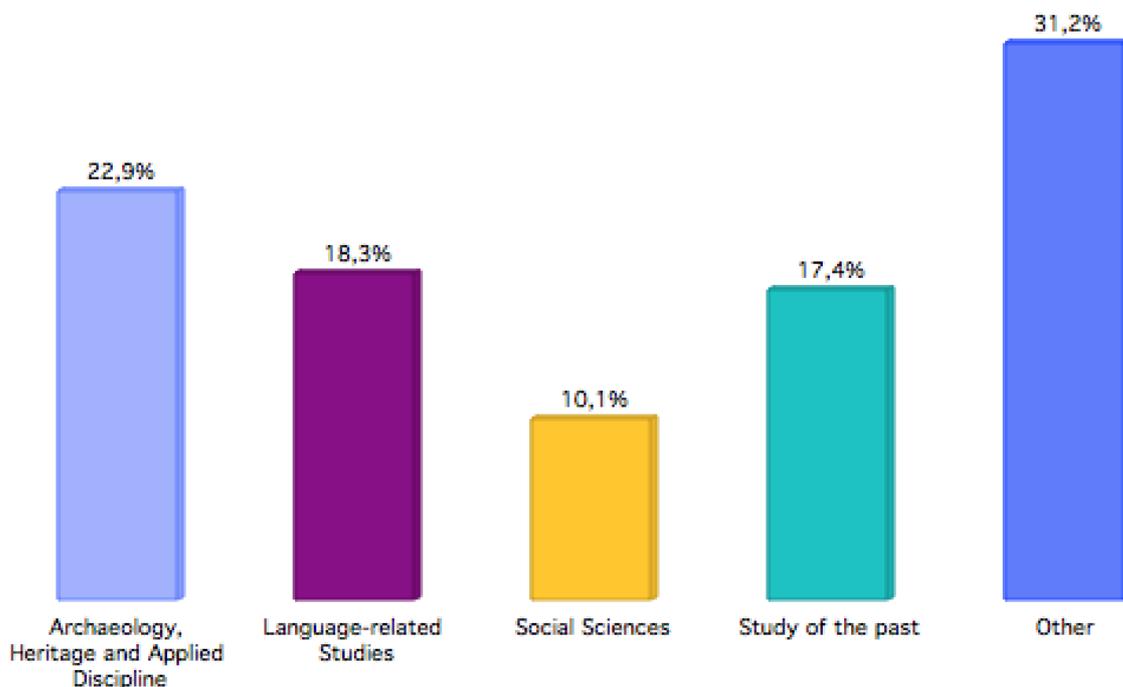
About the data reuse conditions of the institution concerned:
Did you face obstacles in accessing the data ?

It shows that there are still a lot of improvements to make to fluidify the transactions. The web platform that we proposed to develop, could have a major impact by promoting the reciprocity between cultural heritage partners: researchers can benefit from better guidance and clearer reuse conditions, while CHIs can benefit from higher visibility thanks to concerted dissemination and (meta)data enrichments (66% of the respondents claim that they are willing to share their research results with the partner institution they obtain the data from).

According to the respondents, the institutions are widely supportive of enriching their data with researchers' work.
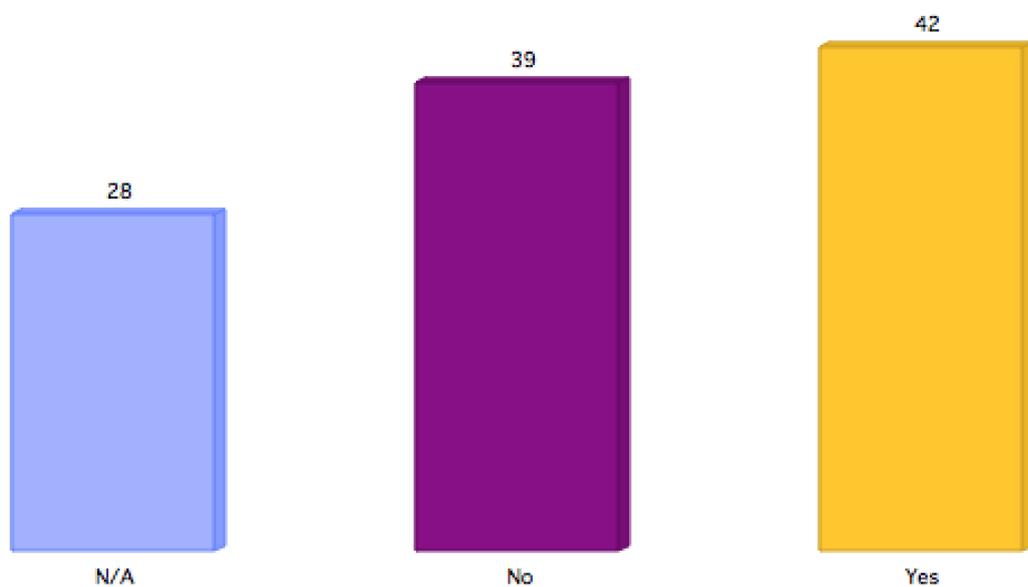
Did you discuss the means of disseminating your research results with the institution?
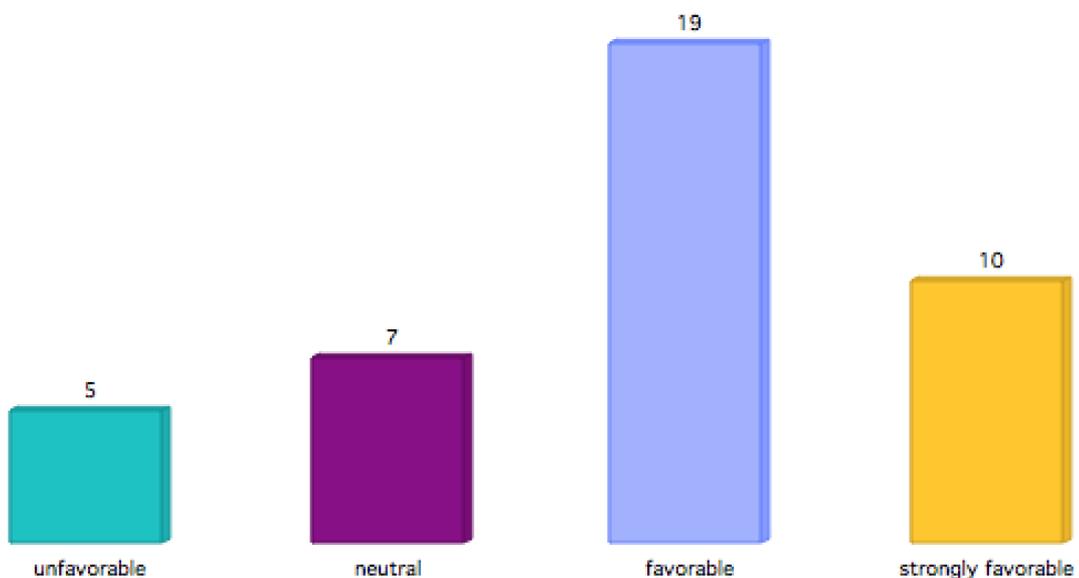
One way to help researchers and CHI partners collaborate more easily could be to offer a mean of proposing a specific enrichment to a dataset. This is clearly a feature to consider.

Finally, what was highlighted by this second part of the questionnaire is that clear reuse conditions and Open Science strategy constitute engaging factors for researchers who want to collaborate with CHIs.

Researchers practices

The aim of the third part of the questionnaire is to find out about the general opinions and habits of researchers in their day-to-day activities. Almost 70% of the respondents claim to be willing to **share their results with the institutional partner**, but under certain conditions:

Are you willing to share your research results with the institution
that gave you access to their data ?

No answer   59
CC-BY or alike   16
CC-0 or alike   9
CC or other free license   5
Irrevelant   5
Open access   5
Fee / Autorship right / Copyright   4
CC-BY-ND-NC   1
CC-NC-SA   1
CC-ND   1
Dataset tracability   1
Ethics   1
MoU   1
NC   1
Share alike   1
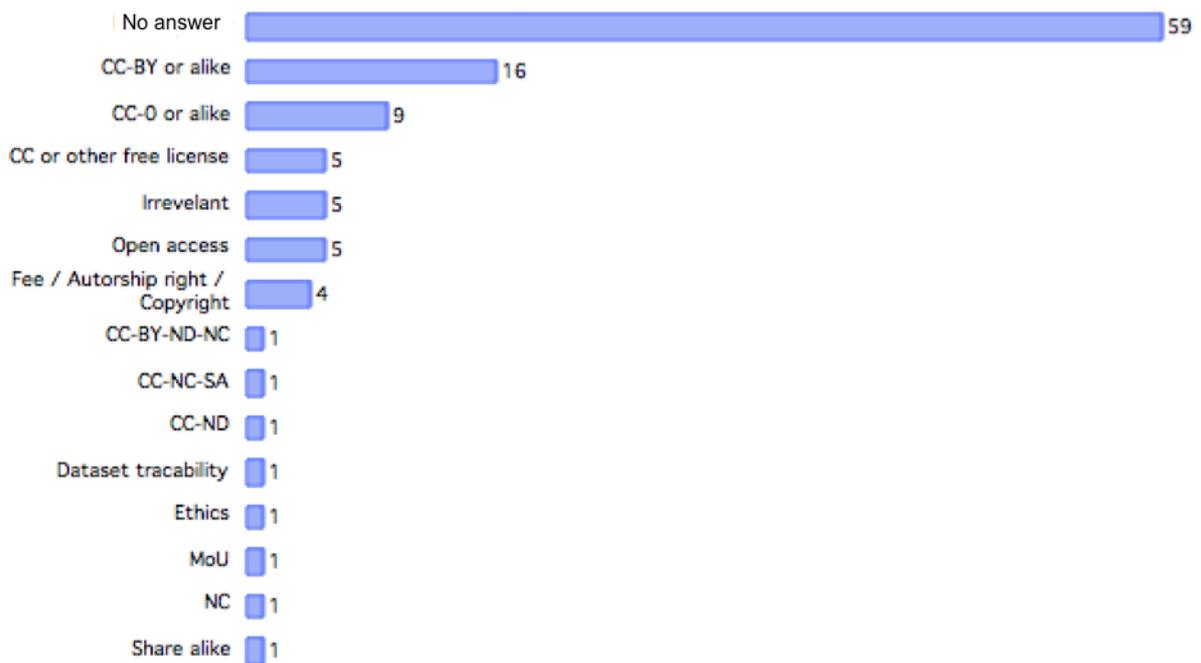
Under what conditions would you be willing to share
your research results with the CHI you worked with ?

The participants seem to have some **lack of interest and/or knowledge in the existing licenses**, as well as the digital surrogates they produce (75% did not answer). There is an important gap to fill in this domain: raising awareness towards licensing issue needs to be addressed. The respondents mainly know the Creative Commons (CC) licenses and lean towards CC-BY in most cases, which means they only require the attribution of their work when reused by a third party. Free and open licenses like CC seem to be preferred by the majority of respondents - a result that certainly has to do with the overrepresented awareness for licensing issues in the group of respondents that actually answered the question.

Another interesting point is the **correlation between the average digital literacy of the respondents and the importance given to data format**: the few participants who ranked themselves below three to assess their digital literacy assigned less value to data format than those who ranked themselves higher.
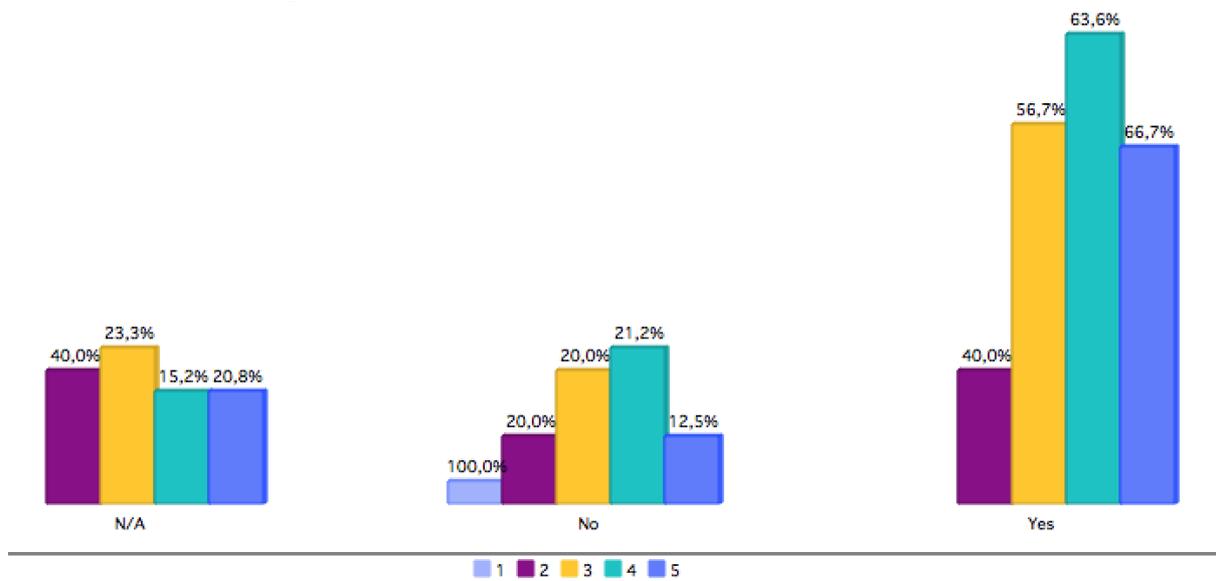
Cross-tabulated : digital literacy //
is data format an important issue for you ?

Need for an online solution

The **need for up-to-date information from CHIs concerning their data policy** is attested here: about 60% of the respondents want to be kept informed of any policy development from the CHI partners or soon to be. This could be addressed within the future online environment, through a notification system that would alert researchers of any significant change within institutions "followed" (or "bookmarked"). It has to be linked with the fact that about 70% of the participants consider that offering the opportunity to interact online with the institutions is "useful" or "very useful". Note that the vast majority owns at least one academic profile online, so it will have to be taken into account when researchers will register in the online interface: an external authentication system could be a solution to consider in that case.
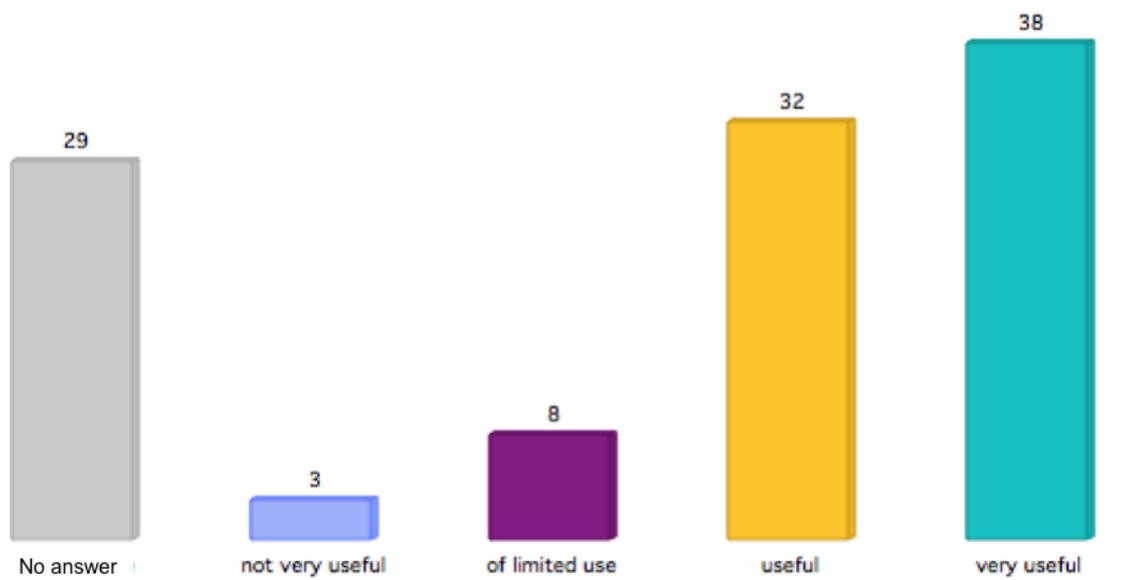
How do you feel about interacting online
with the institutions about reuse conditions ?

The openness and sharing of information are generally approved by the respondents since the majority is in favor of transparency concerning their institutional partners and the reuse conditions of their own data.

