A Cookbook Approach to Quantitative Larp Evaluation
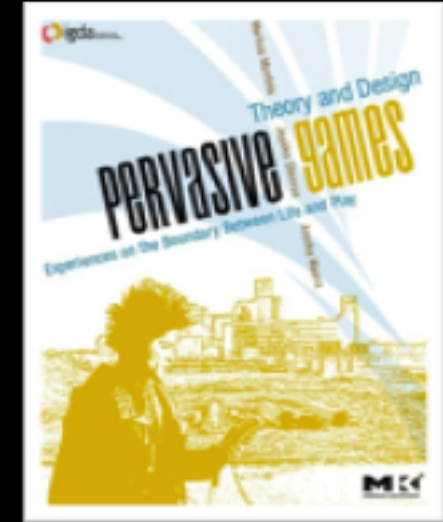
Knutepunkt 2017

Markus Montola

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Game Scholar

University of Tampere 2004

Nokia Research Center 2009

PhD 2010

Game Designer

Grey Area 2011

Housemarque 2013

Boomlagoon 2014

Reforged 2015

Cookbook Approach

- If you want to do academic work, take a proper course on methods

- Customer satisfaction grade results

- Wtf. std. deviation chi squared test factor rotation yeah right not here

NO ROCKET SCIENCE

Recipe

1. Decide what it is you want to know
2. Create survey items
3. Create the survey
4. Test the survey
5. Run the survey
6. Crunch the numbers
7. Eyeball the numbers
8. Serve with Graphs

Ingredients

1 Microsoft Excel, or

1 Google Sheet

1 Google Form

40-50 players, preferably more

Preparation time: 2-4 weeks

1.
Decide what it is you want to know

A great tool for…

- Validating assumptions
- Checking for red flags
- Measuring ongoing performance
- Tangible communication
- Producing marketing claims

Totally sucks at…

- Finding out unexpected things
- Explaining what just happened
- Finding out causes of problems
- Telling how to fix them

Do ask about…

- Background data
- Success of your game – before, during and after
- Success of your unique design decisions and metatechniques
- Safety and comfort – before, during and after
- Actionable information

Don't ask about…

- How to improve X
- "Did you experience character immersion?"
- Anything complicated

13. Do you believe that political correctness has created biased news coverage on both illegal immigration and radical Islamic terrorism?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion
- Other, please specify:

(Source: Mainstream Media Accountability Survey, action.trump2016.com)

15. Do you believe that people of faith have been unfairly characterized by the media?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion
- Other, please specify:

(Source: Mainstream Media Accountability Survey, action.trump2016.com)

QUESTIONS   RESPONSES   394

The character relationship workshops organized on-site were valuable.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Totally Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Totally Agree

I got intimidated by other players preparing so well.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Totally Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Totally Agree

I felt guilty for underpreparing at some point before, during or after the larp.

Use scales, not questions

Good survey item is…

- Simple statement: "I felt ready to play when the game started."
- Often audacious: "This was my best larp experience ever."
- Often scary: "I have ethical concerns about this game."
- Clear: "The Throne Room act worked well for me."
- Subjective: "Other players' alcohol use detracted from my experience."
- Exactly identical to your previous survey

This is the hardest part

Bad survey item is…

- Complex: "I felt bored but my experience was still great"
- Invalid: "Did you prefer immersive moments or boffer fights?"
- Requires estimation: "Other players had more storylines than I did."
- Uses rocket science words: "I experienced bleed-out in this larp."
- Not actionable: "My co-players played badly."

Two items are often better than one

"The larp was too short."

+

"The larp was too long."

(But there is no need to ask the same thing multiple times)

Background questions

- Which of the following best describes your character?

- Which of the following best describes your larp experience?

- In what year were you born?

- What is your current country of permanent residence?

- Which gender do you most identify as?
  (Agender/None, Female, Male, Non-binary, Decline to state)

Don't require player to answer any of the above

A note on marginalization

- Quantitative methods tend to put the majority in focus

- Anonymity requires critical mass:
  In practice, non-binary players are unlikely to form a segment large enough to be studied anonymously

- Use red-flag items to give a voice to minority viewpoints:
  "I experienced sexual harassment during this larp."

Google Forms is quick, dirty, and great

I had very high expectations for this larp.

Linear scale

1 ▾ to 5 ▾

1 Totally Disagree

5 Totally Agree

Required

3.
Create the Survey

Remember to add introduction

- Motivate the respondent

- Explain the purpose and uses of the survey

- Disclose the person responsible, with contact info

- Describe the anonymity respondents can expect

If you work in the academia, remember to comply with

the ethics guidelines of your institution

This survey is run by Markus Montola (Lodovico of the 1st run, Cambio of the 2nd). He is not a member of the organizer team. He will be the only person to see the raw, identifiable data gathered, and will process and analyze the results in a fashion ensuring that no individual respondents can be identified. Anonymized data can be also used for research purposes, but identifiable responses will never be published anywhere or even shared with the organizer team.

