

A framework for Open Access to Cultural Heritage: what are our shared values and goals?

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Why a survey on the OpenGLAM Principles?

Last year, members from Creative Commons, Wikimedia Foundation and the Open Knowledge Foundation started a collaboration to revitalize the “OpenGLAM” (Galleries, Libraries, Archives & Museums) initiative. The first step was to take back the [@openglam](#) twitter account through an [open call to contributors](#), and run a [“temperature check” survey](#) on the [OpenGLAM Principles](#), a set of principles created in 2013 with the aim to define what being an open institution in the cultural heritage sector meant.

Our intention with the survey wasn't to take a representative sample but more to approach different actors to understand whether the principles were useful or not and why, and how they could be improved to better address the needs of cultural heritage institutions. We

publicized the survey through social media, mainly through the @openglam account, and we reached out specific people we wanted to take the survey. We received a total of 109 answers.

What is out there? Other declarations on Open Access

Before entering into the results of the survey on the OpenGLAM Principles, it's good to ask what other instruments or tools exist out there around Open Access. It's tempting to rush into writing yet another declaration, but our initial judgement allowed us to have some doubts around the existence of guidance on Open Access for cultural heritage institutions.

In the list of [Declarations that support Open Access](#) maintained by the Open Access Directory, not that many recommendations, declarations, guidelines or principles specifically address Open Access in relationship with the cultural heritage sector. Other mandates such as Obama's [Executive Order on Open and Machine Readable Information](#) or the [Public Sector Information Directive](#) either don't include cultural heritage institutions or directly exclude them altogether. Moreover, these are always country or regional specific instruments, and there doesn't seem to be a global instrument set in place.

Other useful instruments on Open Access, such as the Bethesda or the Berlin Declaration are directed to material that is being created by researchers, but not to material that was created long time ago (what we know as "heritage"), that might be in the public domain and therefore could potentially be shared. The [Public Domain Manifesto](#) addresses some of these issues, but it is largely oriented towards copyright concerns in connection with the Public Domain, and not to the overall work that cultural heritage institutions have to do for releasing collections.

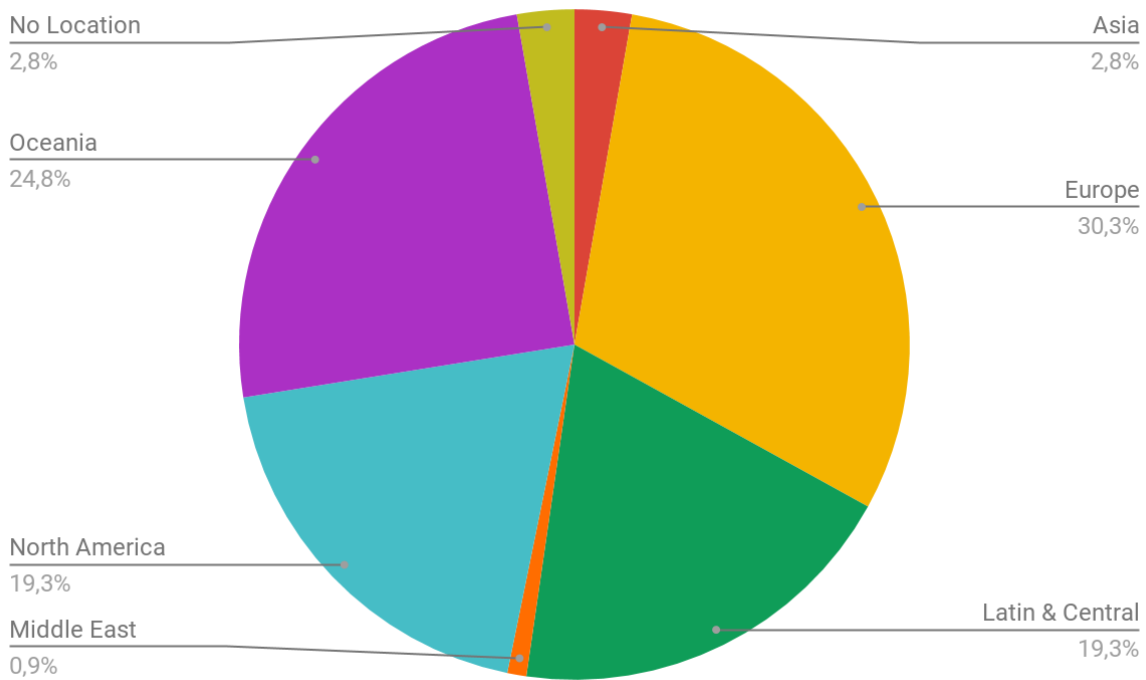
In short, we have reasons to believe that there are really not that many global and official instruments that cover Open Access in the cultural heritage sector.