Finally, the questionnaire concludes by asking researchers to point out the kind of information they would like to be able to gather online from cultural heritage institutions: **documentation on data policy** is the most important item (after recoding the answers), since it is something that they sometimes struggle to find on the websites or portals of the institutions. The planned online environment can step in precisely there and make that kind of information more visible and accessible to a large audience.
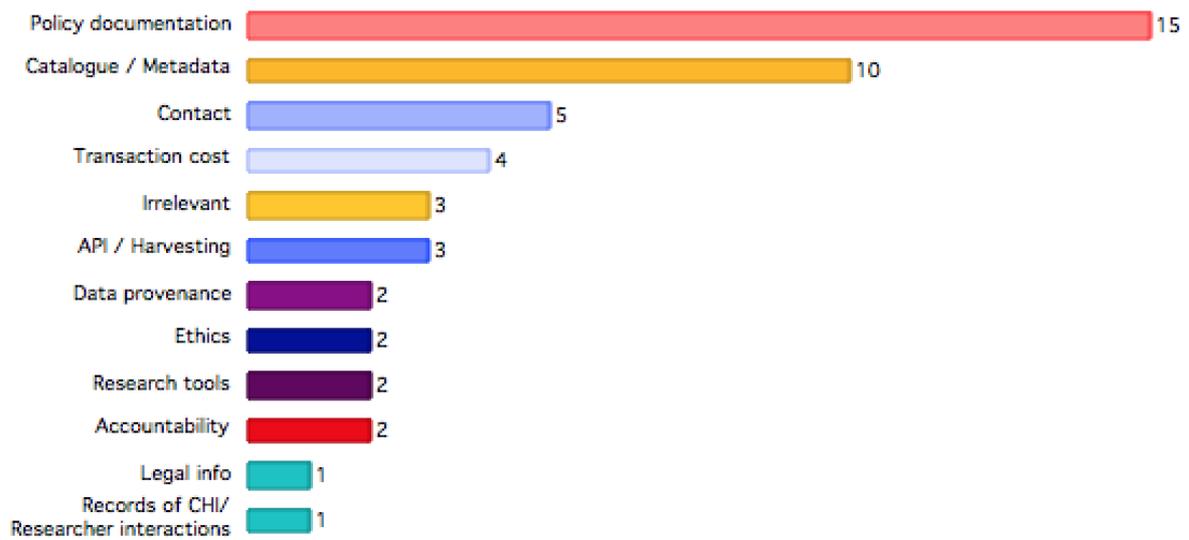
Policy documentation		15
Catalogue / Metadata		10
Contact		5
Transaction cost		4
Irrelevant		3
API / Harvesting		3
Data provenance		2
Ethics		2
Research tools		2
Accountability		2
Legal info		1
Records of CHI/ Researcher interactions		1

What key information would you want to consult online regarding an institution you are likely to interact with ? (recoded)

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Appendix (detailed statistics)

Age of the respondents
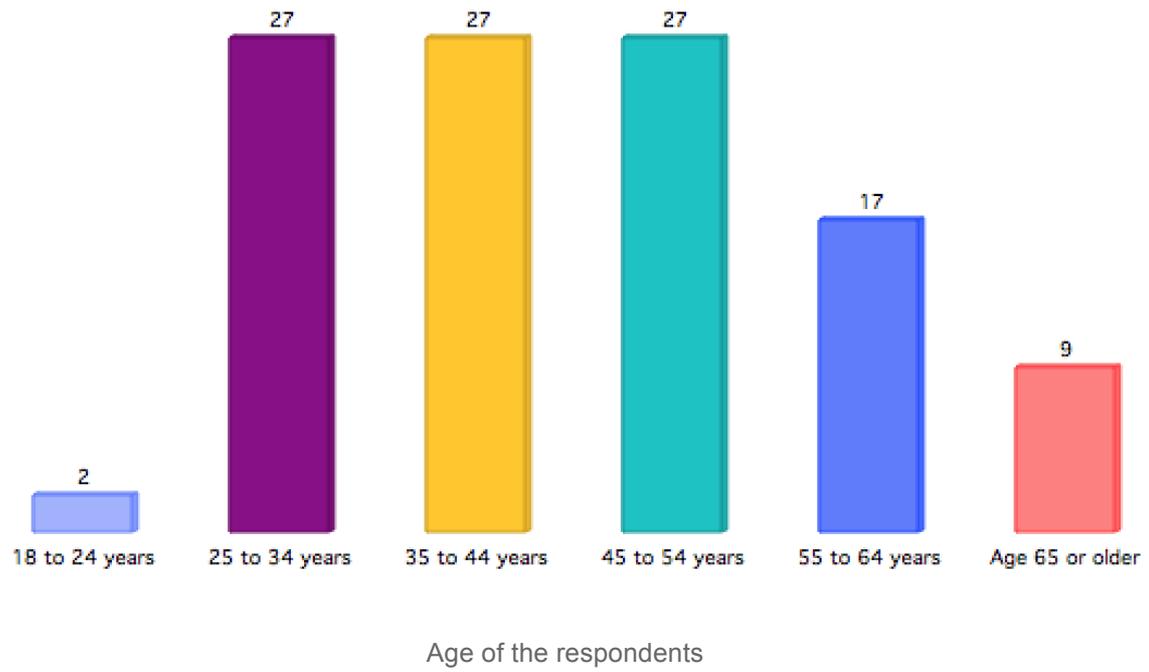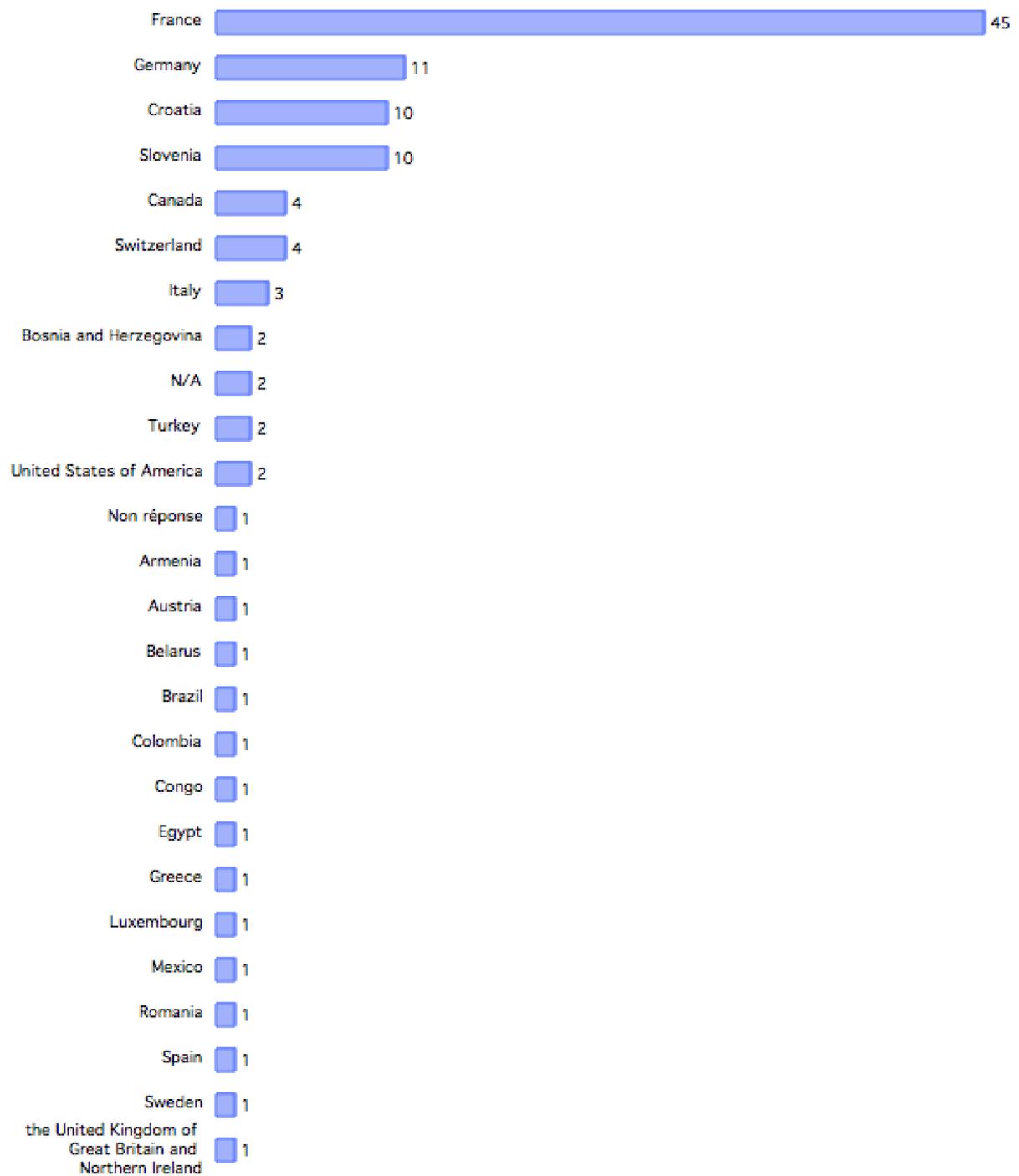
Country where main research takes place

Research domain

Current research position
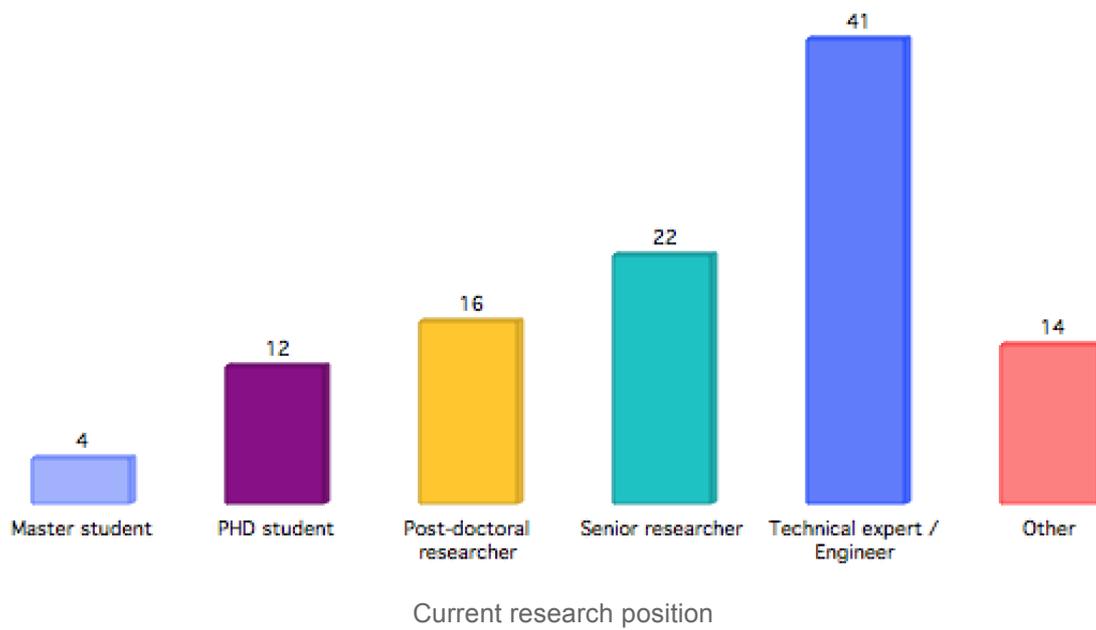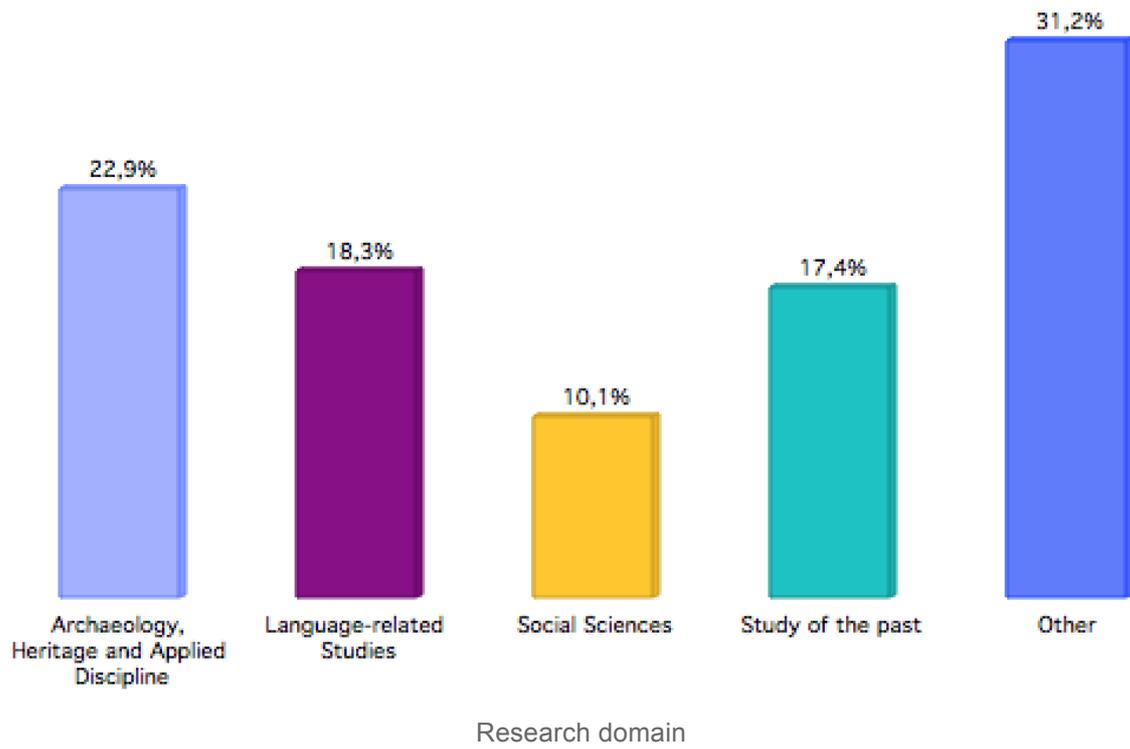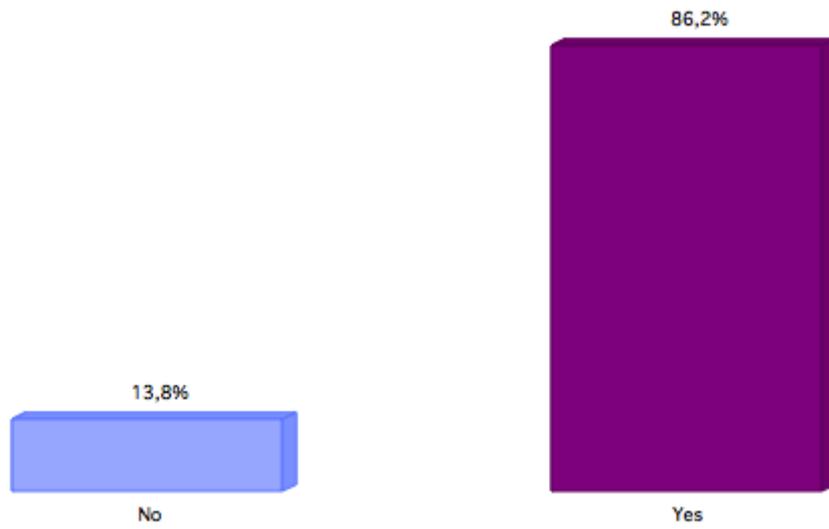
Are you affiliated to any research institution ?
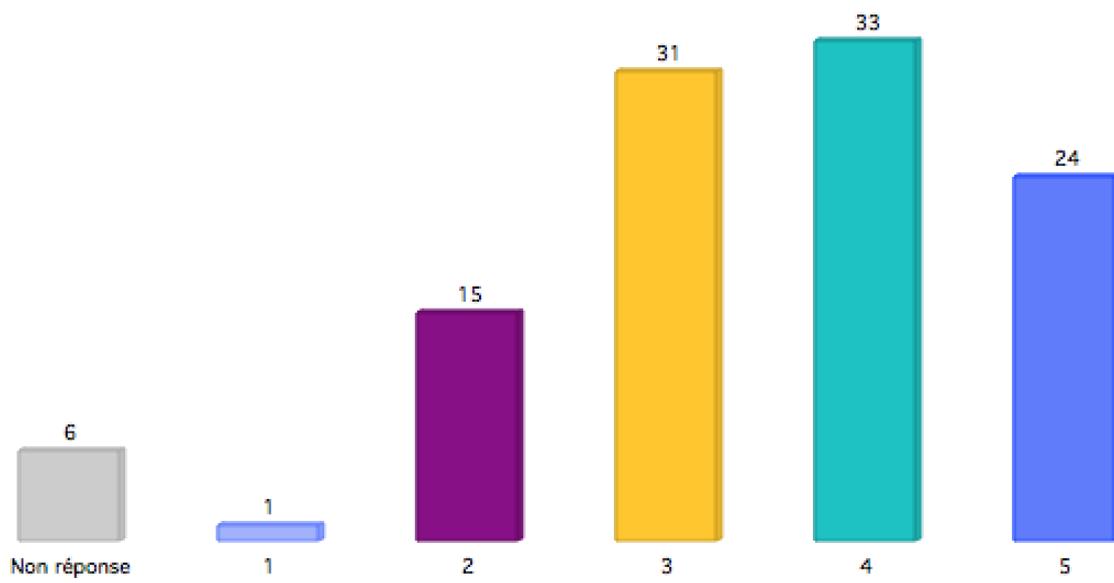
How would you rate your digital literacy on a scale from 1 to 5 ?
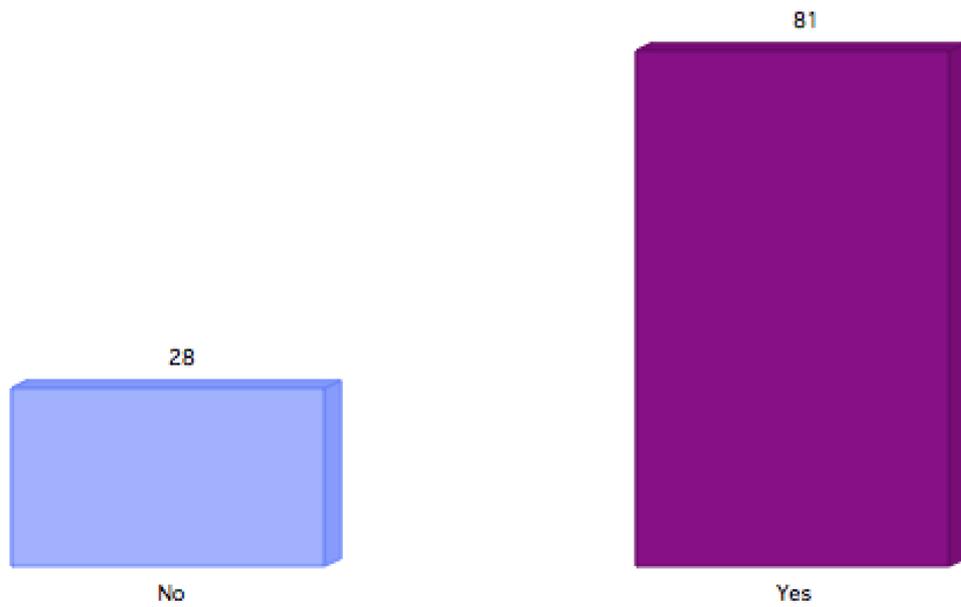
Have you ever needed to contact a CHI in order to
use its data for a research project ?
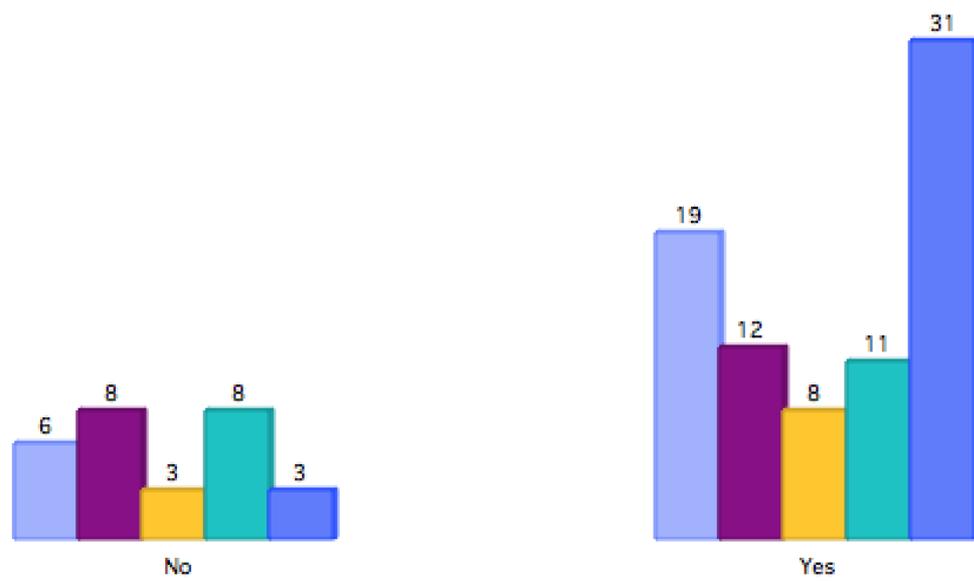
Archaeology, Heritage and Applied Discipline Language-related Studies Social Sciences
Study of the past Other

