

FORS policy statement on open data

The unfulfilled potential of data

Much of the social science data produced with public funds in Switzerland is never made available to researchers outside of the original project teams. These data could be further exploited for new insights and scientific contributions, and so there is a loss of scientific potential. In addition, because data are often not appropriately preserved by researchers, they often become lost or unusable over time. This represents a loss of potential knowledge and cultural heritage.

The "open data" movement

The international movement toward "open data" aims to overcome restrictions on data access by advocating for legal and funding policies that promote the widespread availability and distribution of research data. This means that most data produced within publicly financed projects should be safely preserved, documented, and made freely available to the research community for re-use.

Benefits

The benefits of open data for the social sciences include:

- Greater transparency in the scientific process;
- More thorough exploitation of existing data and reduced need for new collections;
- More rapid pace of discovery;
- Greater innovation and dissemination of best practices in research; and
- Development of new forms of scientific collaboration.

FORS' policy statement on open data

FORS takes the position that social science data produced within publicly funded projects should in principle be:

- Available for re-use outside of the original research team;
- Free and easy to discover and access;
- Curated according to international standards by a professional archiving institution

Policy in practice

Since its inception, FORS has been disseminating curated Swiss survey data free of charge to the social science research community. We try to advance open data ideas in Switzerland through a range of promotional and teaching activities. We are in the process of developing a new archiving system, to be released in late 2013, that will allow researchers themselves to easily document and deposit their research data (both quantitative and qualitative) for long-term preservation and dissemination, customisable according to data type. We are currently involved in a multidisciplinary project led by the Bern University of Applied Sciences investigating the background, potential, and risks of introducing "Open Government Data" in Switzerland.