

Researchers' Perspective on the Publication of Research Data: Semi-structured Interviews from Germany

Interview: os_015 – Translation

1	Interviewer: So once again, thank you very much that I can do the interview with you. And my very first question is: How long have you been now working in science?
2	Researcher: Are you including the time of the doctorate?
3	I: Yes, I would also consider this.
4	R: Then since 2008.
5	I: Ah. That is quite a long time already.
6	R: Yeah. Yeah, that's exactly that are...
7	I: Could you tell me what you're researching right now?
8	R: Yes, well I'm a plant scientist. [Institution] Employed. And I am very much engaged with (unintelligible) with the effects of... various... soil conditions. So for example, with nutrient conditions or compaction. Erm... or of soil structure properties on the yield. And erm... also the climate, climate change. What is the effect of the atmospheric conditions and climate on the yield.
9	I: That's a very exciting area of research I think.
10	R: Yes, definitely. I think so, too. It's not as sexy as media, but it's definitely relevant.
11	I: Definitely relevant and also very current again. Very good. Erm... and with what kind of research data are you working there with specifically?
12	R: Erm... we gather data ourselves in the field. So it's just the way one imagines it: We measure, for example, yields or we take soil samples and analyse them in the laboratory.
13	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)).
14	R: And... uhm... and sometimes I also work with, I would say... also collected data, but which my colleagues simply slip... send to me or which are made available to me. Or these, which are already available, because they are older already.
15	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)). And have you ever published your research data?
16	R: Yes, sure. Several times.
17	I: And how did that proceed?
18	R: Erm, it depends on the when. Well I of course have also grown over the last ten years.



19	I: Of course.
20	R: And in the beginning I naturally got more support from my thesis supervisor at that time. And in the meantime... I do, I am very independent in this regard. Or how, what, how do you think how that has developed?
21	I: Also these information just now were very interesting for me. But what also interests me is the where you publish. For example, whether you grant licenses and if so, which ones? How that looks a little bit like.
22	R: Erm... So I publish in international... um... peer-reviewed journals. And eerm... So what do you mean by granting licenses?
23	I: Right, well, erm... When you publish in journals, you publish an article. Probably.
24	R: Exactly, yeah.
25	I: And the question is whether you are publishing also your data with it. So whether the journal also requests your data...
26	R: Oh, ok, yes.
27	I: Request. For example.
28	R: Yes, ok. So we do that partly... Erm, well, I, eh... am also... so half of my work is maybe... erm... not (unintelligible) data in that sense, but modelling. So I do a lot of plant growth modelling on the computer, i.e. a very large of output or publish (unintelligible) data are simulated data.
29	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)).
30	R: And, erm... We are partially providing data. Now, for example, we did to a data research centre, erm... The [Insitution] in [a city] we did provide a hundred years old dataset from a [experiment]. This data is now publicly accessible. At least parts of the data. If someone needs access to further data, he has to get in contact with us.
31	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)).
32	R: So we' re in this regard actually relatively open. And erm... but it is not like I always publish each and every number or everything. But I also always make, erm... tables, in which I show in detail for example the average values of the yield measurements...
33	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)).
34	R: Or preferably publish the data, so that they also can be used further again.
35	I: Very nice, and erm, do you have any concerns with the publication of research data?
36	R: Erm... Well we have already thought a lot about this [trial]. Because these are very unique... this is not that common. Well, the experiment was established in 1904 and was it now... so for a long time relatively little was published, because the predecessor of my institute director did not have much interest. And we wanted naturally to publish the pearls first, so to speak.



