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Newspapers as a Research Source: Information Needs and Information Seeking of Humanities Scholars

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Introduction

- newspapers (historical and contemporary) can be used in many ways
  - for amusement, education, scientific research
- for research purpose content of newspapers is often perceived as less worthy than scientific journals and textbooks
- newspapers reflect social and cultural values of a certain place and time
  - language structure, material artefact (typography, paper properties, graphic design)

Study methodology

- nationwide study that aims to investigate the information behaviour and user needs of Croatian academics and scholars from the social sciences and the humanities

- the first phase focused on historians and linguists

- research questions:
  - 'What kinds of information do (Croatian) historians and linguists look for in newspapers?',
  - 'What difficulties do researchers encounter when using newspapers?' and
  - 'What would enhance newspaper use in their further research?'
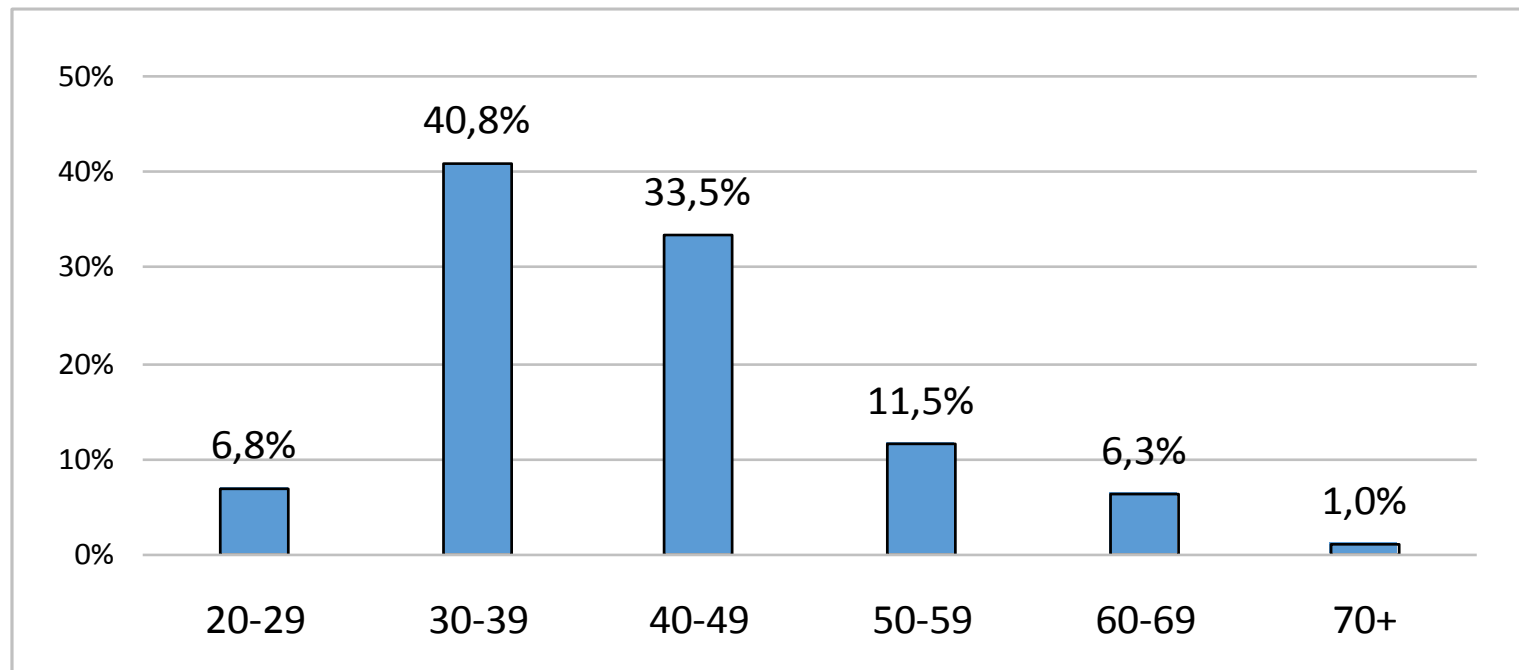
Methodology