For questions, please contact markus.montola at gmail.com.

Sort your questions logically

1. Introduction

2. Background info

3. Before – during – after the game

4. General questions

5. Open questions

50-70 items or so is alrightish

for a weekend larp

4.
Test the Survey

Conduct a trial with a human subject and get feedback
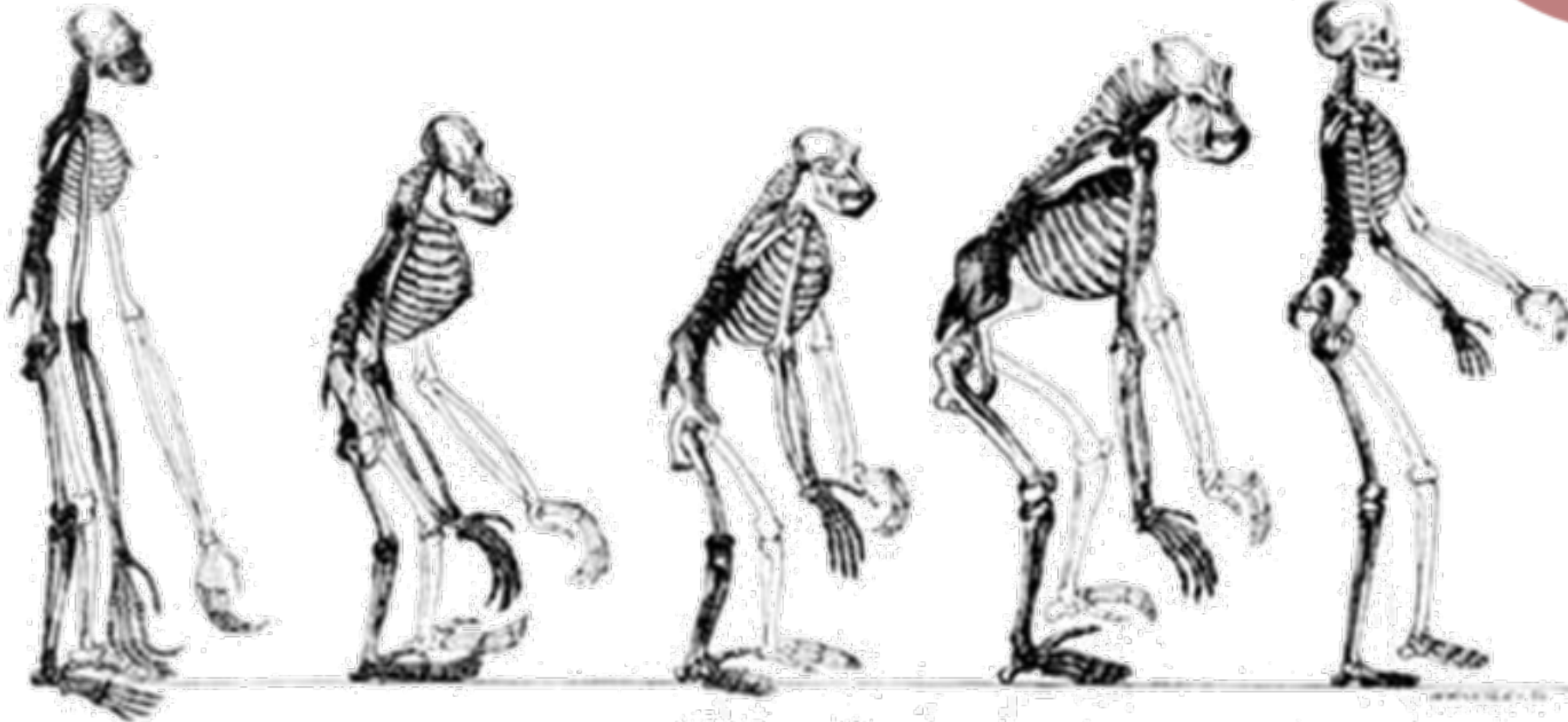
5.
Run the Survey

The easy part

- Make sure the organizers share the post
- Write a nice motivation
- Two weeks of response time is good
- Take notes when respondents complain about your form
- Typical response rate: 50%+

Have a non-organizer run the survey, a person who guarantees that organizers will only receive anonymous result data.