Assumptions and overview of the survey

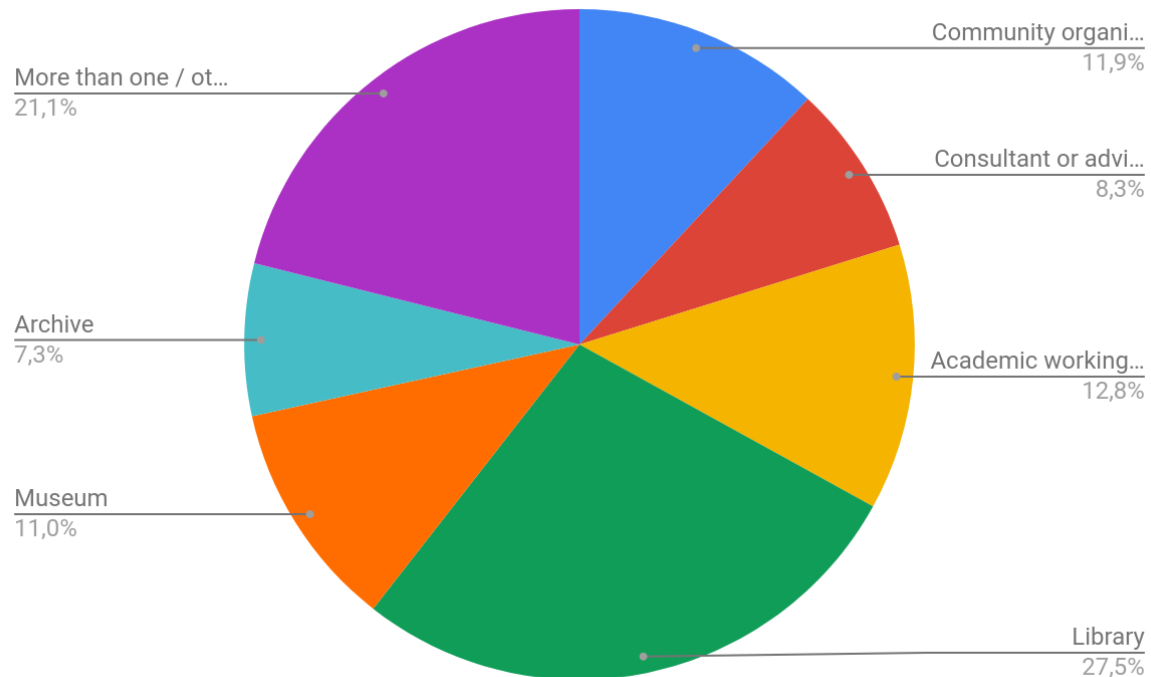
These are some of the assumptions that we had before starting the survey:

- the Principles are not very well known by GLAM or cultural heritage institutions, and they are mainly directed to the "open" communities;
- the Principles, even when their last version is from 2013, don't properly reflect recent concerns that some cultural heritage institutions have around the proper acknowledgment of traditional or indigenous knowledge and other ethical concerns in connection with releasing digital content;
- the Principles are only written in English and have never been translated to other languages, therefore limiting their utility as a global tool;
- they need to be backed or supported by an official institution to have relevance amongst cultural heritage organizations.

Unsurprisingly, most of the responses obtained came from Europe and the US, as can be seen in the graphic below. We received no response from Africa. Of course, this first speaks of the limited outreach that the survey had, but it also let us believe that language still plays a major role in the limited diffusion that the Principles have.



The other challenge is directly related to the “GLAM” acronym, because we needed to better understand who we were reaching out, and how actually people is identifying themselves as working professionals. In some cases, it is also to expect that the change for open inside an institution might be driven by an outside enthusiast, for instance an academic, advocate or community organizer (such as a [Wikipedian In Residence](#)) who helps with the decision of releasing the content. Surprisingly, the results were quite balanced overall, with libraries only having a slightly higher percentage of respondents.



And, as we also expected, the Principles are not very well known. Even with the low amount of responses that we obtained, almost half of the people answering the survey weren't aware of them.