- hypothesis
  - newspapers are a relevant information source for historians and linguists, but their potential is not fully used (limitations in the access to newspaper collections and obstacles in searching for and retrieving information from newspaper content)

- a survey was conducted in December 2013 through an online questionnaire distributed to
  - 803 academics employed in the linguistic and history departments of six universities in Croatia and
  - 31 scholars from three major history and language research institutes
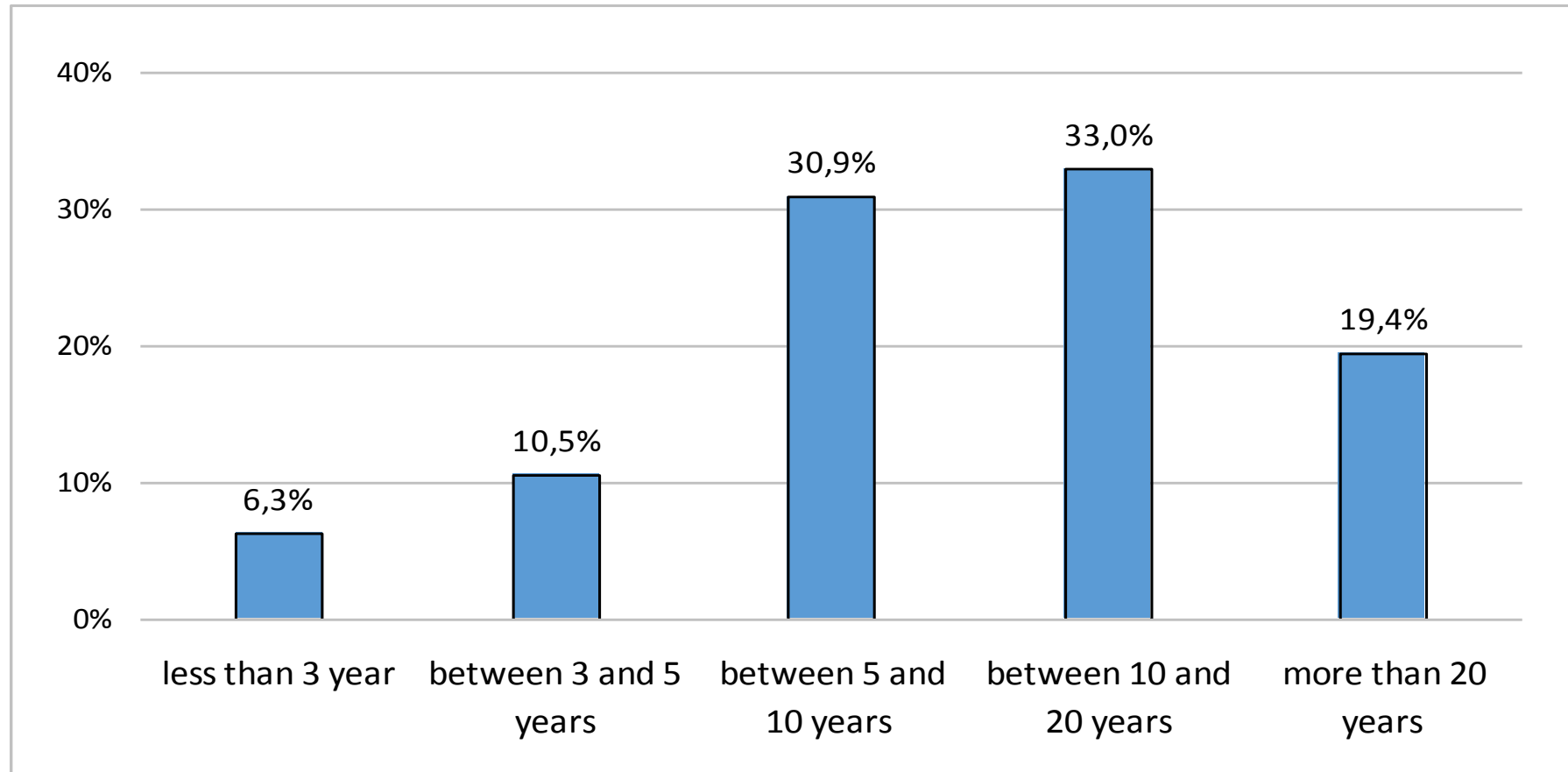   - response rate: 23%