Cross-tabulated : research domain //
have you ever needed to contact a CHI in order to
use its data for a research project ?
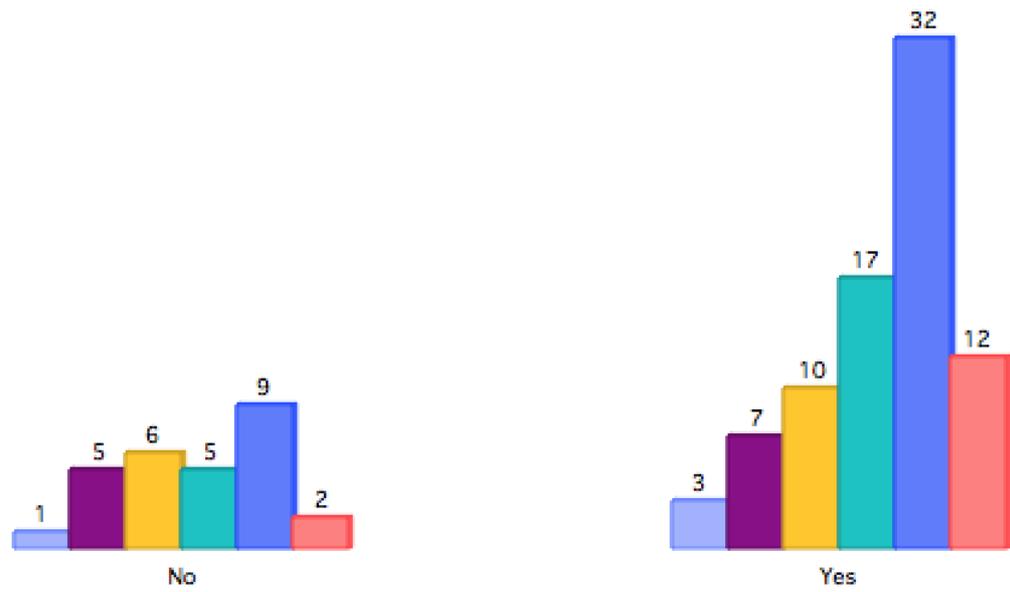
Master student   PHD student   Post-doctoral researcher   Senior researcher
Technical expert / Engineer   Other

Cross-tabulated : research position //

have you ever needed to contact a CHI in order to

use its data for a research project ?
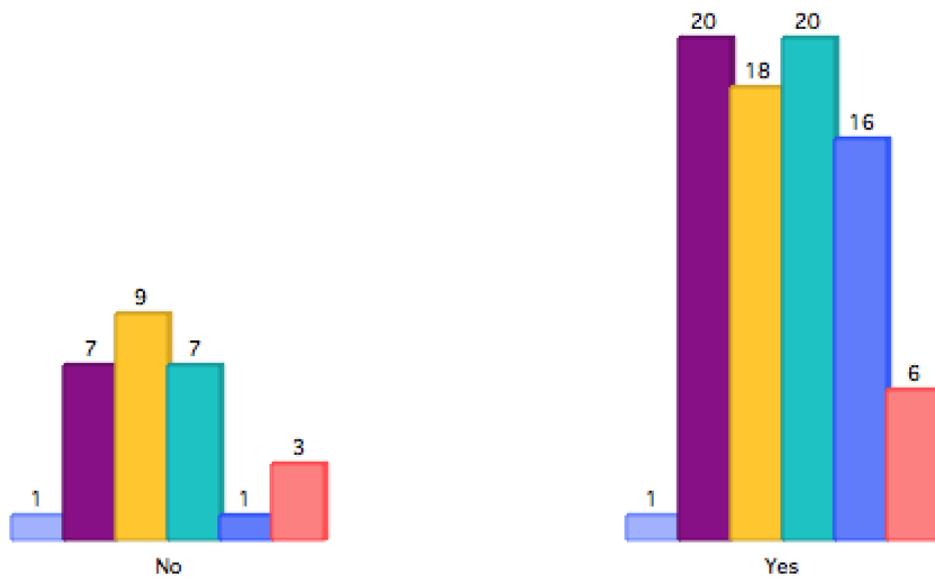
18 to 24 years   25 to 34 years   35 to 44 years   45 to 54 years   55 to 64 years   Age 65 or older