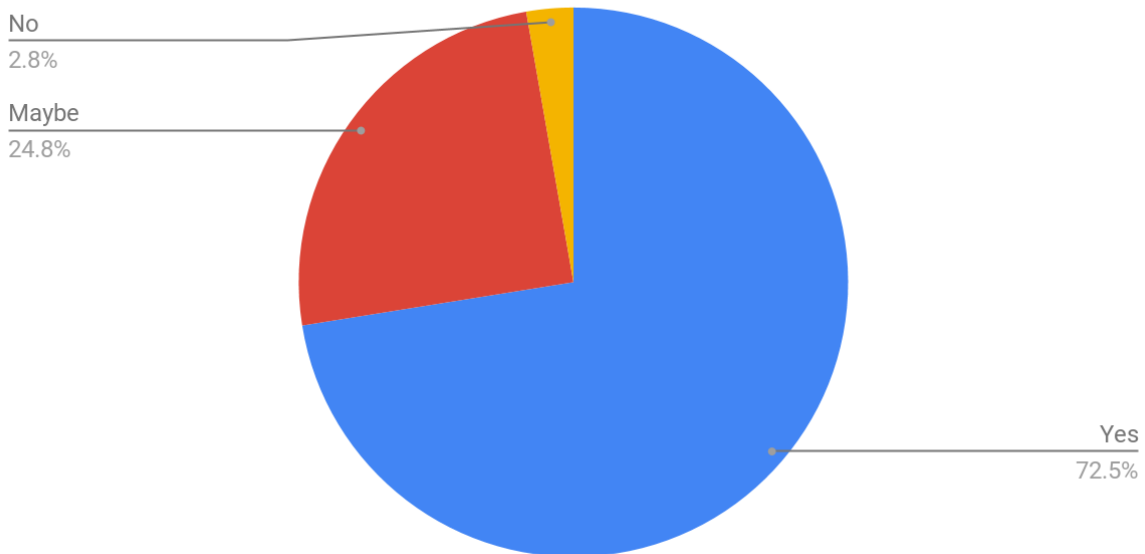
Before taking this survey were you aware of the Open GLAM Principles?



Do Principles change minds?

More in general, the question remains whether the Principles are an adequate instrument. In the survey, we asked whether participants considered the principles useful or not, and if so, why.

Do you think the Open GLAM Principles are useful or could be useful for you?



Of the total responses (109), 67 gave an explanation around what they found useful about them, with the most common explanation being that they provide a good framework or benchmark to address licensing and release of collections inside cultural heritage institutions.

Of the 11 explanations that we obtained about the Principles not being useful, here are some verbatims:

“They lack connection to values and reasons. They sound more like technical principles”.

“They are actually useful, but they won’t be taken seriously by the institutions I work with because they aren’t official.”

“Open Data, etc. are not relevant organizations in the cultural field. They need to be supported by relevant organizations. We need to have guidelines and values to discuss, to build up a better structure and network.”

“The OpenGLAM principles can be very useful, but they must have the explicit support of more prestigious organizations; they must be backed by a greater amount of empirical research and they must have greater diffusion within GLAM institutions.”

So, as expected, these critiques and others were fundamentally aligned with some of our initial assumptions: the lack of official support for the Principles, the lack of

acknowledgement of the Principles by GLAM institutions, and the Principles being mostly directed to a US/European public. However, the remarkable bit of these critiques is that all of them were adding a caveat, leaving some room to potentially consider an instrument of this sort to be useful, although not clearly in the current shape that the Principles have.

The last verbatim goes directly to this point. Someone answered:

“They are clear, but do principles change minds?”

This is consistent with the observation that they were useful because they provided a “framework” (more than values and goals), but also consistent with other observations that appeared when asking people if the Principles needed to be updated, and if so, what changes should be introduced. Several answers pointed to the need of the Principles to offer a “guidance on practical application”.

