

Research access to official micro-data in Europe

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Access to official microdata in Europe

- Legal provisions to enable access to official microdata for scientific purposes are in place in most of Europe
- In practice, access remained limited for long, but recent years have seen major improvements throughout Europe
- Discrepancies remain especially for highly detailed data
- They generate inequalities among researchers within the ERA and hinder comparative/multi-country research

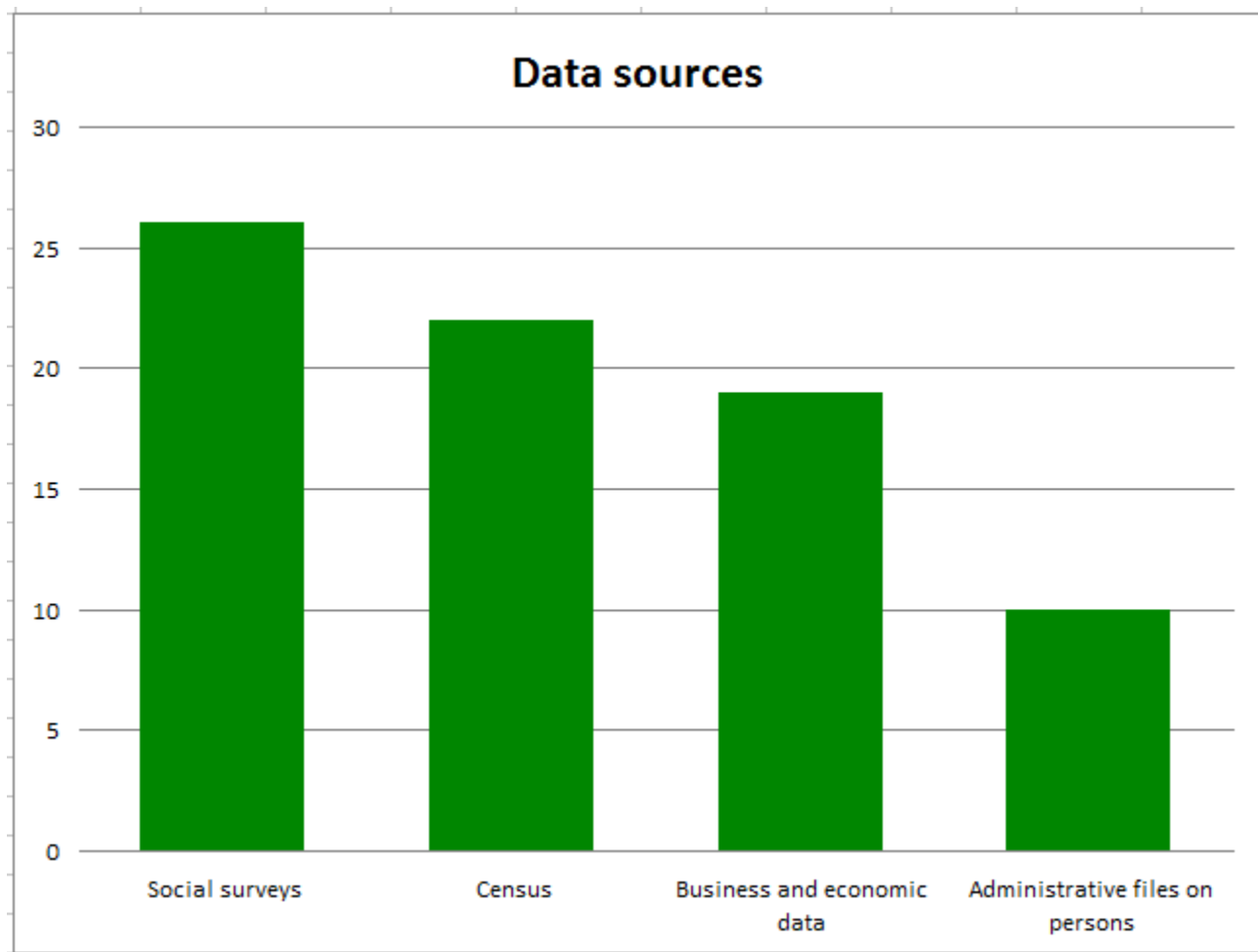
What is the situation like, today?