6.
Crunch the Numbers

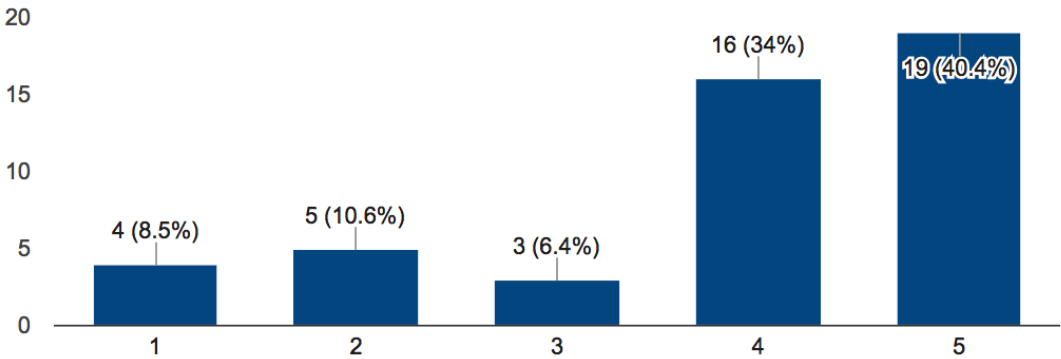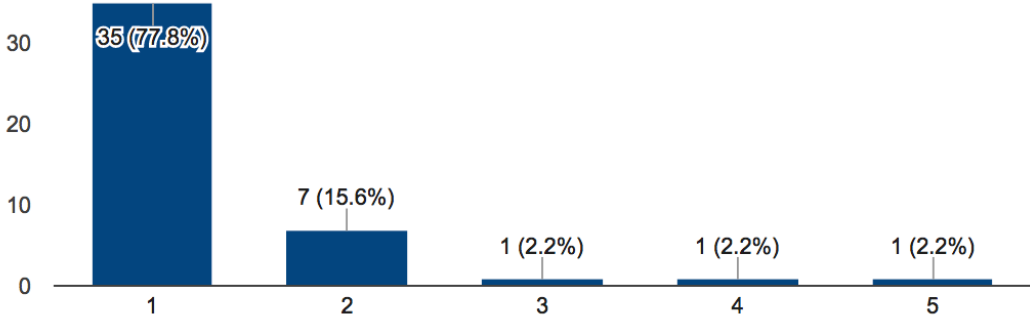|	L	M	N	O
	Your house?	Path?	I had very high expectations for this larp.	I read the design document before the game.
	Molin	Cryptozoologist	5	4
	Faust	Cryptozoologist	3	3
	Faust	Artificier	5	4
	Durentius	Curse Breaker	5	4
	Faust	Artificier	3	5
	Libussa	Artificier	5	5
	Faust	Curse Breaker	5	5
	Durentius	Artificier	5	3
	Faust	Guardian	3	4
	Durentius	Guardian	5	5
	Durentius	Healer	5	5

	A	B	C	D
	Answer	Slice	I had very high expectations for this larp.	I read the design document before the game.
	5	Artificier	0,36	0,86
	4	Artificier		0,07
	3	Artificier	0,14	0,07
	2	Artificier	0,00	0,00
	1	Artificier	0,00	0,00
	5	Cryptozoologist	0,46	0,54
	4	Cryptozoologist	0,31	0,31
	3	Cryptozoologist	0,23	0,08
	2	Cryptozoologist	0,00	0,08
	1	Cryptozoologist	0,00	0,00

= COUNTIFS(Raw!N:N ; $A2 ; Raw!$M:$M ; $B2)
/ COUNTIFS(Raw!N:N; ">0" ; Raw!$M:$M ; $B2)

7.
Eyeball the Numbers

(a.k.a. "analysis")