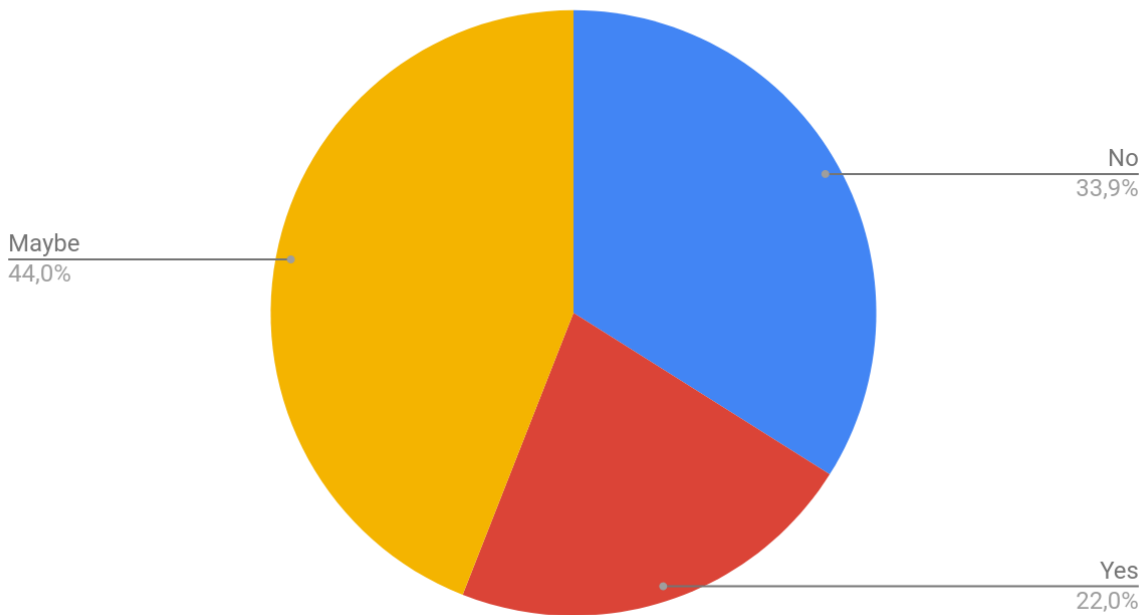
Other answers also signaled the fact that while it’s valuable to insist on the need of institutions to use the CC0 waiver or the Public Domain Mark, in certain cases for institutions this is a very maximum requirement that not necessarily can be met at the moment of release, but could potentially be done later on in the future. In this sense, they regarded the release of collections as a process.

The question therefore is whether the name “Principles” is adequate or should be changed to a more flexible wording that also adapts itself better to the sort of requests that appeared in the survey. Probably, a name such as “Declaration” or “Recommendations” might be better suited for an instrument of this sort. The question whether “OpenGLAM” is useful as a catchphrase als remains open.

Is there any room for changes and improvements?

For us, the most important aspect of the survey was to understand if the Principles needed to be updated or not, and if so, why. The results we obtained that support a change weren’t conclusive in terms of a positive answer, but the total amount between “yes” and “maybe” suggest that there is room for changes:

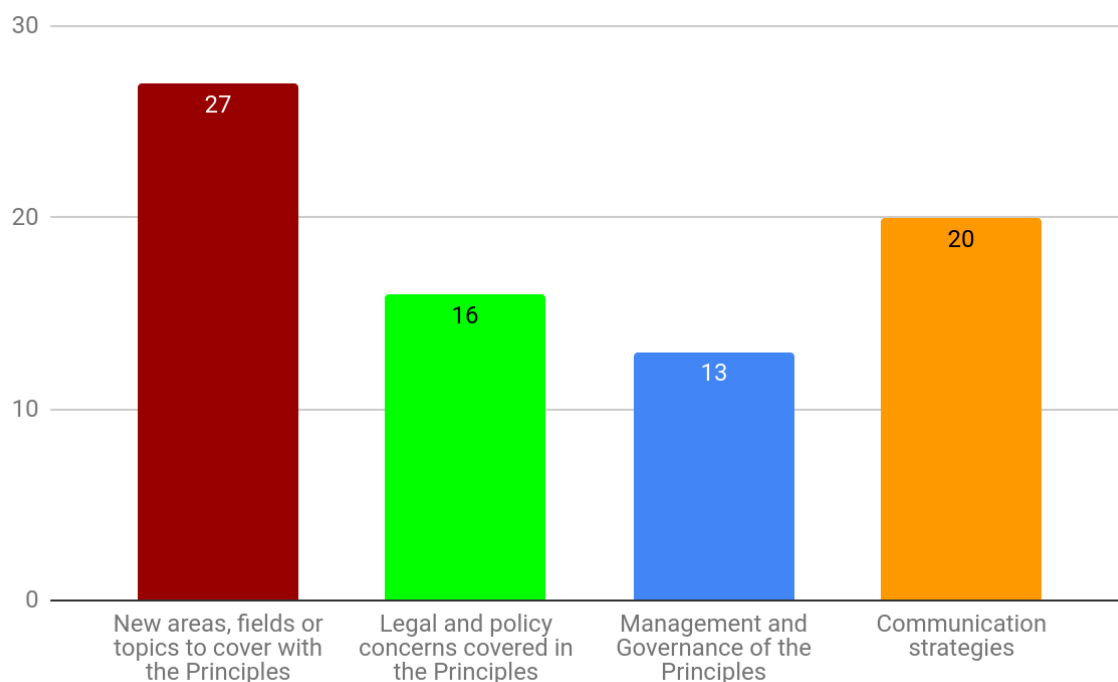
Do you think the principles need to be updated?



