Questions on data ownership

Contemporary research has become increasingly data-intensive from natural sciences to humanities. This has created new challenges in data storage, maintenance, sharing, and analysis. Data ownership and open access are central elements in terms of data maintenance, quality assurances, and research reproducibility. In this workshop panel we debated these topics. We concluded that data ownership can be important for instance from the perspective of 1) maintenance responsibility; 2) potential for unique scientific breakthroughs; and 3) commercial interests. Transparent research would require openness of the research data in principle, but practical bottlenecks may arise from funding limitations, privacy and confidentiality issues, or binding agreements with other parties. The concept of ownership can become more fuzzy with open licensing as anyone would be allowed to use the data without restriction but in terms of scientific quality, it will be important that the maintenance responsibilities are clearly defined. The research data cannot be always easily distinguished from the algorithms, software, and documentation used to interpret and analyze it. One key challenge in research is that the funders often demand open data availability but funding for long-term maintenance is often very limited. Open availability of research data is a good objective in research but has to be balanced with the availability of the resources and the added value for science and society; not all data sets are equal, and prioritization is inevitable.