Results

- respondents
  - female: 135 (70.7%)
  - male: 56 (29.3%)
- age of the participants

Scientific work, vocation & interest

- most represented: assistant professors (25.1%), teaching and research assistants (20.4%), senior assistants (17.3%)
- areas of scientific interest: philology (74.3%), history (19.4%)

ICT use

ICT	%
e-mail	92.7%
laptops	91.6%
personal computers	79.6%
smart phones	42.4%
e-readers	12.6%
tablets	16.8%

Usage of primary information sources

- always
  - books (published literary works) (51.8%)
- frequently
  - journals (35.1%) and newspapers (31.4%)
- sometimes
  - manuscripts (43.4%), diaries (42.9%), letters (41.9%), photographs (41.4%), government documents (37.7%), ephemeral material, f.e. leaflets, posters, pamphlets, etc. (37.7%), film and sound recordings (36.1%), oral historical sources (33.5%), maps and plans (32.4%), register books (28.3%), records and reports (27.7%) and calendars (26.7%)
- never
  - musical recordings (88.0%), genealogical sources (79.1%), graphics (70.7%), artefacts and museum pieces (68.6%)
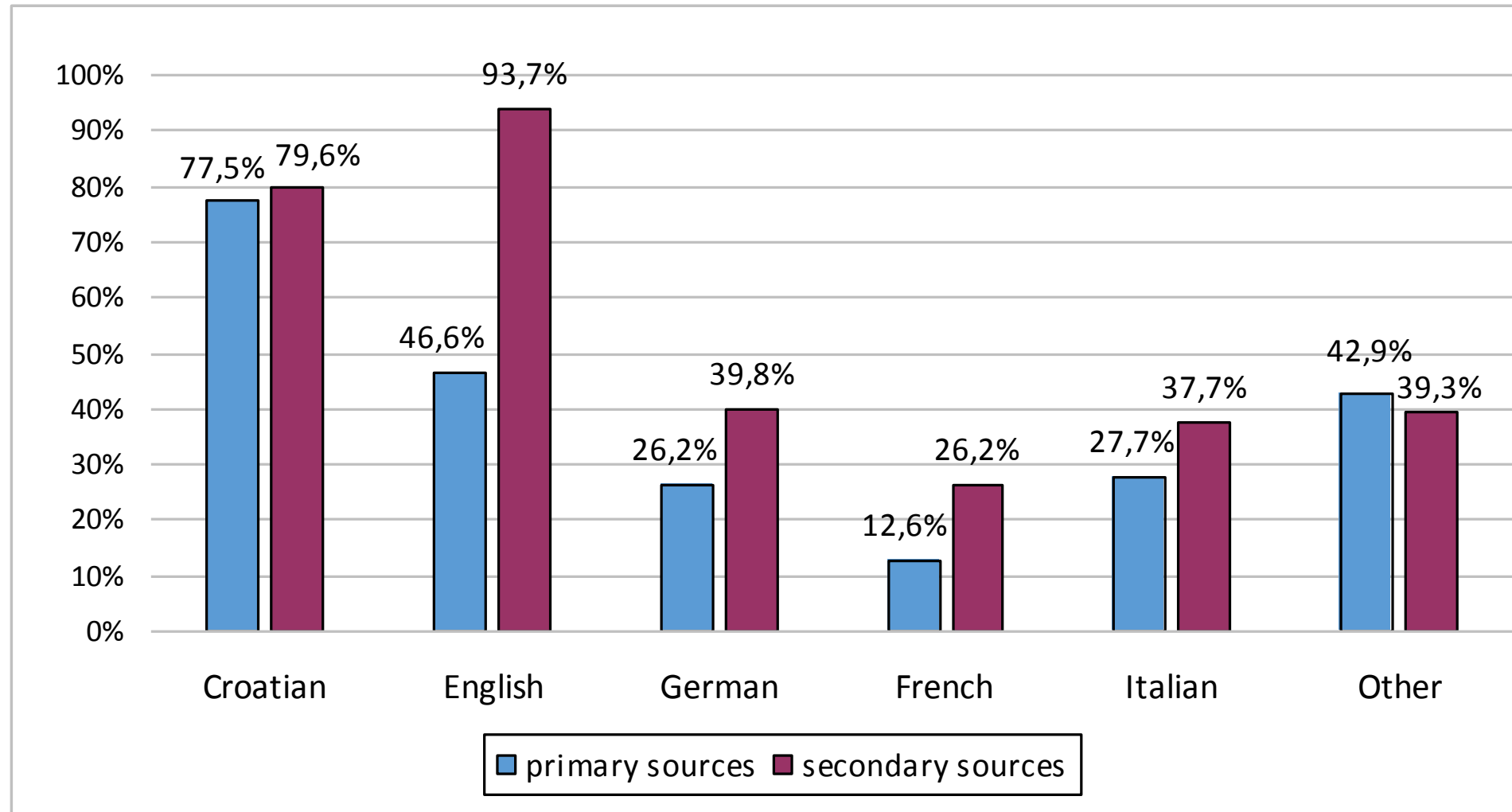
Usage of secondary information sources