- Within DwB, we have mapped conditions for research access to national data (2011-12)
- Focus on practices and procedures rather than legal issues
- Focus on NSIs
- Effort to use common terminology to reveal similarities beyond apparent differences
- Considering data at all levels of anonymisation
- Building on a previous overview (CESSDA-PPP, 2008-9)

Research access in Europe: current state and transformations



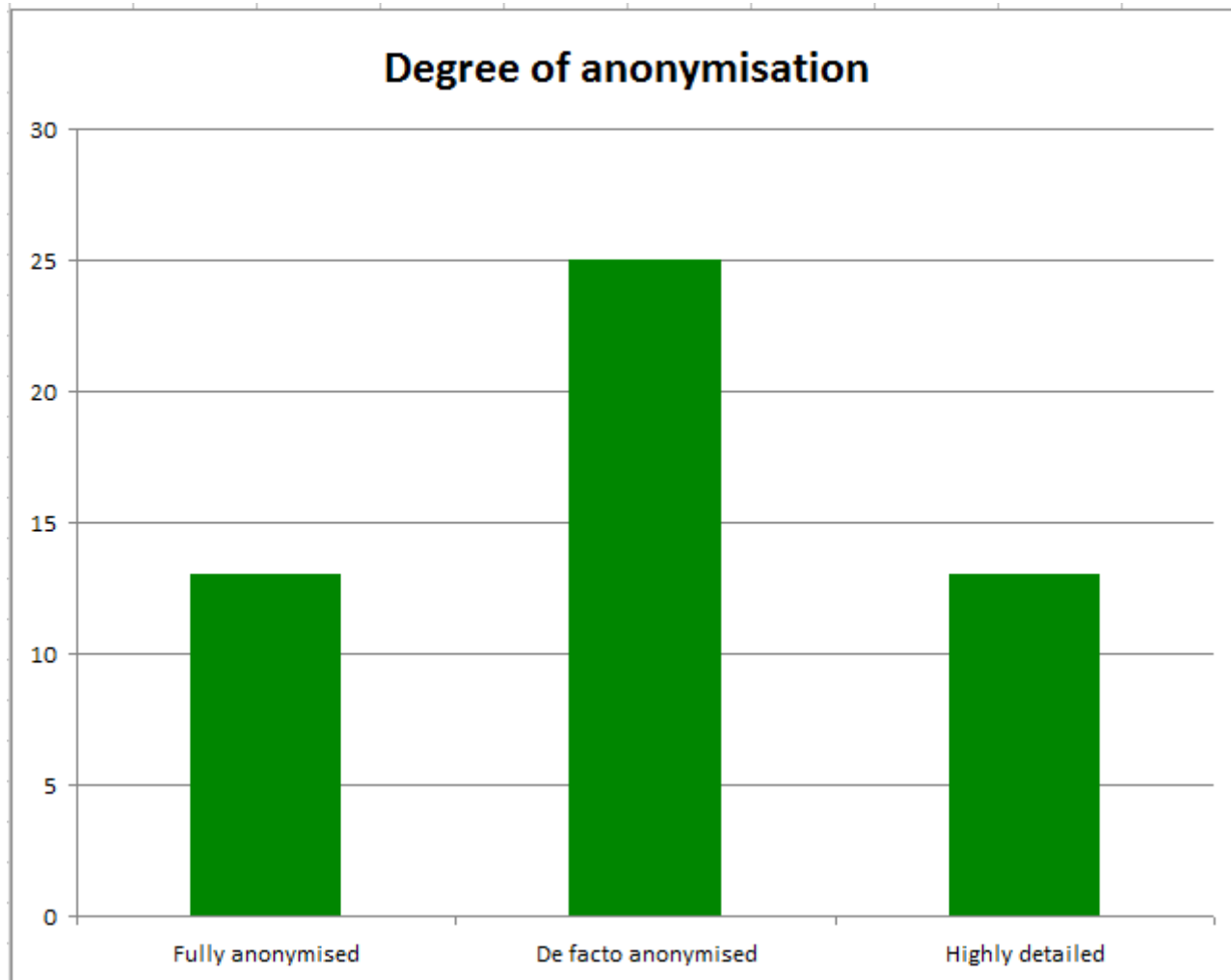
Data sources



Sources of data released to researchers

- Social surveys are most commonly produced and released to researchers, census data follow
- Business and economic data less commonly released due to higher disclosure risk especially in smaller countries
- Administrative data more common in Nordic countries, and increasingly used elsewhere too
- Combined administrative/survey data increasingly popular