Cross-tabulated : age //

Have you ever needed to contact a CHI in order to

use its data for a research project ?
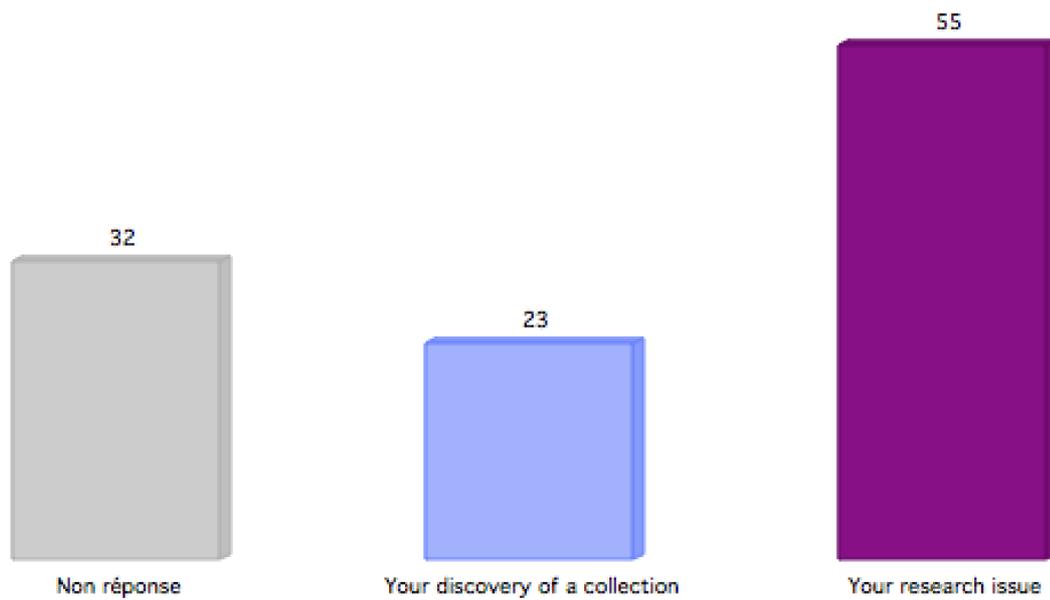
Was the first contact mainly initiated by… ?
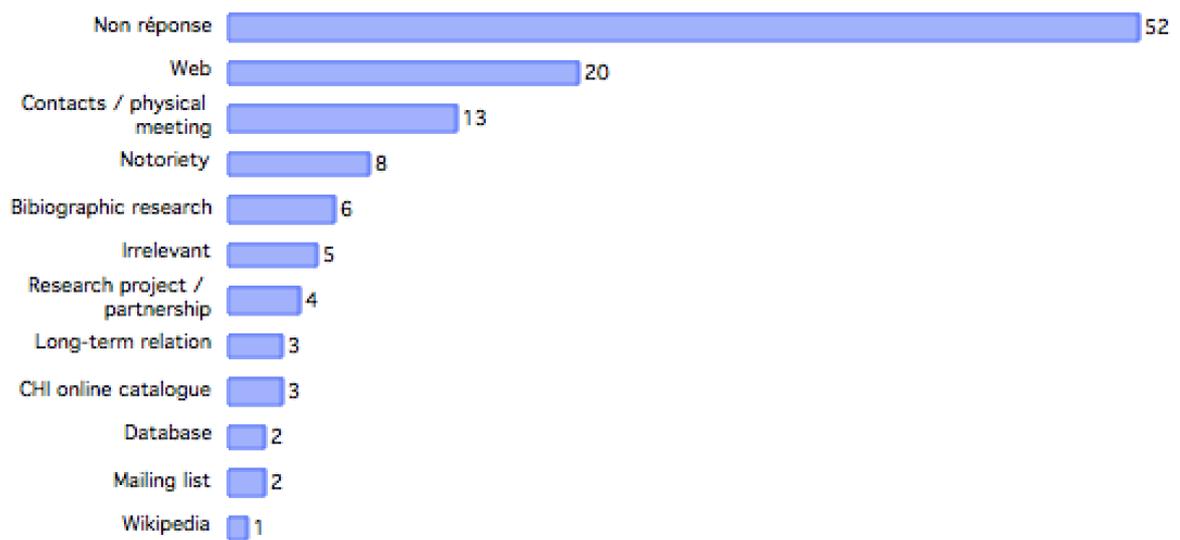
Free comment : Was the first contact mainly initiated by… ? (recoded)
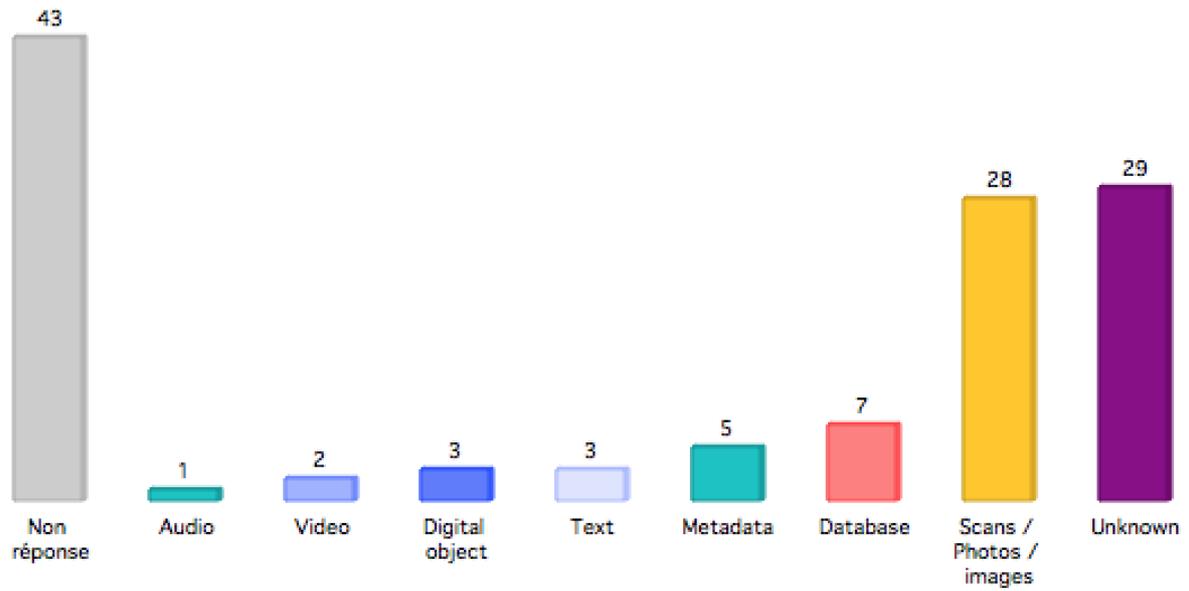
What type of material was involved in the transaction (recoded) ?
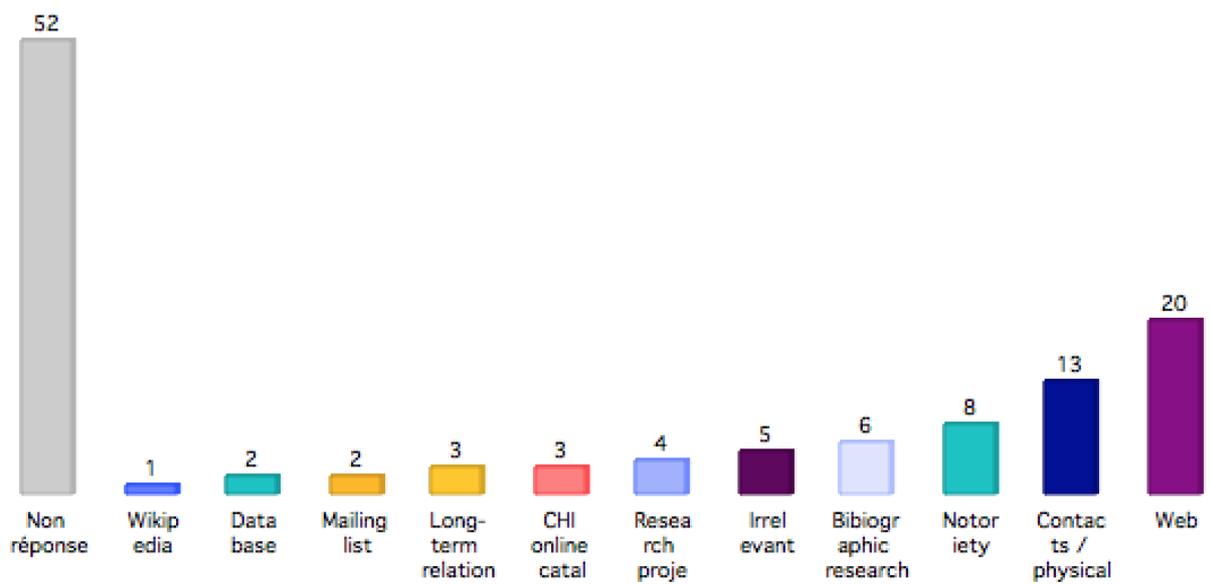
How did you find out about the CHI you worked with ? (recoded)
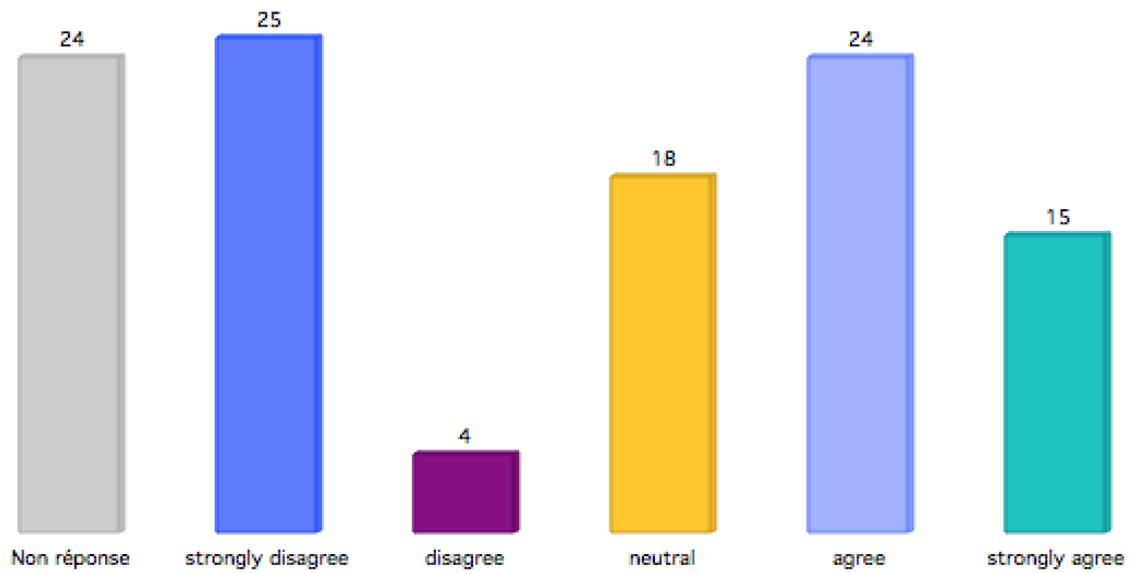
About the data reuse conditions of the institution concerned :
did your university or research institution played a role
in this transaction ?
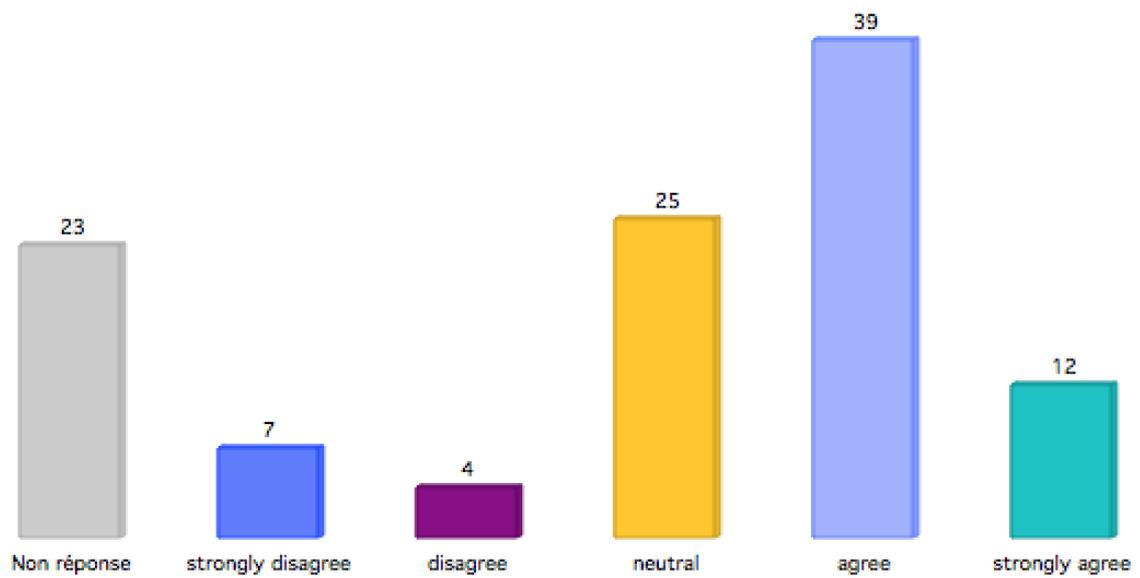
About the data reuse conditions of the institution concerned :
did the CHI guide you effectively in your request ?
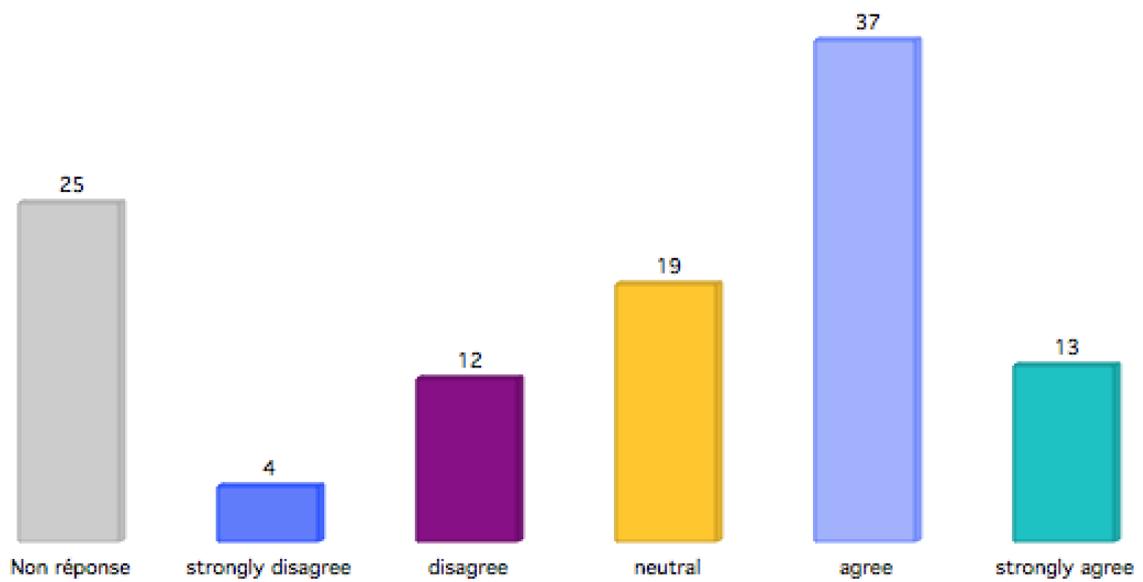
About the data reuse conditions of the institution concerned :
were the reuse conditions easy to understand ?
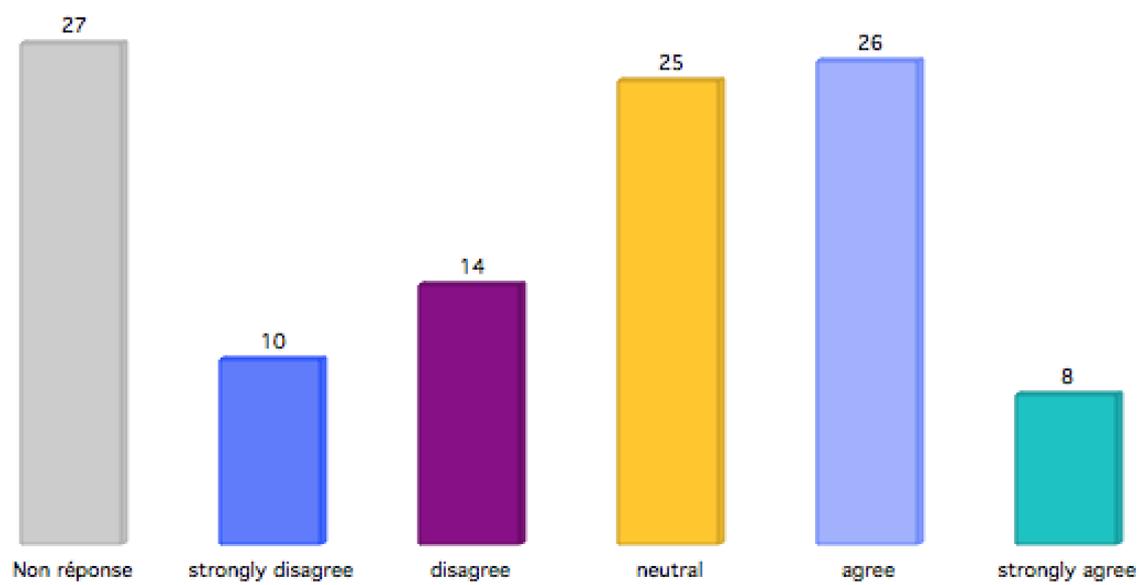
About the data reuse conditions of the institution concerned :
did you face obstacles in accessing the data ?
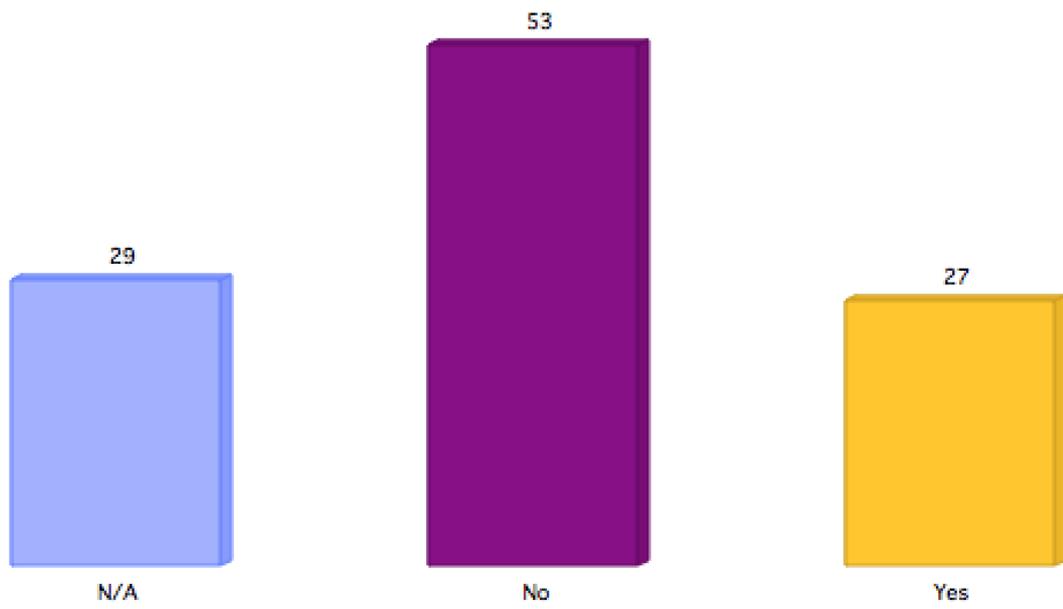
Did you sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the institution
or any type of cooperation agreement ?

		Effectifs	Fréquence
Non réponse		90	81,8 %
Reuse & citation disclaimer		4	3,6 %
CHI requirement (no details)		3	2,7 %
Irrelevant		3	2,7 %
unclassifiable		2	1,8 %
Copyright		2	1,8 %
Publishing prescription		2	1,8 %
Personal use only		1	0,9 %
Data sharing restriction		1	0,9 %
Data security		1	0,9 %
No commercial use		1	0,9 %
Total		110	100,0 %

Reason for signing the Memorandum[15] (recoded)
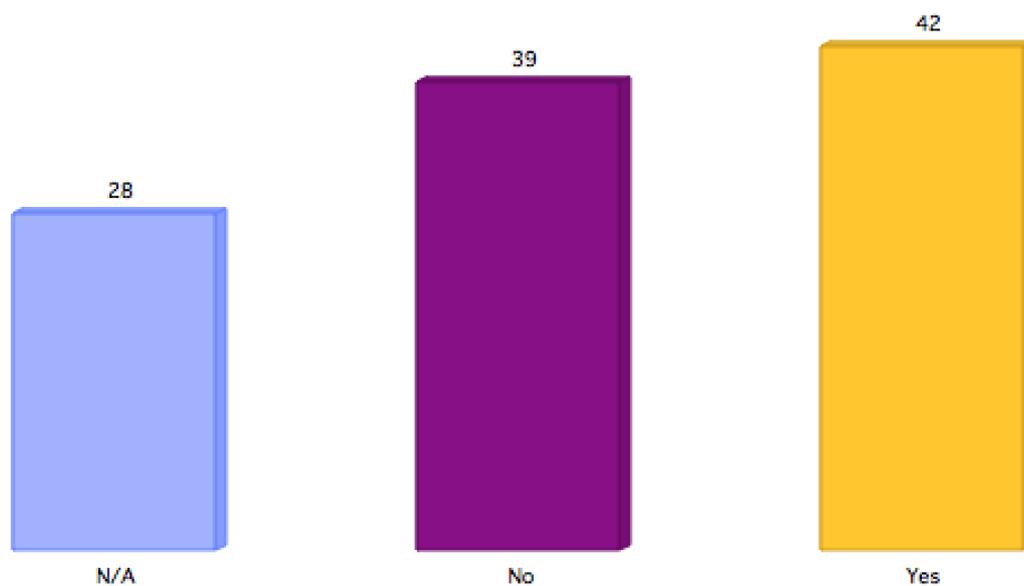
Did you discuss the means of disseminating your research results
with the institution ?