- always
  - scientific books/monographs (93.1%)
  - scientific journals (90.0%)
  - conference proceedings (80.6%)
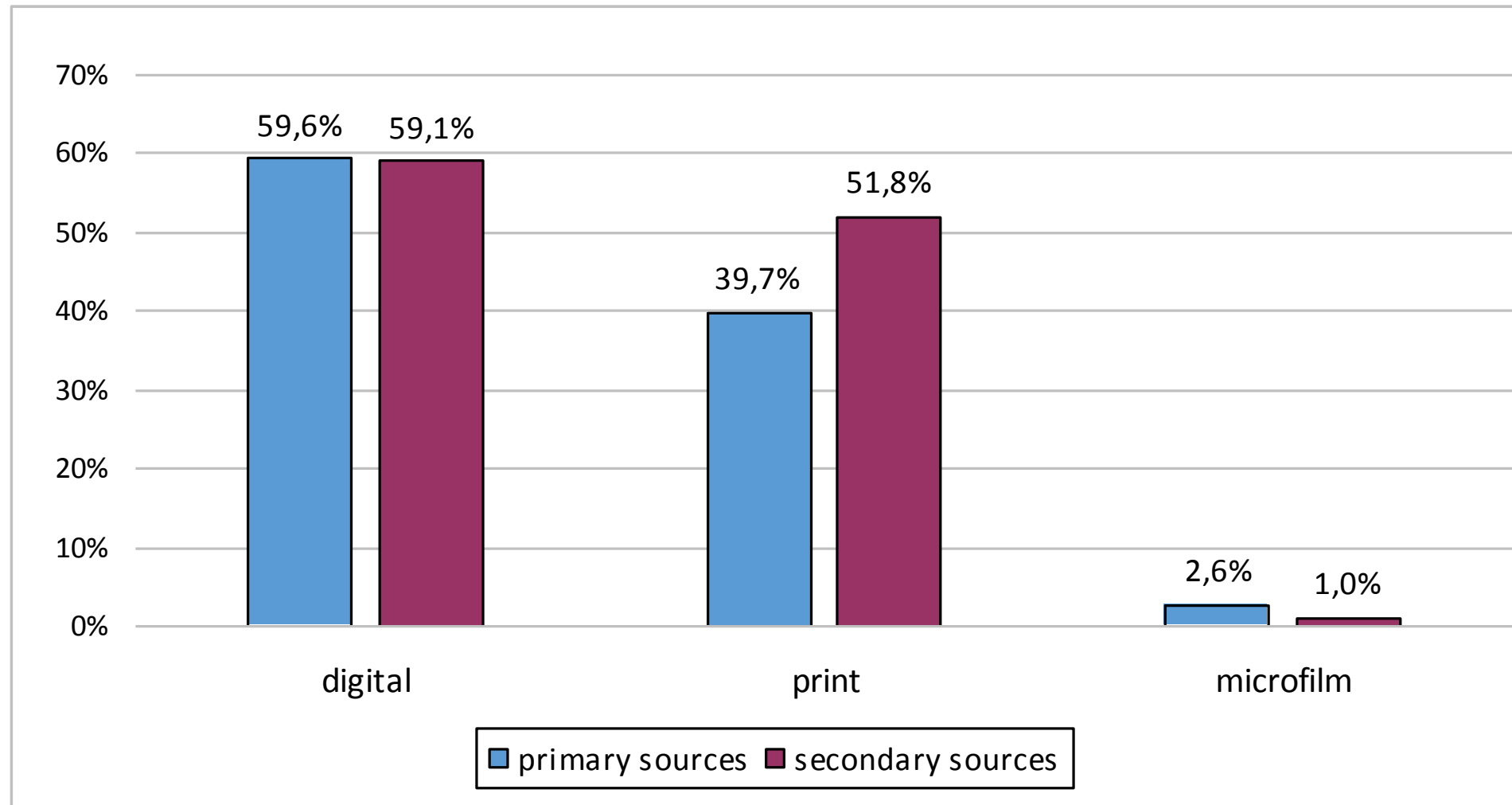 - reference publications such as encyclopaedias, lexicons, dictionaries (75.9%)
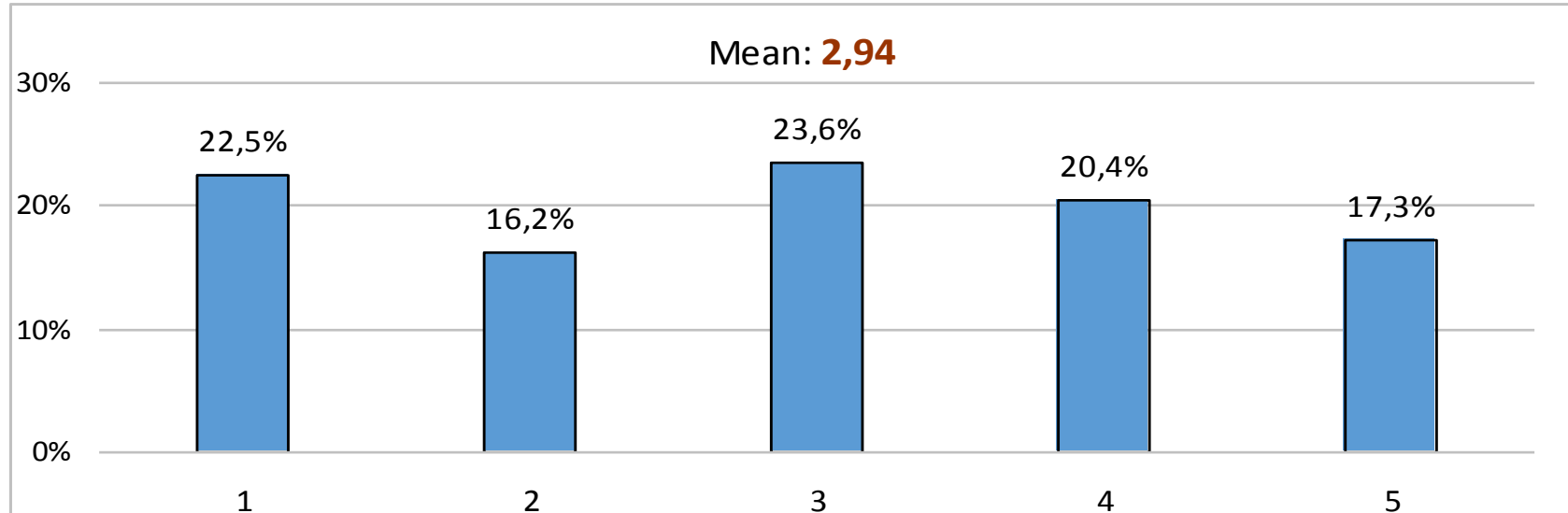
Language of information sources

