

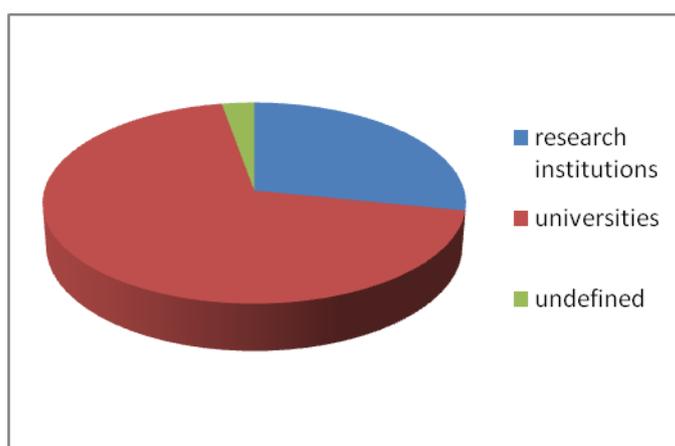
What do Italian Researchers think about Open Research Data?

Last year, from August to December 2012, the Italian National Open Access Desk conducted a survey to find out what researchers and all the people involved with research in universities and research centres were doing with reference to research data archiving, management and access policies. The aim was to produce an overview of the state of the art of research data production, management and sharing in Italy, and to investigate researchers opinions and attitudes towards a potential National infrastructure for data storage, curation and preservation. The survey addressed more than 1240 directors of research departments in universities and research institutions, who were then requested to disseminate the survey among their researchers.

The survey structure was inspired by a similar research carried out in 2008 in UK, published in ARIADNE¹, it is divided in three sections:

1. containing 14 questions about production, management and access to research data. This section aimed at understanding researchers behavior towards data production and management in their discipline; their opinion about other researchers accessing their data; their behavior towards accessing to third-party data (governmental, industry, etc.); and their attitudes towards sharing or not their data.
2. Containing 2 questions about data formats and storage. This section intends to investigate on researchers' production of data, usage of data formats used and storage media adoptions/preferences.
3. containing 2 questions about National infrastructure for research data management and preservation. The last section was devoted to explore researchers opinion about the implementation of a National infrastructure for research data and on its functionalities.

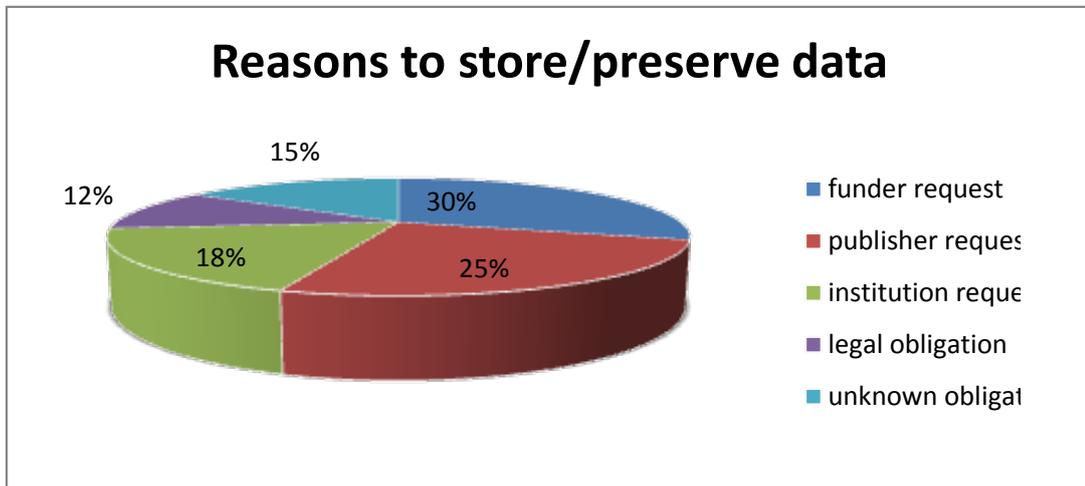
The total number of respondents is 334; they are mainly university researchers, while a low percentage of them is affiliated with public research institutions.