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[15] The purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding is to clearly state the reuse conditions of the data provided and could be a valuable feature of the online platform : to be able to read and sign all the conditions of an institution directly online.
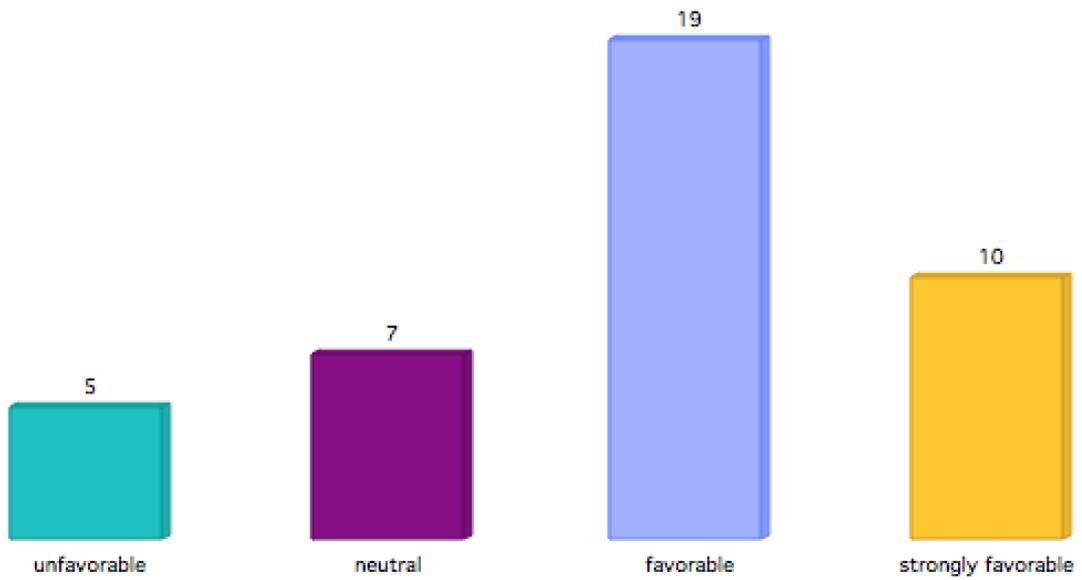
If so, how did the institution feel about enriching their (meta)data
based on your work ?
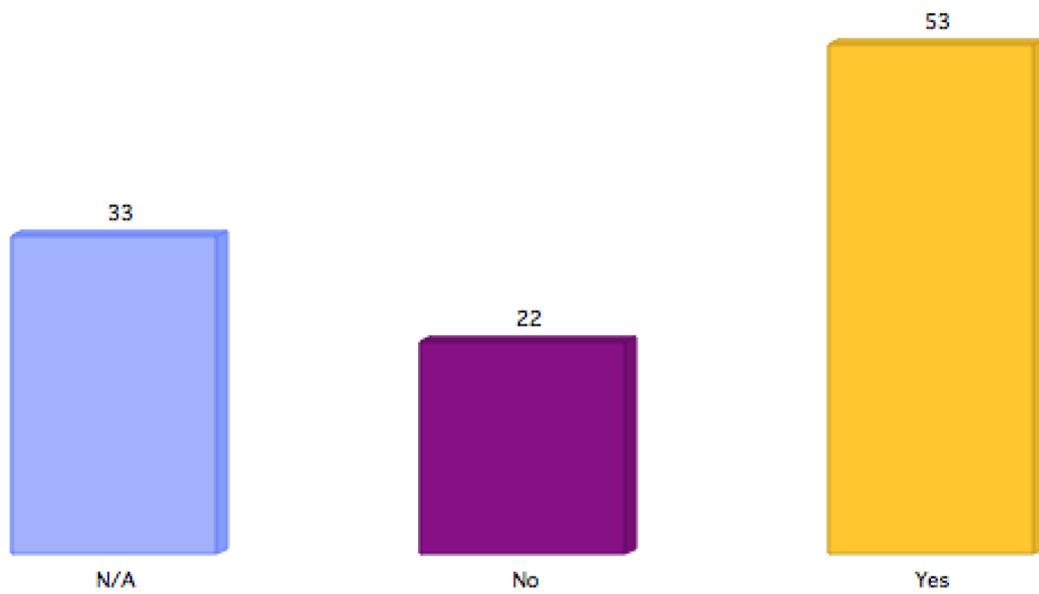
Once your initial work on the data was complete, did you wish
to keep working on these data for another project ?

61

28

18

N/A

No

Yes
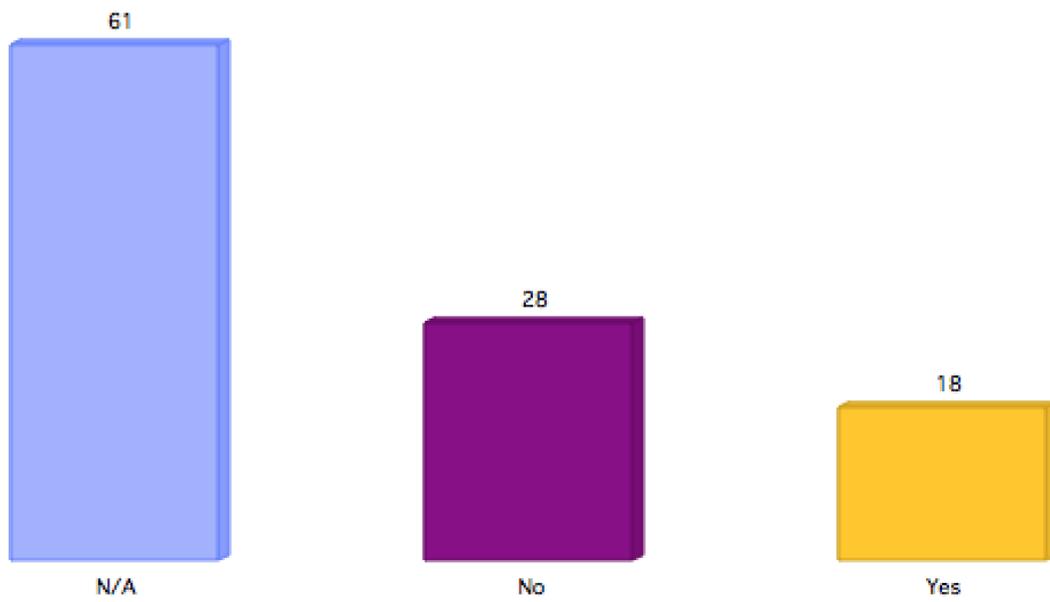
Did you contact the institution anew ?

89

14

3

N/A

No

Yes

Had the conditions of use/reuse changed ?
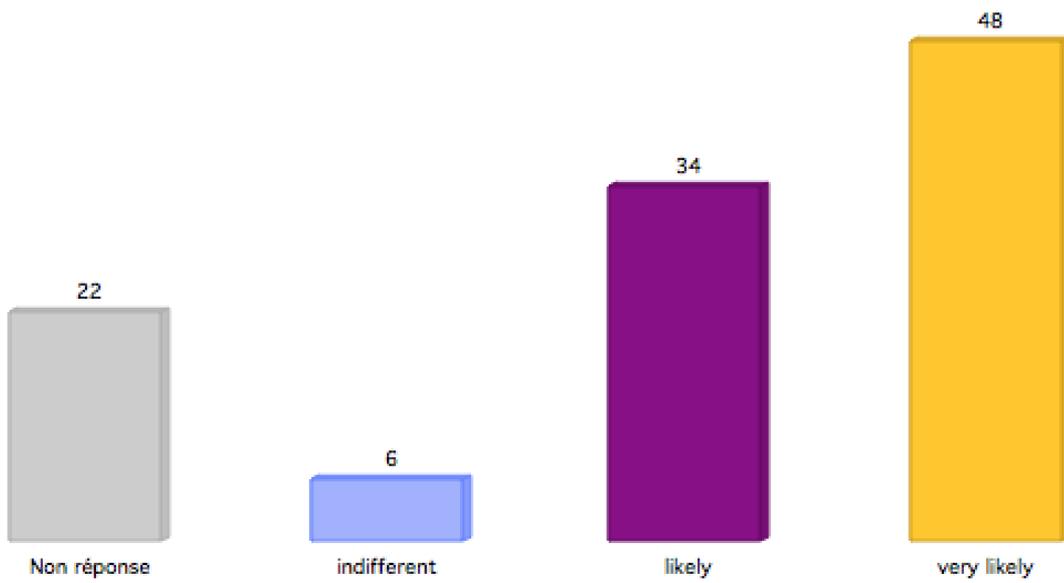
Are you more likely to work (or work again)...
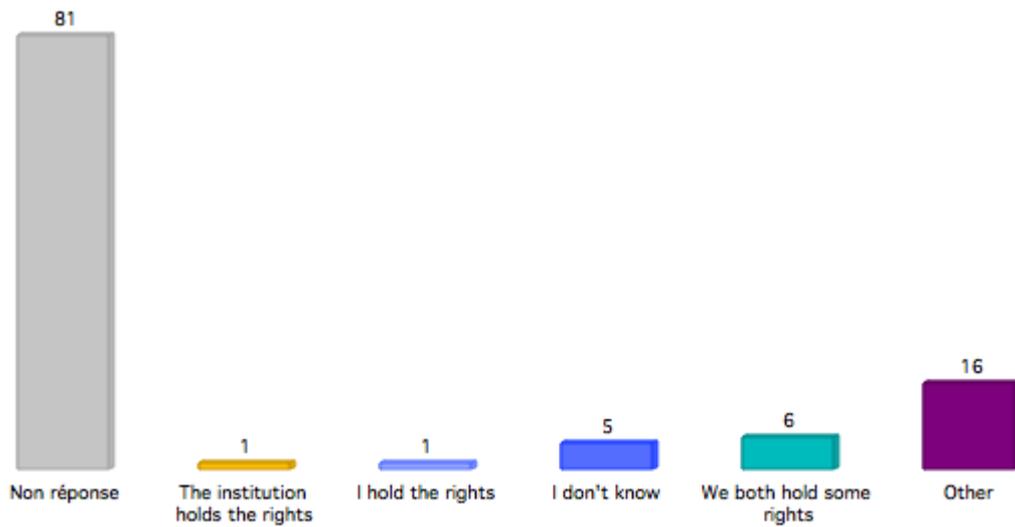with an institution whose conditions of data access are clearly stated ?
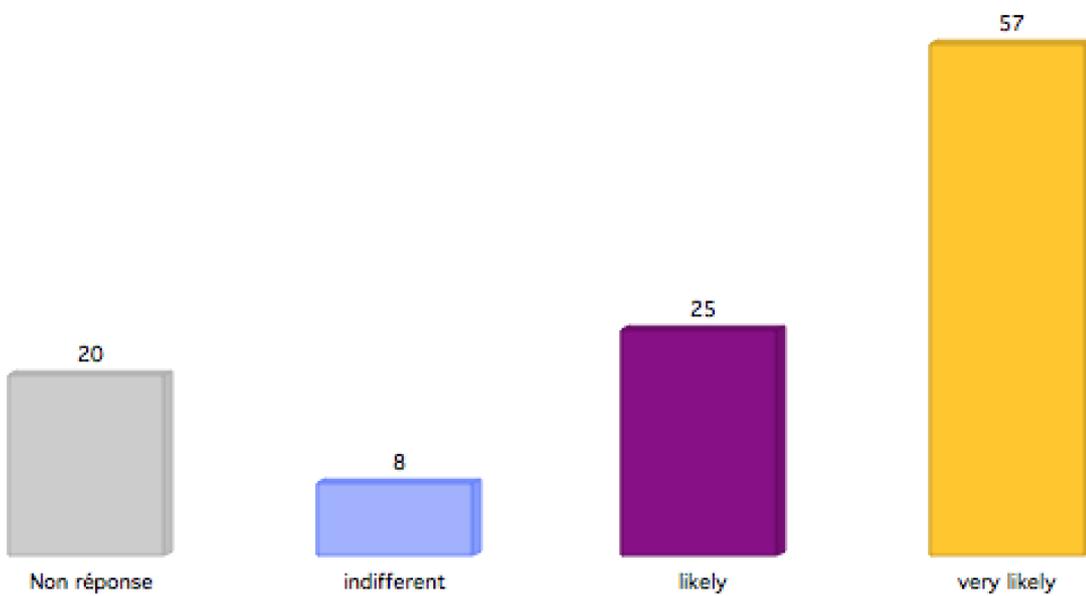
Are you more likely to work (or work again)...
with an institution that has an explicit open science strategy ?
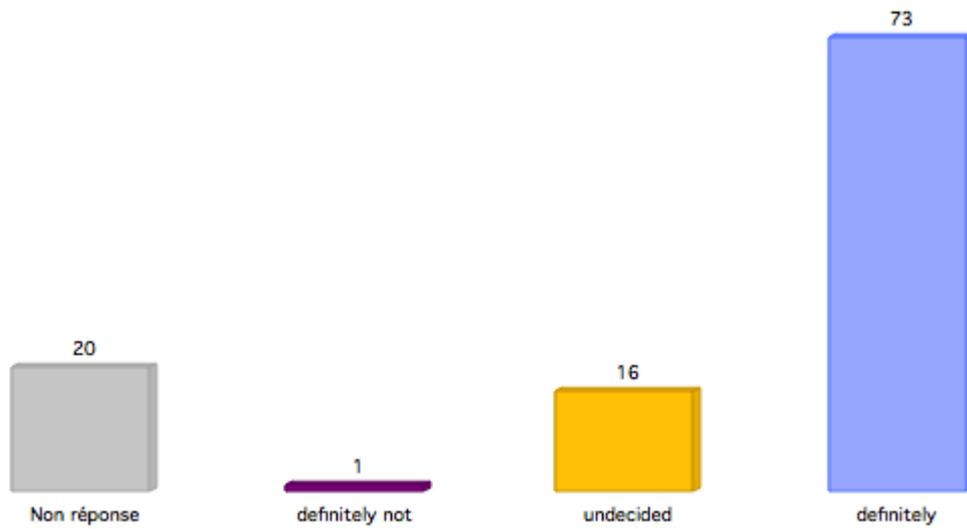
73

20

1

16

Non réponse   definitely not   undecided   definitely

Are you willing to share your research results with the institution
that gave you access to their data ?

Non réponse	59
CC-BY or alike	16
CC-0 or alike	9
CC or other free license	5
Irrevelant	5
Open access	5
Fee / Autorship right / Copyright	4
CC-BY-ND-NC	1
CC-NC-SA	1
CC-ND	1
Dataset tracability	1
Ethics	1
MoU	1
NC	1
Share alike	1
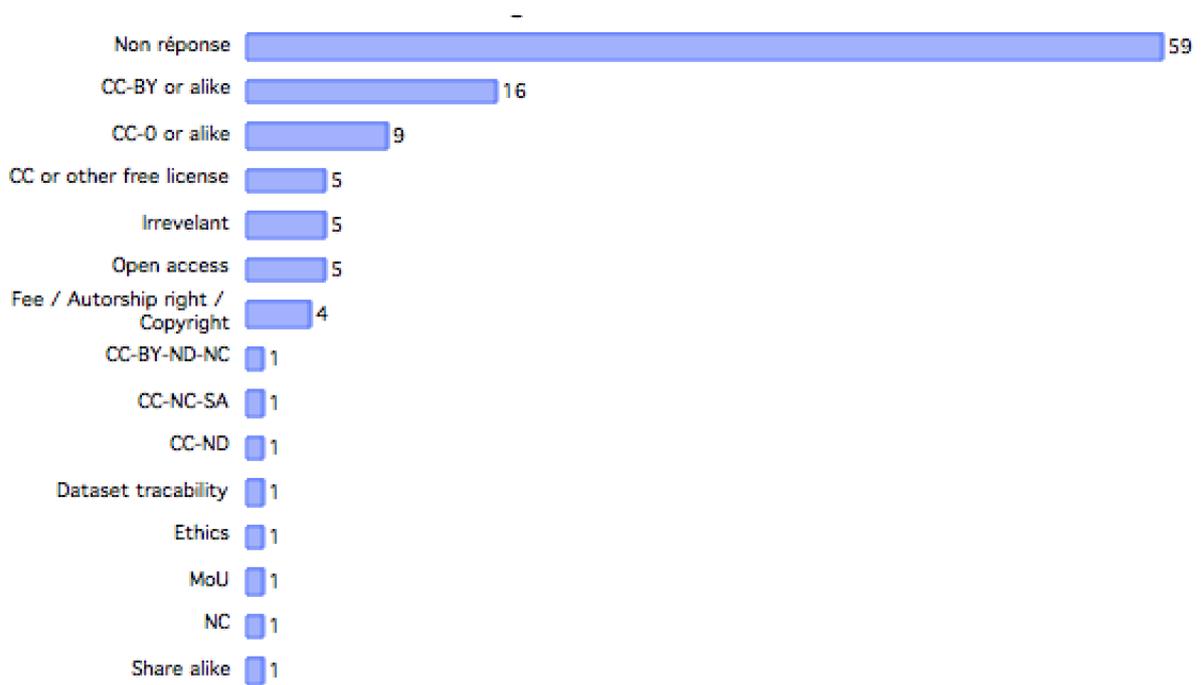
If so, under what conditions ? (recoded)

What do you think is the legal status of the facsimile or digital
surrogates you produced on the basis of the physical
collections of the institution ?
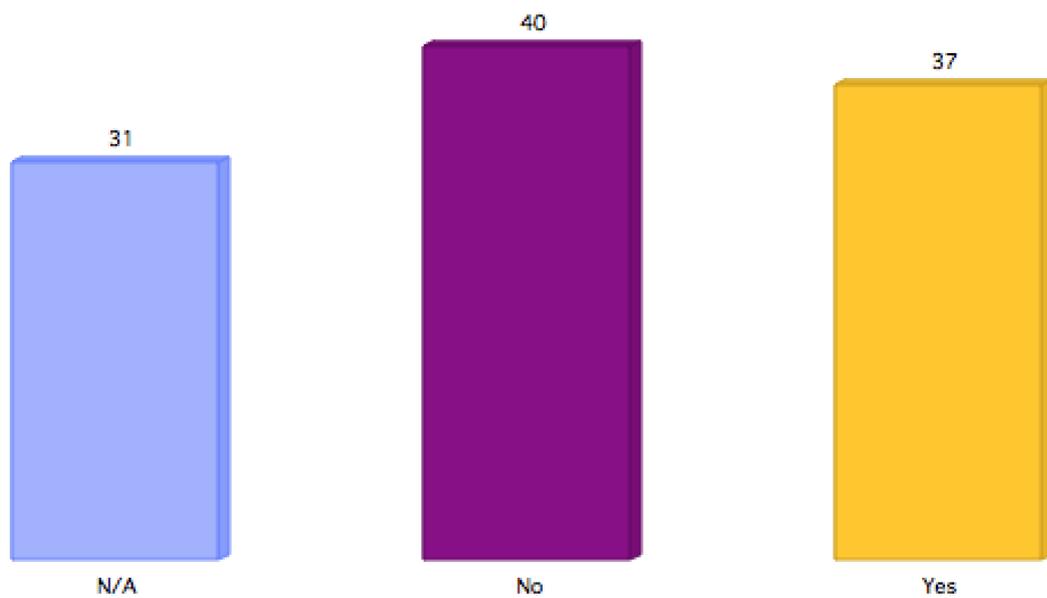
Are you familiar with the different types of licenses available
for the publication of your research results and data ?