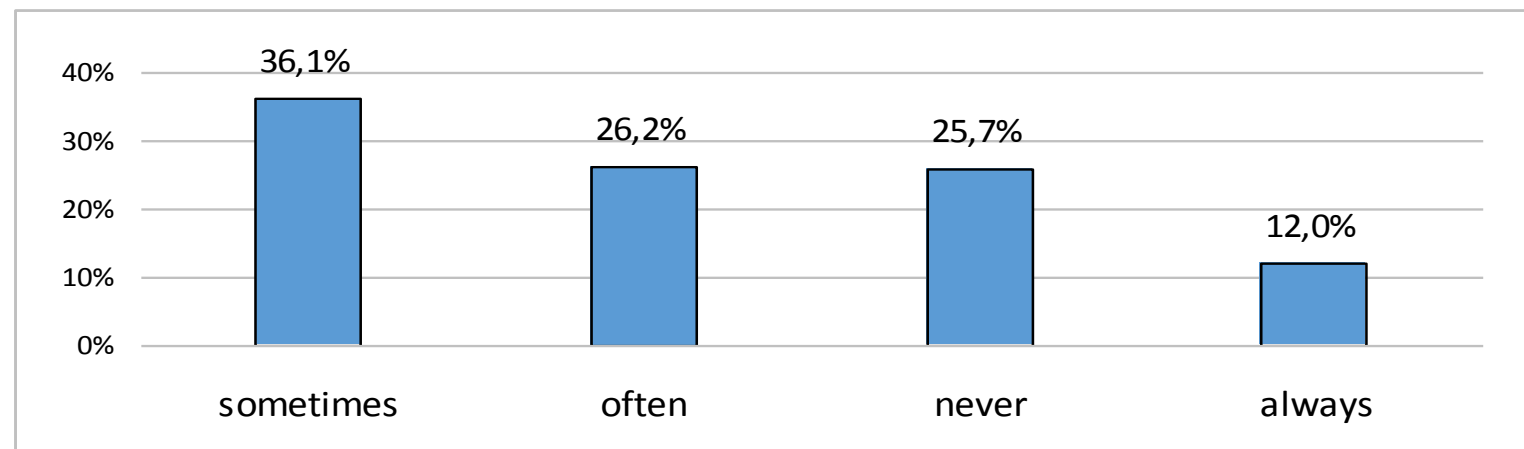# Preferred form of information sources

Importance of newspapers

Frequency of newspaper use

Reasons for (non) consulting print newspapers

- 24.6% of the respondents consulted print newspapers even though they had available digital versions
    - incorrect and incomplete digital versions of newspapers
    - better overviews of text in the print newspapers
    - a preference for using the original and a habit of consulting print versions
    - print newspapers can be read without a computer and outside the home or workplace
    - a sense of authenticity (smell) etc.
- 10.4% were unsatisfied with the poor quality of digitization
- almost 20% of the respondents did not consult original print newspapers
    - easier and faster searching of digital newspapers
    - digital versions were credible and gave the same information as print newspapers
    - digital versions are more accessible (at any time and regardless of the reader's physical location)