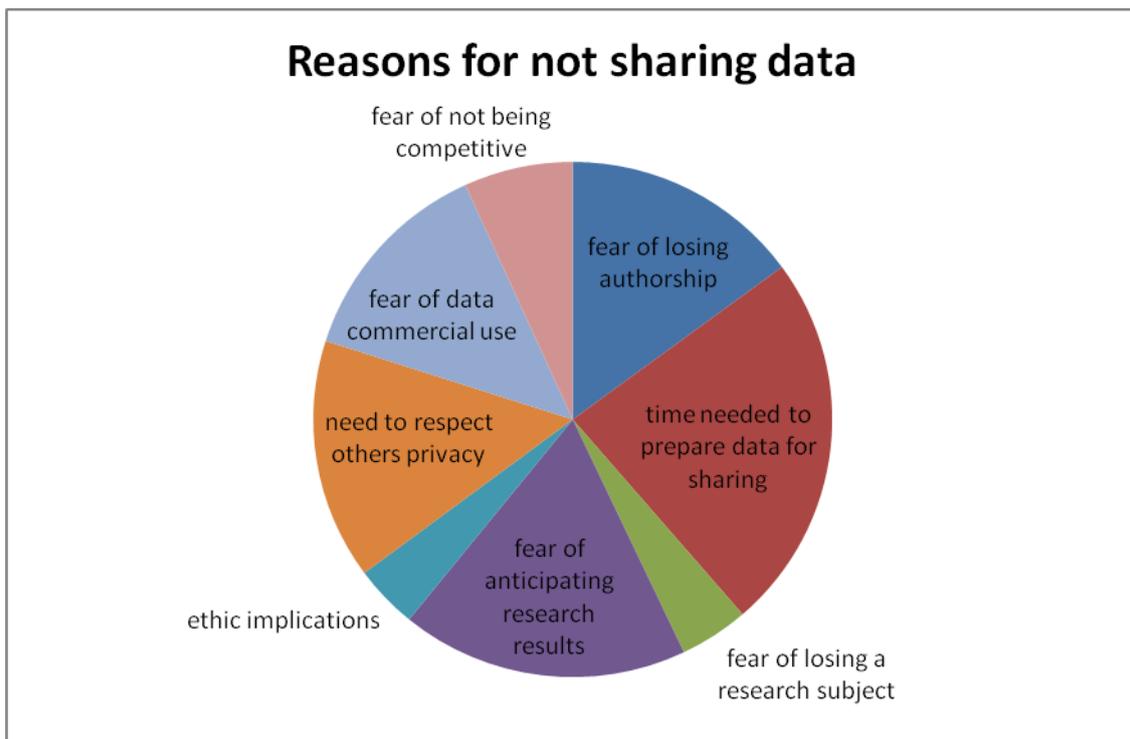
The survey results show that the majority of respondents produce data in electronic format during their research activities; some researchers hand in data to publishers when required, and store data for a certain period of time as a requirement of their institutions, while some others declare to store data as an

¹Neil Beagrie, Robert Beagrie, Ian Rowlands. "Research Data Preservation and Access: The Views of Researchers". July 2009, Ariadne Issue 60 <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue60/beagrie-et-al/>

evidence of their experiments. In several disciplines the digital storage facility and the search and discovery tools are offered by international services (such as EMBL-EBI, GenBank, etc.); in other cases researchers use their own desktop computers or removable hard-disks as a storage facility, and share data only upon request.



Researchers are well aware of the key importance of publication and data sharing; however, they believe that Open Access to publications is the primary goal to achieve in Italy, open research data management and dissemination will follow once full text articles have reached full openness.



It is a common way of thinking among respondents that “publicly funded research results (both publication and data) should be available to everyone publicly and for free after a reasonable period of time (e.g. 12 months)”. Building a National Infrastructure is evaluated as a desirable initiative, furthermore importance is stressed on policies on access to and usage of contents when deposited in a such an infrastructure; this infrastructure should offer added value services to researchers – i.e. data curation and metadata expertise in specific disciplines, in order to make data retrievable and available in a format suitable for sharing.

According to Italian researchers, research data openness must be discussed bearing in mind three main issues:

- 1) the protection of confidential and personal data
- 2) the rights of the data producer (author or institution)
- 3) the property on data demanded by the research funder

There is a strong conviction that using available data saves time and resources.

It seems clear that more information about open access to data and publication needs to be delivered among the research community. More emphasis should be given to data as products suitable for National research assessment exercises, which currently consider publications only for evaluation. A clear shift in this direction would greatly contribute to give more impact and visibility of Italian research and to gain a leading role within the International research community.

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