CC-BY	13
CC	13
CC-0	5
Open access	2
CC-NC-SA	1
Common Reciprocity License	1
CC-ND	1
GPL	1
CC-BY-SA	1
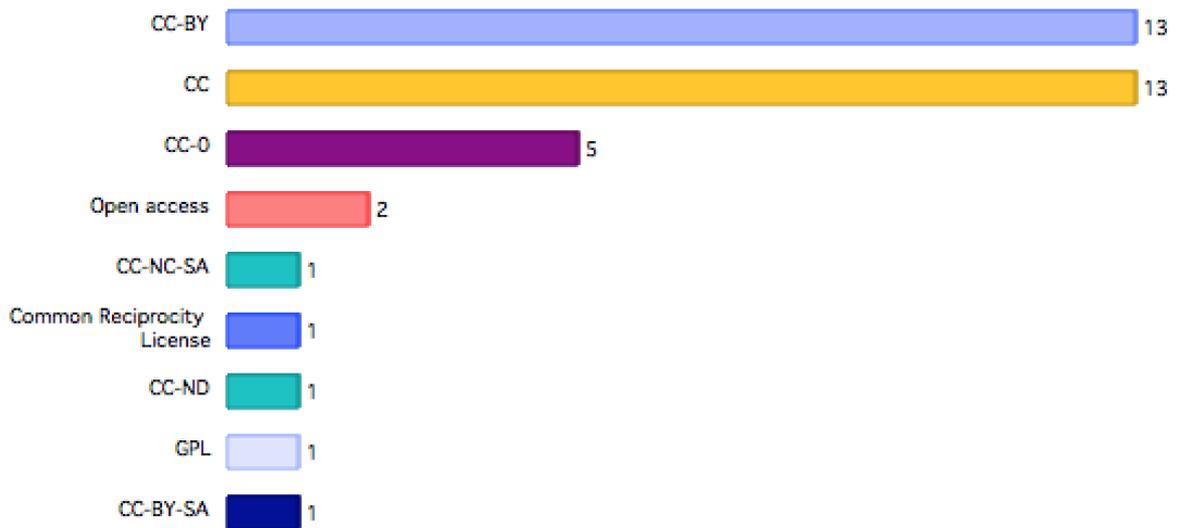
Which one(s) do you favor and why ?

hardly ever	sometimes	occasionally	frequently	almost always
14	13	20	18	14
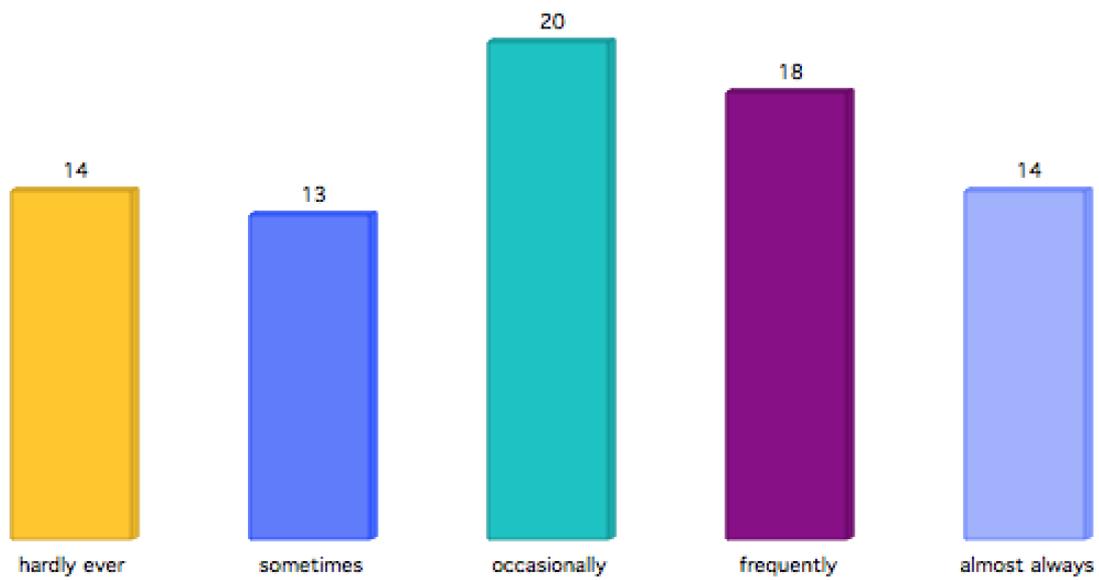
How often do you transform the data provided by the institution ?
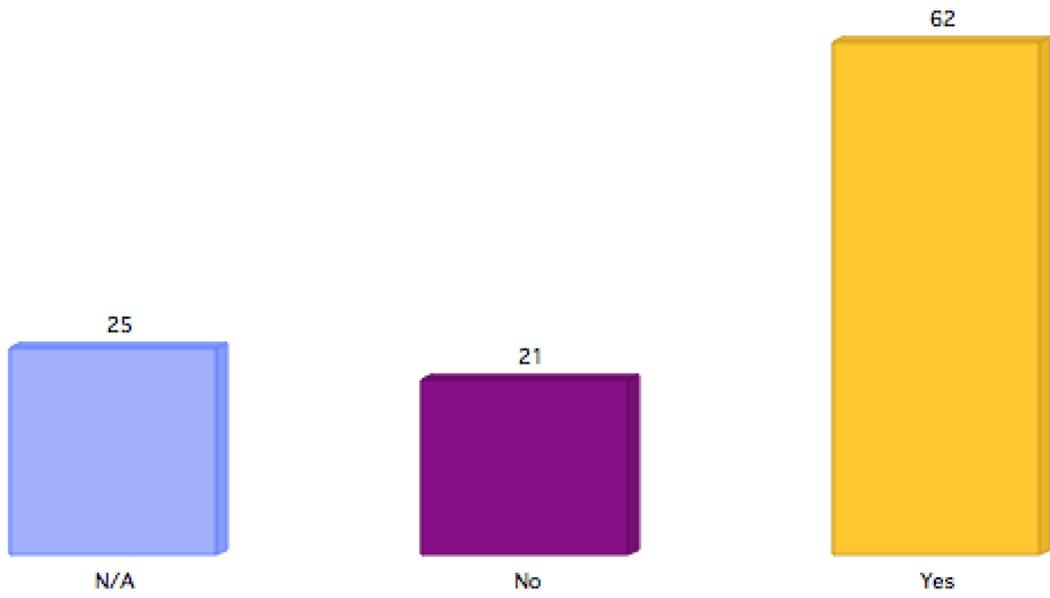
Is data format an important issue for you ?
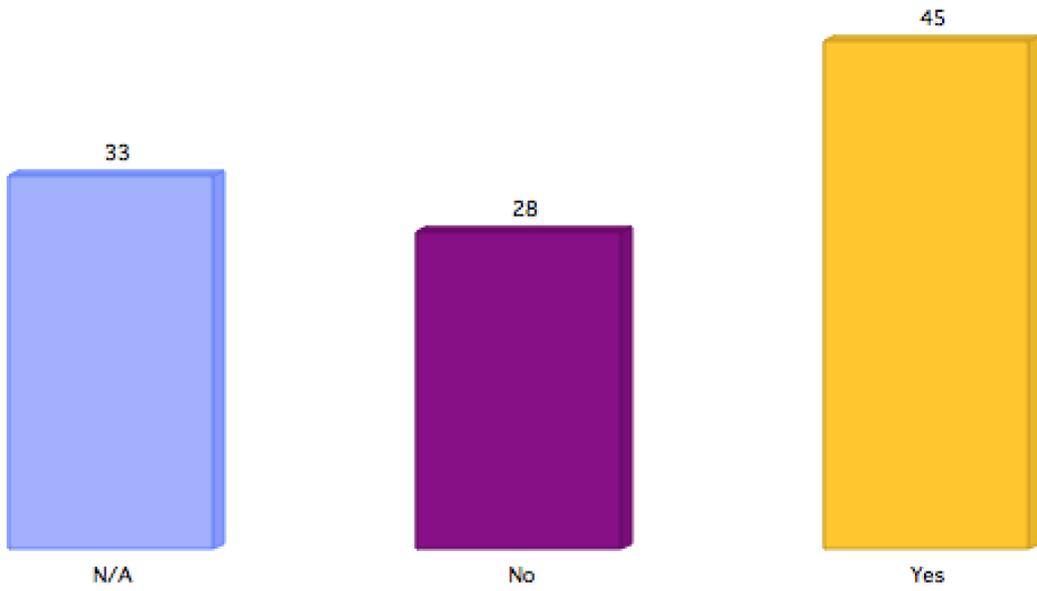
Does the CHI prescribe or recommend you a way to cite them in your publications ?

94

8

2

N/A

No

Yes

Usually, how do you cite the institutions where your primary sources come from :
the way your research institution wants you to ?