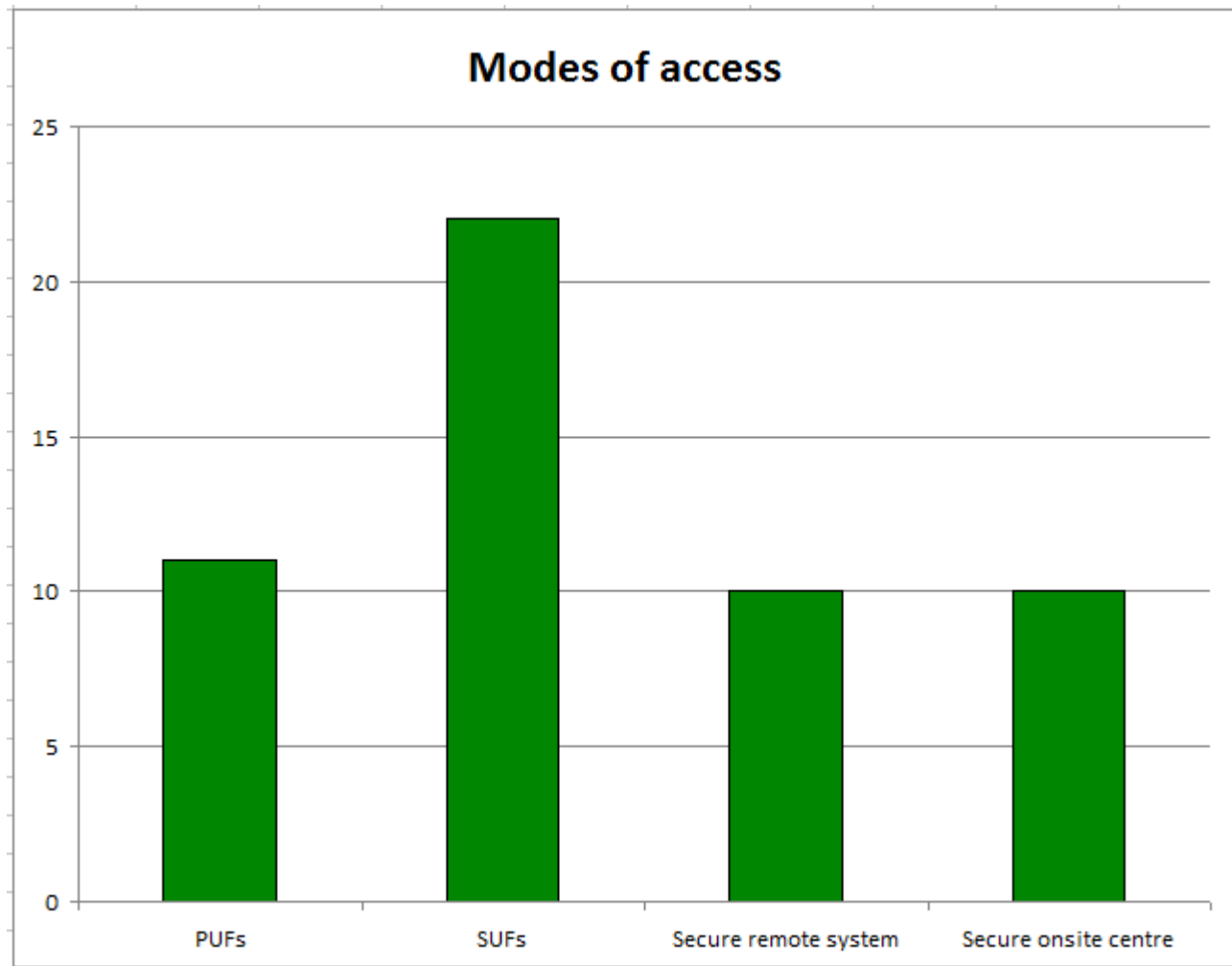
Degree of anonymisation



Degree of anonymisation

- Intermediate (*de facto*) level of anonymisation has long been the most common
- New technical solutions and changing needs of researchers now enable enhanced access to both highly detailed and fully anonymised data

Modes of access



Modes of access

- Transmission to researcher (typically, SUFs) is the most common solution
- Growing availability of secure modes of access:
 - initially onsite, now more frequently remote
 - remote execution initially more widespread, remote access now on the rise
- Growing production of PUFs too, though to a lesser extent

Accreditation: situation and gaps



Accreditation

- Widespread eligibility of confirmed, public-sector researchers
- Patchy for less clear-cut (but growing in number) cases:
 - Students (PhDs, post-graduate, under-graduate...)
 - Post-docs, temporary research staff, private sector...
- Eligibility of foreign researchers very often granted, but typically limited to some types of data / modes of access
- Procedures are often cumbersome and decision-making untransparent, with numerous differences across countries

Information: gaps and progress



Information

- Our study revealed major gaps in availability of online information about existing data, criteria and procedures for access
- English translations often incomplete; relevant information often difficult to locate on NSIs' websites; conditions for transnational access not stated
- Some improvement a year on – moving towards a more researcher-friendly data access model ?

Remaining problems

Remaining problems

- For researchers:
 - Heavy and time-consuming procedures to obtain access; multiple interlocutors; restrictions to access even when legislation would allow it
- For NSIs:
 - Trade-off between granting access and fear of failing to adequately protect confidentiality; high costs of granting access in times of austerity

Collaboration with data archives: a way forward?



Encouraging experiences with archives

- Collaboration with data archives and the research community at large, as a way to share the burden while increasing access
- Pioneering experiences in some countries: FR, NO, SI, UK...
- Can be done for a range of different activities (metadata/information, access and accreditation management, training...)
- May involve different forms of collaboration

Conclusions

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- Current legal, technical and societal transformations challenge traditional approaches to research access
- Gaps and limitations inherited from the past remain to be addressed
- Innovative solutions are being developed, based on new technologies and enhanced collaboration and trust-building with the research community
- Collaboration with data archives as part of this process

Thanks for your attention

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