More important than that is an analysis of the answers related to the aspects that could be improved of the Principles. This question was optional and had a free text field. After receiving the answers, we identified common topics and we organized them into four categories, as follows:

- (1) **New areas, fields or topics to cover with the Principles:** these refer to core updates in the content of the Principles that aren't covered as for today;
- (2) **Legal and policy concerns covered in the Principles:** these refer to improvements in guidance, examples, or new aspects of the problems already covered in the Principles around licensing and openness;
- (3) **Management and governance of the Principles:** these refer to comments around the governance structure behind of the Principles (currently inexistent), the need to structure that governance around global diversity, and the need for maintaining regular updates;
- (4) **Communication strategies:** refer to comments around improving copywriting, the definitions and the examples, the need to translate the Principles, and general communication outreach strategies.

We ended up with a total amount of 76 valid answers, organized as follows:



These topics are also too comprehensive, so we subdivided them in different sets of answers, according to the general subtopics identified in each. In particular, the most interesting ones can be found in the “New areas to cover” and the “Legal and policy concerns already covered by the Principles”. To illustrate some of the points made by respondents to the survey, we are including some verbatims.

New areas, fields or topics to cover with the Principles

Acknowledgment of traditional knowledge and indigenous rights

“Information with personal, cultural or social constraints, such as traditional knowledge, should not just be ‘released’. We require some acknowledgement of the complexities of cultural knowledge”.

Privacy and ethical considerations

“Even with proper licensing, open resources shouldn’t be published in a model of “scan and dump”. We need to offer context, especially with things such as racist keywords within the metadata structure.”

Interoperability, long term access to data & technological considerations

“Data needs to be accessible in a persistent way.”

“Data needs to be open and connected to the open data ecosystem.”

Other concerns

This is the catch-all category, for answers that are rather vague, don't fit properly in any of the topics already identified, but somehow try to address the need to offer a broader coverage of topics. Here are some significant verbatims:

“Are there other principles related to open practices and policies that can be discussed above and beyond the primary focus on open data?”

“We should include a statement regarding the education of GLAM professionals, they need to be engaged and prepared to work with open access projects.”

“They should take into account the risks related to new monopolies on open content discovery.”

Legal and policy concerns covered in the Principles

Guidance on practical application of the Principles

“My recommendation is to develop a set of values with examples of how they might be implemented. Institutions can then sign on based on their resources and the needs of their collections, applying open in a context that works for them and their work.”

“Would love some guidance or a heuristic on what kind of resources to prioritize for openness.”

“What does it mean in practical words to publish data with a strong statement about reuse (Principle 3)? The Principle could give some examples of how to get it done.”

“In certain cases, libraries have a great policy but seem to be failing on implementing the same consistently across the many avenues of access they provide to reusers.”

Public domain & CC licensing

“It might be worth dealing explicitly with the issue of ownership of digital versions of public domain works and attribution of host institutions as issues that still come up in the sector.”

“We should not only focus in public domain works. It’s also important that institutions release with an open license the digital information that provides context to works.”

“Open GLAM is an ideal scenario. We need to be flexible with those who cannot, for various reasons, put everything online and for full use.”

Connection with other legal frameworks

“Greater emphasis must be placed on the human rights perspective. Access to cultural heritage is a right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.”

“It could relate to local legislation.”

Advocacy strategies

“They need to be discussed with and presented to policy makers, so they can understand the importance of taking action.”

“They should help to promote things such as freedom of panorama”.

Conclusions and next steps

Even with the limited outreach of the survey, there are some things that come out clearly as highlights or standing remarks. The first one is that yet again more guidance is needed on how to implement open access policies inside cultural heritage organizations, and stronger statements on what open access means in the intersection of the complexity of cultural knowledge, as one of the respondents pointed out. Guidance, however, is something different from an agreement on values, and that’s probably the major aspect that needs to be reconsidered.

The lack of support from a well recognized institution and the lack of global diversity is an issue that needs to be addressed.