84

8

12

N/A

No

Yes
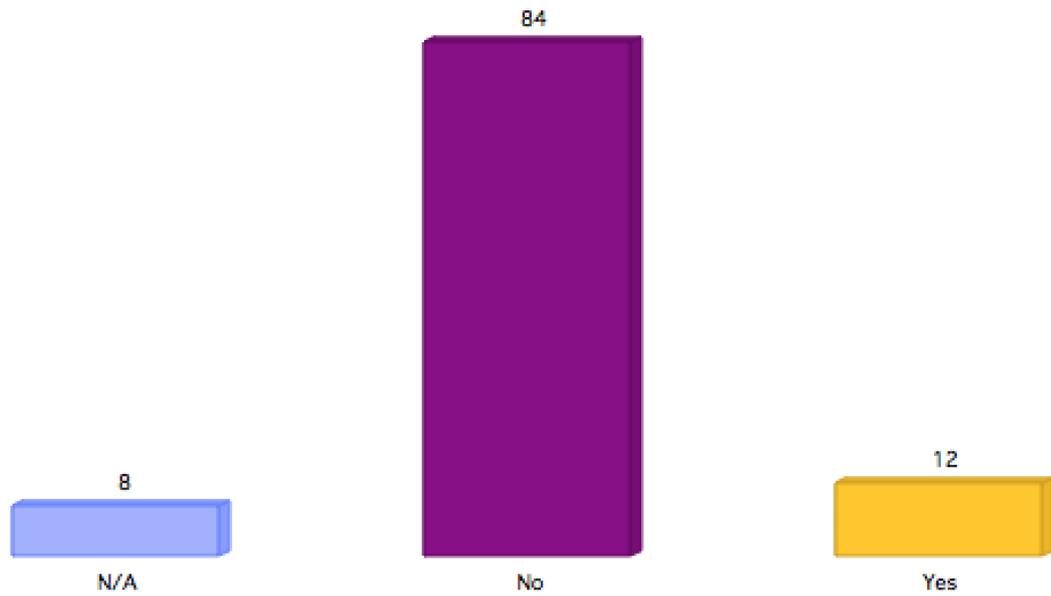
Usually, how do you cite the institutions where your primary sources come from :
the way the CHI recommends you to ?
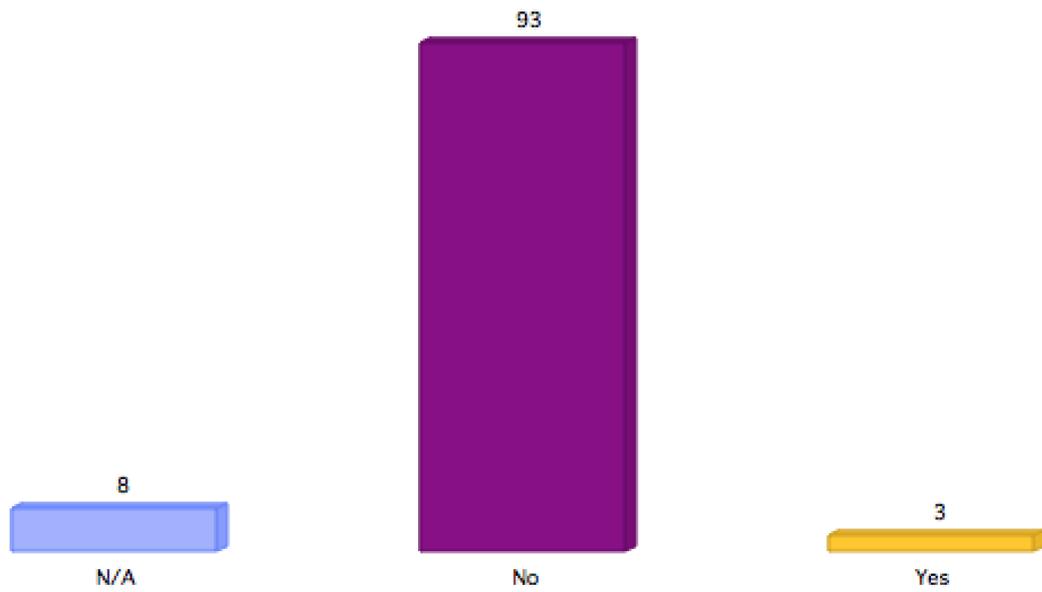
Usually, how do you cite the institutions where your primary sources come from :
the way your publisher recommends you to ?
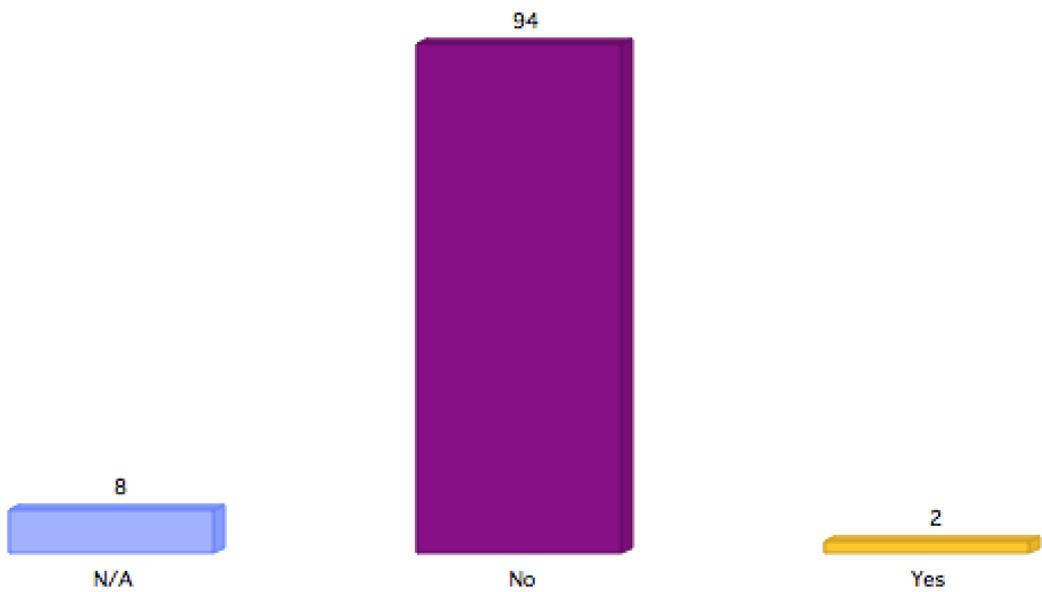
Usually, how do you cite the institutions where your primary sources come from :
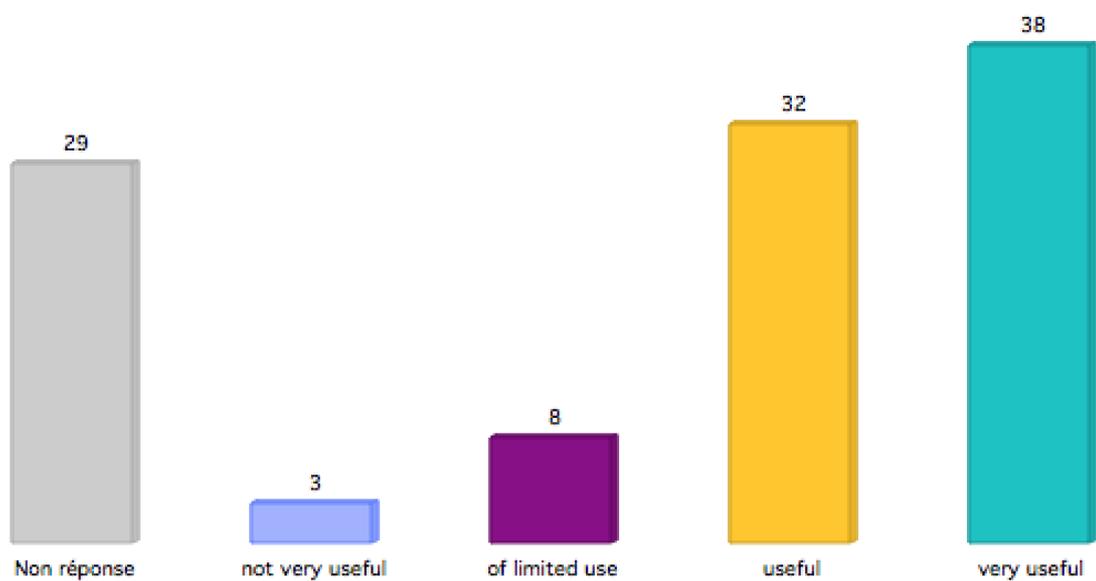no particular guidelines ?
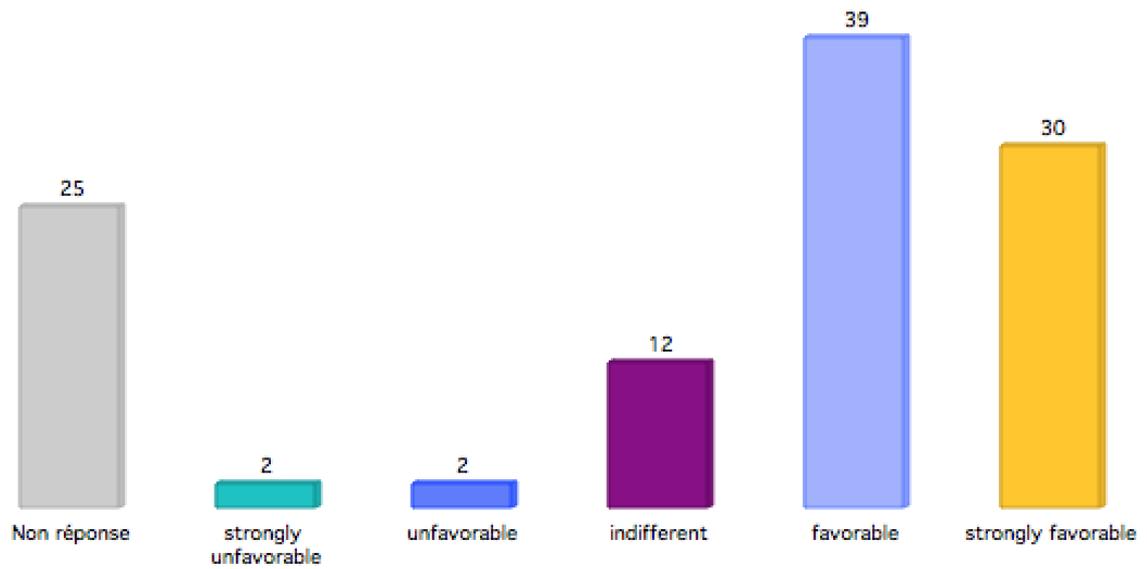
Would you like to be kept informed of policy development within the institutions :
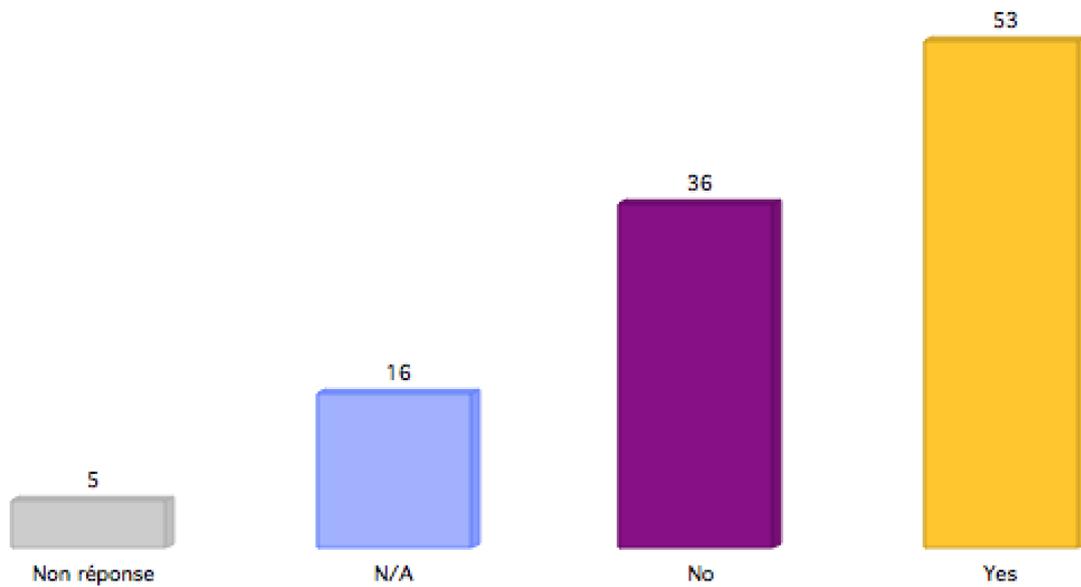
you are interested in ?
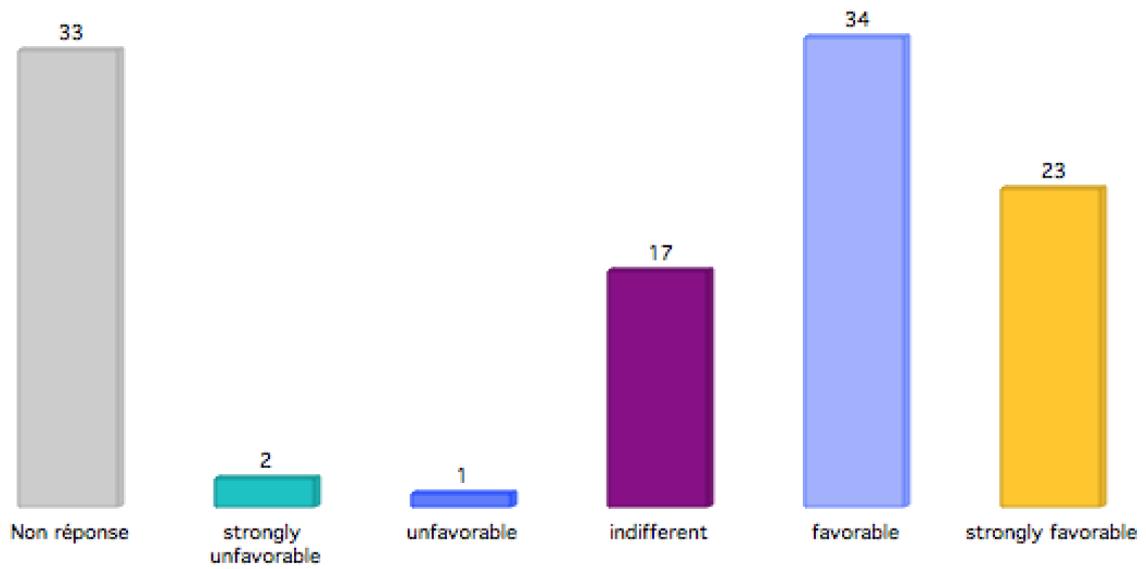
Would you like to be kept informed of policy development within the institutions :

you worked with before ?

28	3	1	14	35	29
Non réponse	strongly unfavorable	unfavorable	indifferent	favorable	strongly favorable
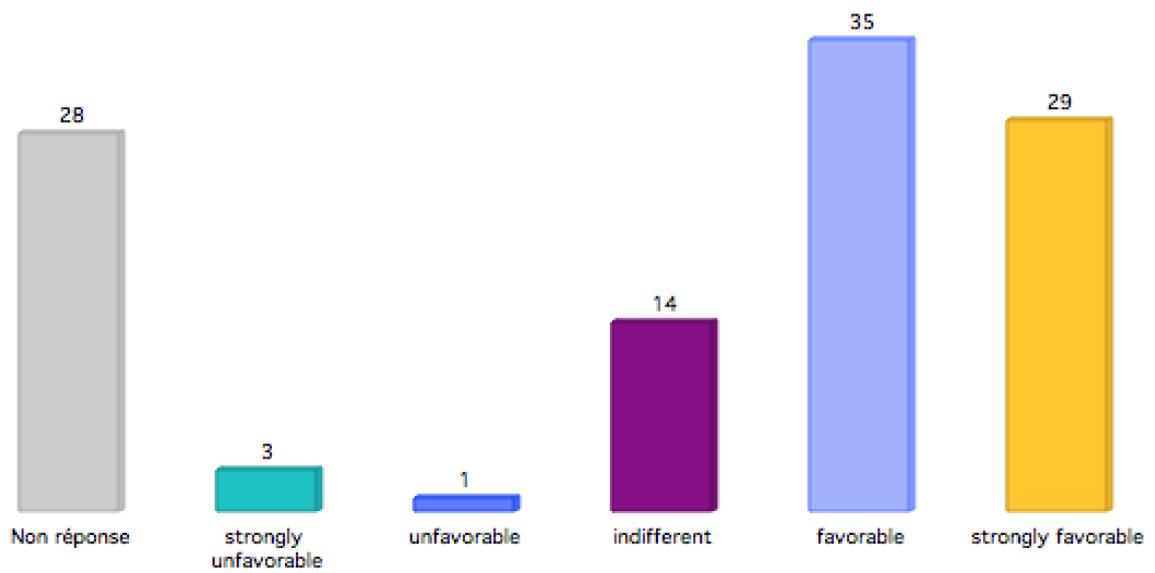
Would you like to be kept informed of policy development within the institutions :
you would like to work with in the future, especially regarding their data reuse policy ?
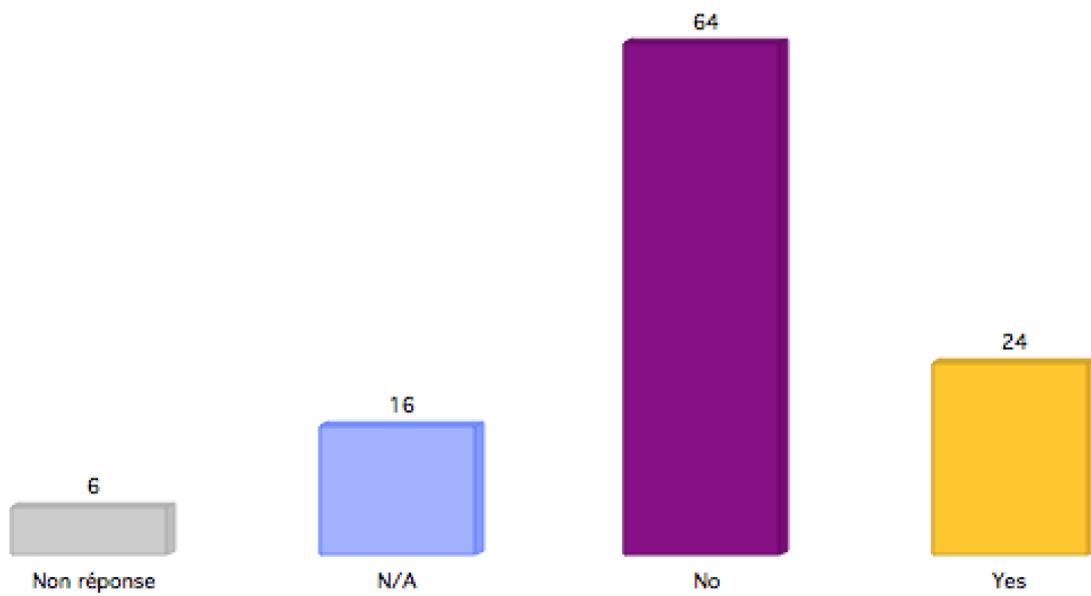

29	3	8	32	38
Non réponse	not very useful	of limited use	useful	very useful

How do you feel about interacting online
with the institutions about reuse conditions ?

53
36
16
5

Non réponse   N/A   No   Yes

Do you have online profiles for your scholarly activities :
Academia ?