Agreement to the statements on newspapers

Statements on newspapers	Mean
Information in newspapers is necessary to check in other sources	4.15
Newspapers are an easily accessible source of information	3.76
Newspaper material is not indexed enough in information institutions	3.69
Newspaper material is not adequately preserved in information institutions	3.32
Information in newspapers is easy to search/retrieve	3.29
Newspaper sources raise the quality of the research work in my scientific area	3.20
Newspapers are a necessary information source for work in my scientific area	3.13
Newspaper material is not used enough in my scientific area	2.76
Information in the newspapers is reliable and correct	2.75
Information in the newspapers cannot be found elsewhere	2.43

Type of information in newspapers

Type of information	%
Historical data to check and complete original data from other sources	51.4%
Linguistic characteristics of the text	50.7%
Data on society and social movements	49.3%
Original historical data which were not recorded elsewhere	40.8%
Literary texts	37.3%
Personal attitudes/opinions	26.8%
Advertisements	26.8%
Illustrations	19.7%
Other	8.3%
Graphical characteristics of newspapers as a physical object	7.7%
Editorials	7.7%

Newspapers used in the last scientific paper

- national newspapers (71.8%)

- foreign newspapers (49.3%)

- local newspapers (43.0%)

Newspaper period	%
Newspapers published after the year 2000	55.6%
Newspapers published in the first half of the 20th century	38.0%
Newspapers published in the second half of the 20th century	31.0%
Newspapers published in the 19th century	26.1%
Newspapers published at the end of the 18th century	5.6%

Motivation to newspaper use

Motivation	%
Lack of other appropriate primary sources of information	40.1%
Previous (positive) experience	38.0%
Newspapers used in relevant papers of other authors	33.8%
Other (information relevant to specific research areas)	20.4%
Recommendation of colleagues/teachers	9.2%
Recommendation of information specialists (archivists, librarians)	0.7%

Information pathways in finding newspapers

Information pathways	Mean
Searching the Internet	2.31
Searching databases	3.01
Searching library catalogues	3.33
Searching through reference publications	4.08
Browsing archival material	4.42
Guidelines/recommendations of other persons	5.24
Browsing printed material on the library shelves	5.26
Finding newspapers by accident while looking for other sources	5.86
Searching the archival finding aids	5.91

Difficulties in using newspapers

- unavailability of digitized newspapers or journals (20.9%)
- lack of bibliographic data in digital newspapers (4.7%)
- unavailability of old print newspapers (4.1%)
- time consuming aspect of searching newspapers (3.7%)
- low quality of digitized papers and unreliable information (2.6%)
- high price of access to digital newspapers (2.6%)
- complicated rules associated with borrowing and using newspapers in the library (2%)
- impossibility of using old and damaged material (2%)
- vastness of information and lack of organized material in the institutions (1.6%)
- length of distance from the institution which possesses the material (1.6%)
- ...

Newspaper use in future research – some suggestions

- further digitization of newspapers in Croatian and foreign institutions (19.8%)
- the availability of digital versions through open access, full text (18.8%)
- easier and quicker searching of digital versions with the help of search engines, keywords, catalogues, and indexes - better organization and structure of the data (12%)
- the availability of old newspapers in print form (3.7%)
- additional services such as the possibility to archive, print and copy old newspapers, online orders of digital newspapers (2.6%)
- ...

Conclusion

- newspapers are used and perceived as a useful information source in scientific work
- a need for further digitization of newspapers in Croatian and foreign institutions
  - open access to full texts
  - better organization and structure of the data
- results can be used in developing newspaper preservation policies on the national and institutional level
- many valuable newspaper collections dispersed in Croatian heritage institutions need to be digitized
- usually newspapers in digital format are not designed (search options, interface design) on thorough and extensive user surveys