37	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)).
38	R: That's why we have now, so to speak, just released the data after parts of it were already published. Or we have only made so much available that we can still publish it ourselves if we add also other data to it. But that is rather the exception. Otherwise we certainly ensure that the...that we publish the interesting data ourselves first and then... these data can of course be used by others for other studies, that is no problem.
39	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)). And when you make the data available to others, do you grant licenses? Or is it completely open for use? Hm... do you know that?
40	R: Usually, if it, if the data are published and someone maybe wants to do a meta study now, then he can simply use the data.
41	I: Yes.
42	R: Erm, and... I think it... or, you might not always notice it that well, erm. But I think often it's more like, that you somehow get phoned or contacted: Could we like get those data? Or can you give us some information?
43	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)).
44	R: Or they call us also, we also quite often get inquiries specifically concerning the experiment. That someone wants to collect data. So soil... ah, would like to take soil samples and analyse them. And we actually almost always allow that. So there we are quite, quite open about that.
45	I: Great. And, erm, is your research data personal or sensitive data?
46	R: Ahm, only in the rarest of cases. So in my case, specifically, basically not at all. For colleagues it can happen at times. Or it can be with project partners, because we for example (unintelligible) collected data all over Germany. About the nutrient conditions in the soils. And if they are geo-referenced, you can of course find out. Ah... who... whose... which farmer, which field and that particular field is cultivated.
47	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)).
48	R: And that had than been, erm, made anonymous. But there... this... Exactly, so there we really had to watch it.
49	I: I see, that means that you also know how to handle such data. Yes, you have just now anonymised...
50	R: Well I know that my colleagues know that. Because I specifically do not have these data... this problem. But I know that this problem exists. And that we also are more conscious of it. Or have become.
51	I: Yes. Erm... Do you know whether the collected research data actually belongs to you? As a scientist.
52	R: Ahm... They probably belong to the funder, or the university. Right?



53	I: ((laugh)), I don't want you ...
54	R: I assume so.
55	I: ((laugh)). I don't want to turn this now into a training course. That's exactly... that's that, what I'm interested in. Whether the scientists know, if the data, belongs to them or not. Erm...
56	R: Is it like that, I don't really know. That's a good question.
57	I: That's actually... You work, erm... On a contract for the university, probably. So you are there in an...
58	R: Exactly.
59	I: In an employment relationship, therefore... erm...
60	R: Exactly.
61	I: Yes, it belongs to your employer, legally speaking.
62	R: Exactly, this I would have...
63	I: Exactly. Unless you do your dissertation, because then you are free in your research. But then you also shouldn't be employed. So it's always a bit more complicated.
64	R: Yes, yes, yes.
65	I: Right. Erm... Do you have the feeling that the process of publishing research data is complicated or too opaque?
66	R: Erm... Yes, complicated... Pff... it depends, so... You just have to somehow invest work and invest time, but... if you can accommodate that, then... I find it, I find it perhaps not complicated. Erm... the... second question was now, if...
67	I: Opaque. If it is non-transparent.
68	R: Yeees. That is sometimes really the case, because sometimes some, the circumstances... depend on which one. Which editor or which reviewers read the publication and... one can submit the publication, almost the same publication twice and then get completely totally different, um... comments. Or requirements, so to speak, for reworking.
69	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)). And you just mentioned the time required. Do you think that... that this time effort is worth it to make your data more noticeable?
70	R: Yes, definitely. That is indispensable. So if you want to stay in//in the sciences, there is no other way around it.
71	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)). And...
72	R: Well, for your own career, I would say, it is of course it's important and is also for the, for the erm... colleagues, important. Otherwise... because nobody else... you couldn't read about, what has already happened. So to speak. Or what the current state of research is. So especially if you



	publish it in only German conference contributions, then it is, erm... at least in our... erm, discipline, it is difficult. If... then hardly anyone can read it.
73	I: Mmm.
74	R: Or hardly anyone reads it.
75	I: Are there research data from your discipline getting more or less published in other countries? Do you have a hunch about that?
76	R: Yes, it always depends on the research topic. So Germany is already quite strong, but of course the USA... eh... probably so.
77	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)).
78	R: Erm, even stronger.
79	I: Can you imagine why that is?
80	R: Excuse me?
81	I: Can you imagine why that is so? Why the US publishes more?
82	R: Because there are simply more Americans than Germans, ((laugh)). It's just a question of the, the number and of course it's also other things... It's an other... funding structure... of the American... partially... (unintelligible) so that the//the good researchers have more possibilities. More funding... less bureaucracy. The students are more intensively supervised by the lecturers.
83	I: Aha ((affirmative sound)). So do you think, that it would be possible, erm... in your discipline to publish also more data, if maybe the supervision etc. Would be better? Or what could perhaps also help, erm, to promote the publication of research data. In Germany.
84	R: Yes. I don't really know necessarily, if one has to publish more data. Because there are already quite many publications. I think it is more important to increase the quality of the publications, if anything.
85	I: Yes. Okay. That was in fact already my last question.
86	R: Yes, good.
87	I: Yes, wonderful. I am really very very grateful. This was really very informative for me. Erm...
88	R: Yes, I'm glad.
89	I: Thank you very much again for your time.