74
16
5
15

Non réponse   N/A   No   Yes
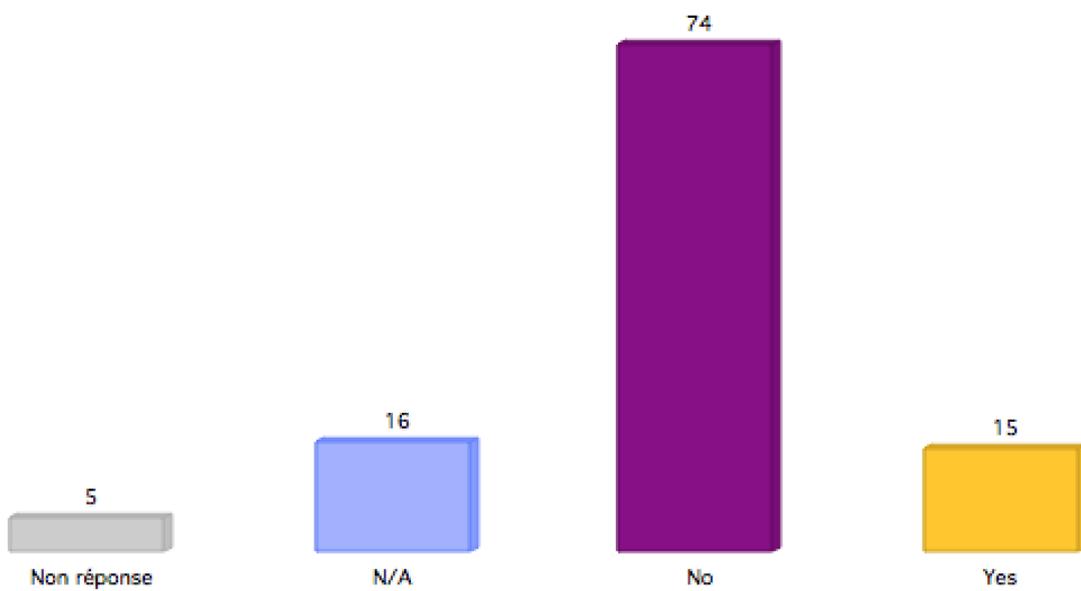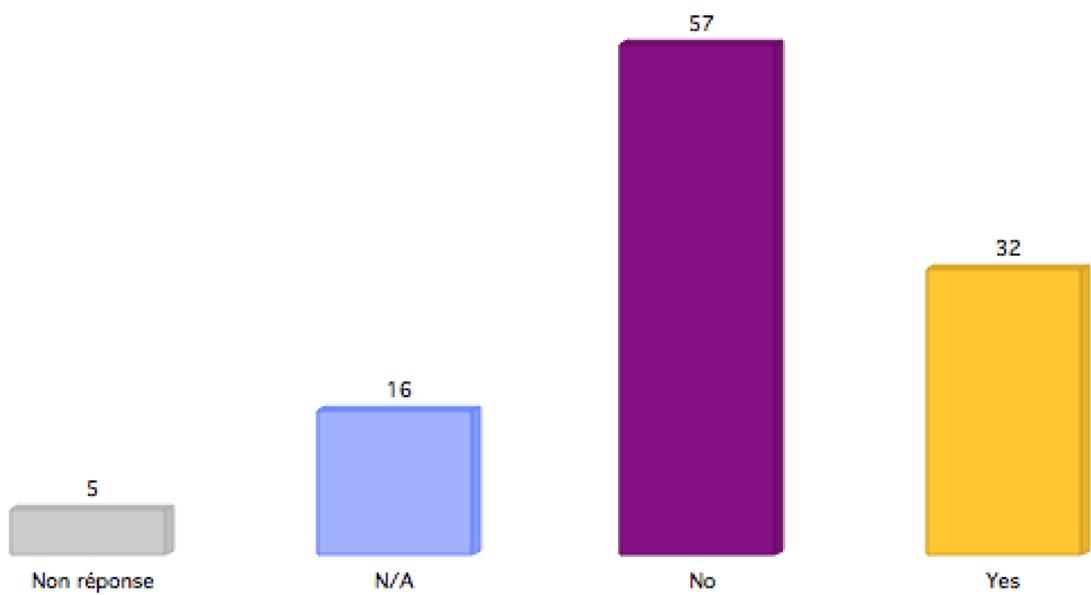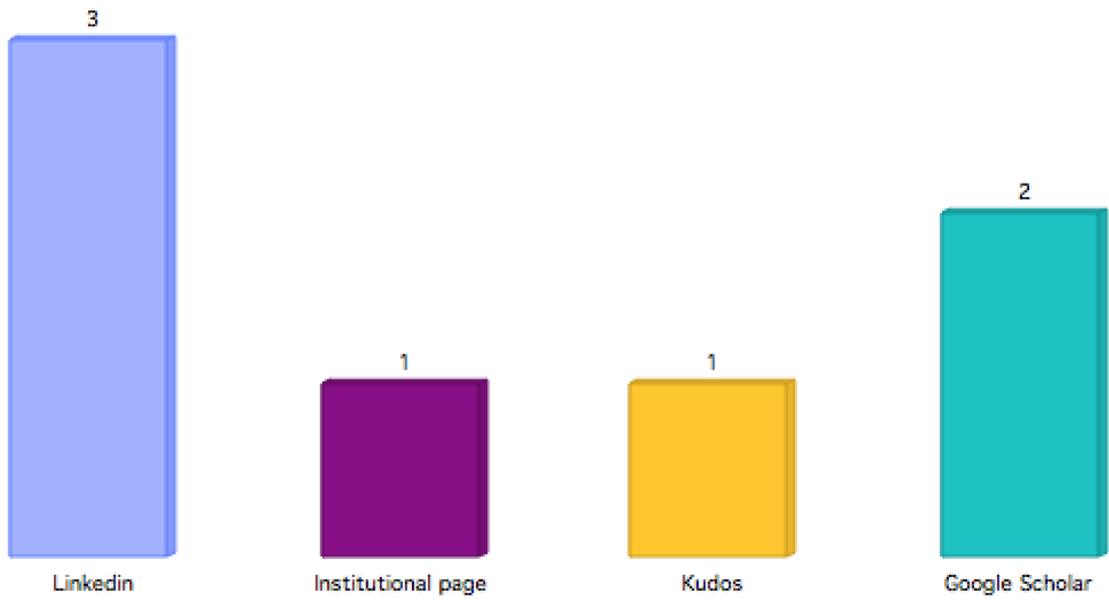
Do you have online profiles for your scholarly activities :
Orcid ?

Do you have online profiles for your scholarly activities :
HAL ?

Do you have online profiles for your scholarly activities :
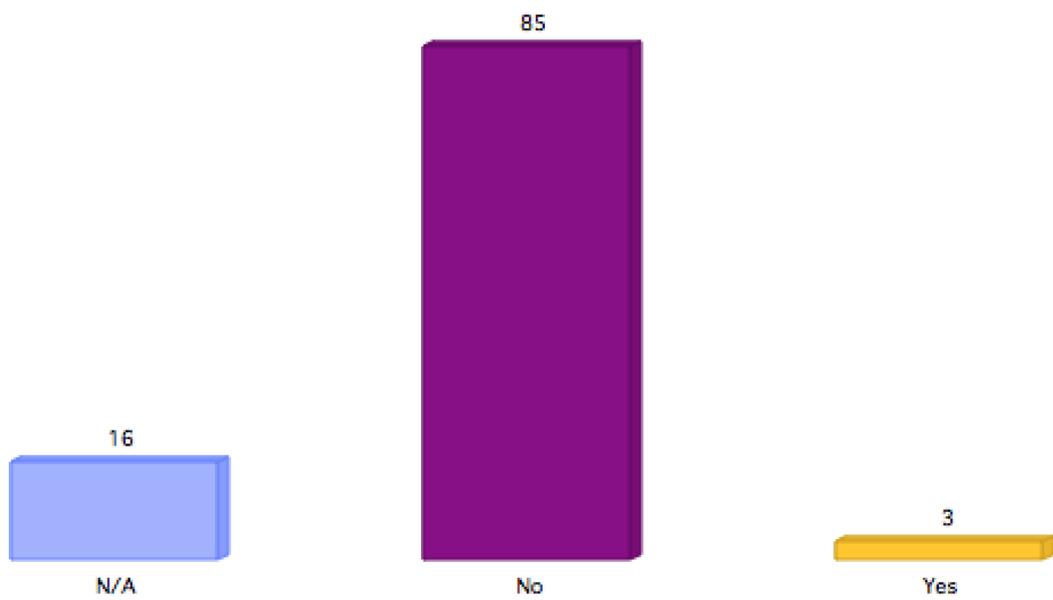Research Gate ?

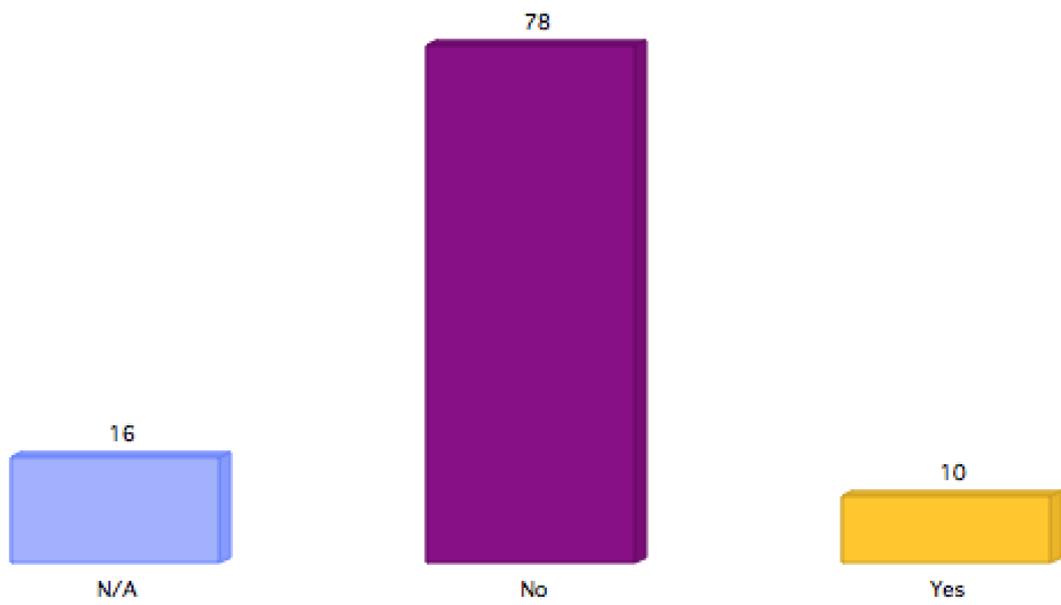Do you have online profiles for your scholarly activities : other ?

Are you willing to disclose which institutions you use/reuse the data from ?
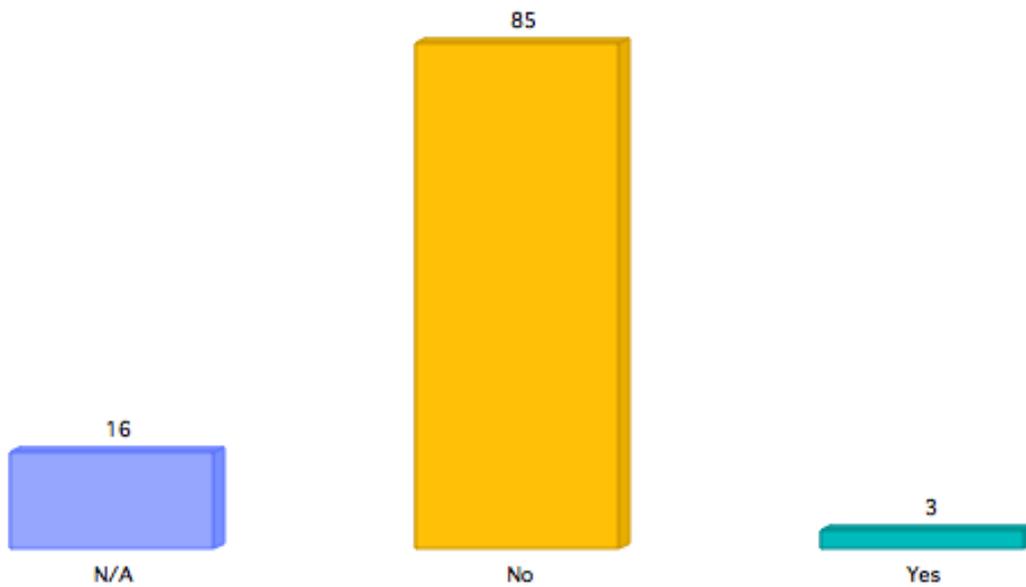
Are you willing to disclose the reuse conditions
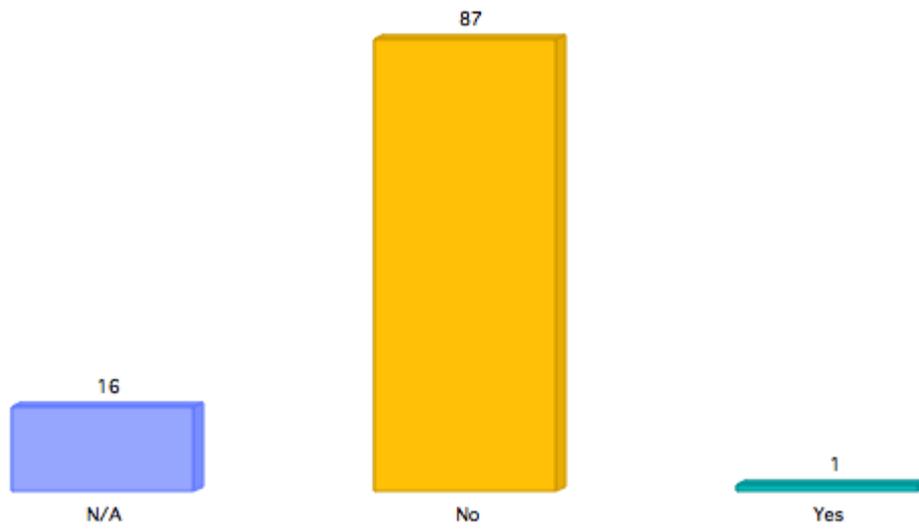of your own research data ?

What information about you as a scholar would you not like to be visible :
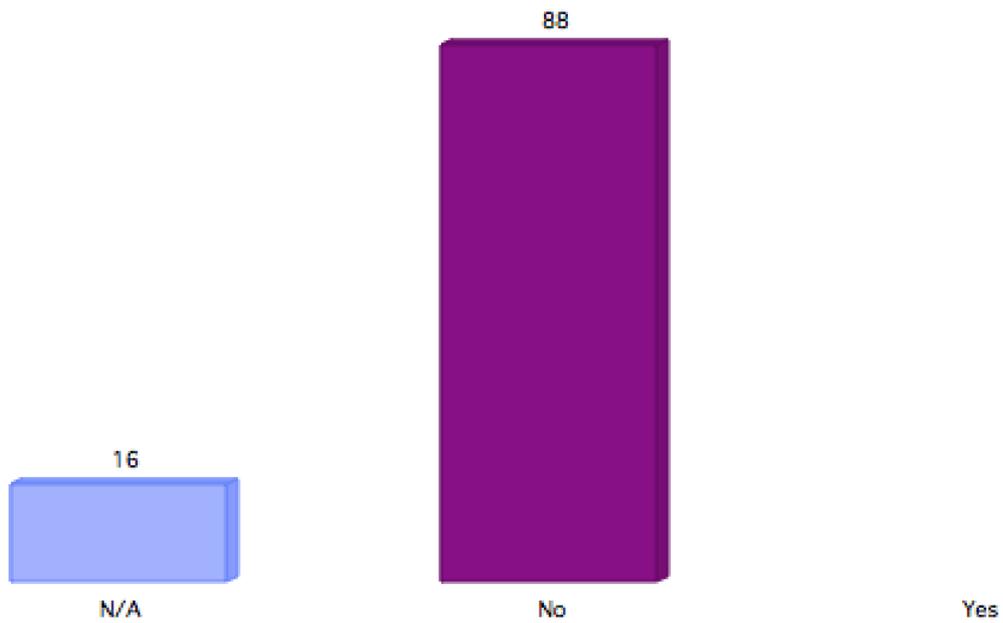your research topics or interests ?

What information about you as a scholar would you not like to be visible :
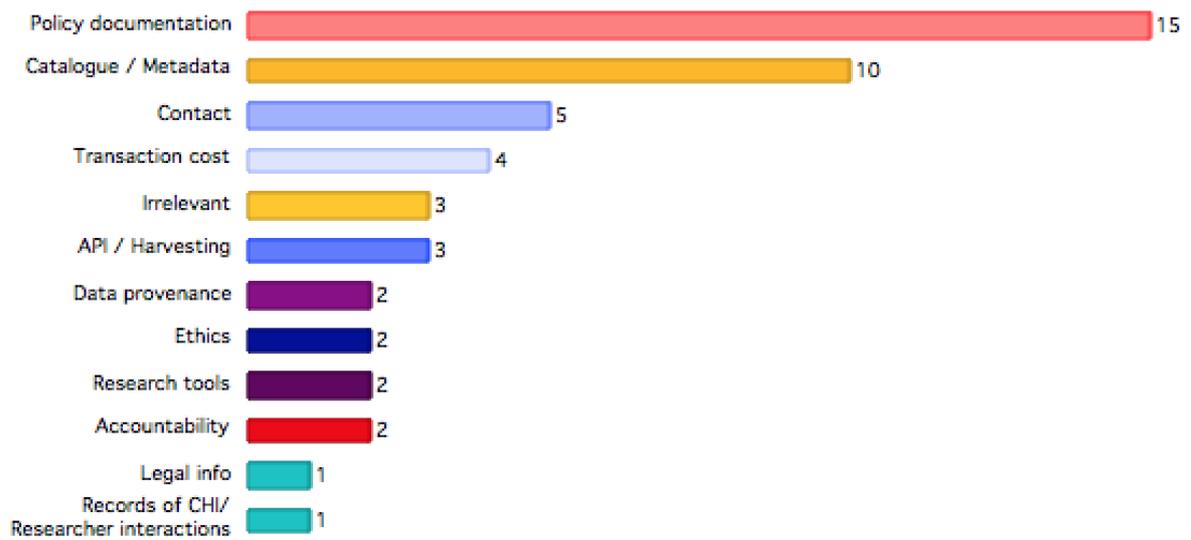unpublished material you work on (primary data) ?

What information about you as a scholar would you not like to be visible :
unpublished results (secondary data such as prepublications / preprint deposits) ?

87

16

1

N/A   No   Yes

What information about you as a scholar would you not like to be visible :
your cooperation partners ?

88

16

N/A   No   Yes

What information about you as a scholar would you not like to be visible :
your location ?

Policy documentation	15
Catalogue / Metadata	10
Contact	5
Transaction cost	4
Irrelevant	3
API / Harvesting	3
Data provenance	2
Ethics	2
Research tools	2
Accountability	2
Legal info	1
Records of CHI/ Researcher interactions	1

What key information would you want to consult online regarding an institution you are likely to interact with ? (recoded)