End of the Line, Helsinki 2016
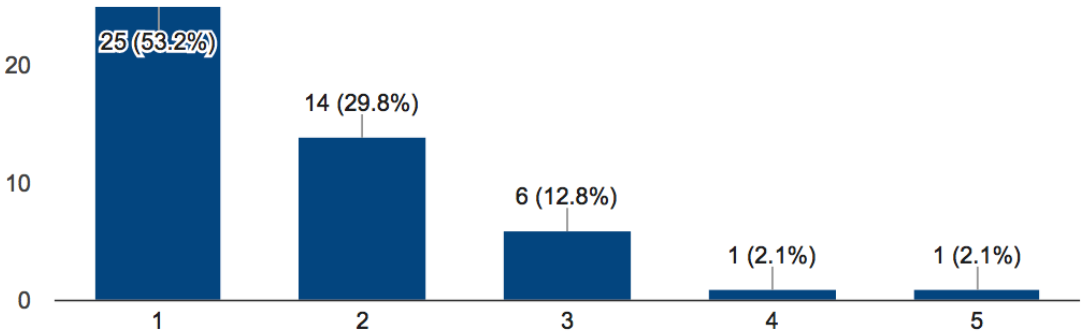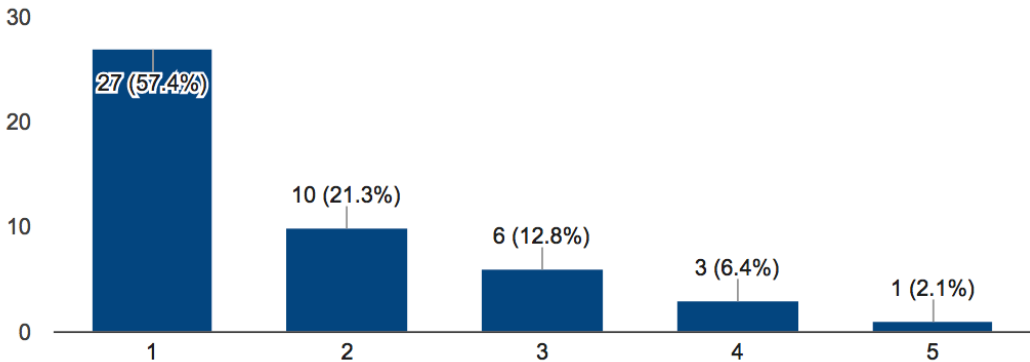
#	Slice	The workshops organized on larp site were valuable.	Workshops were valuable for developing and understanding my character.	Workshops were valuable for developing and understanding social relationships.	I felt uncomfortable at times during the workshop.	I had good experiences in a black box room.	I found it hard to begin scenes in the black box rooms.	Participation in Halat hisar influenced my political opinions.	I notice I read news from Palestine / Israel differently after the larp.	I think I understand the situation in Palestine better after the larp.	I had a great game.	I would recommend this larp to other people with some previous larp experience.
5		0.71	0.39	0.53	0.03	0.39	0.08	0.29	0.32	0.35	0.76	0.92
4		0.29	0.34	0.37	0.32	0.18	0.32	0.29	0.35	0.38	0.18	0.08
3		0.00	0.13	0.08	0.13	0.36	0.16	0.13	0.22	0.22	0.05	0.00
2		0.00	0.13	0.03	0.18	0.00	0.24	0.18	0.11	0.05	0.00	0.00
1		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.34	0.07	0.20	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5	Female	0.74	0.35	0.48	0.04	0.44	0.07	0.30	0.43	0.35	0.70	0.96
4	Female	0.26	0.39	0.39	0.17	0.19	0.20	0.22	0.26	0.43	0.22	0.04
3	Female	0.00	0.17	0.13	0.13	0.25	0.13	0.17	0.22	0.17	0.09	0.00
2	Female	0.00	0.09	0.00	0.26	0.00	0.40	0.17	0.09	0.04	0.00	0.00
1	Female	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.39	0.13	0.20	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5	Male	0.74	0.41	0.53	0.03	0.44	0.09	0.24	0.33	0.30	0.74	0.91
4	Male	0.26	0.32	0.35	0.29	0.12	0.27	0.29	0.33	0.42	0.21	0.09
3	Male	0.00	0.12	0.09	0.09	0.36	0.18	0.15	0.21	0.21	0.06	0.00
2	Male	0.00	0.15	0.03	0.21	0.00	0.27	0.21	0.12	0.06	0.00	0.00
1	Male	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.38	0.08	0.18	0.12	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5	Finland	0.68	0.36	0.59	0.00	0.41	0.13	0.36	0.41	0.45	0.82	0.90
4	Finland	0.32	0.41	0.32	0.45	0.24	0.47	0.27	0.36	0.32	0.14	0.10
3	Finland	0.00	0.14	0.05	0.14	0.29	0.07	0.14	0.09	0.18	0.05	0.00
2	Finland	0.00	0.09	0.05	0.18	0.00	0.20	0.14	0.14	0.05	0.00	0.00
1	Finland	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.06	0.13	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Halat hisar, Otava 2016

8.
Serve with Graphs

College of Wizardry 1

Chart data categories (x-axis labels):
- Women: I feel I missed all the action gameplay.
- Men: I feel I missed all the action gameplay.
- Women: I wanted to have more power and agency in the game.
- Men: I wanted to have more power and agency in the game.
- Women: My character was too central for other players' playing.
- Men: [character was too central for other players'] playing.
- [Women/Men]: [too little to do in the] game.
- Men: I had too little to do in the game.

Legend: ■ Totally Agree ■ Somewhat Agree -- ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Totally Disagree

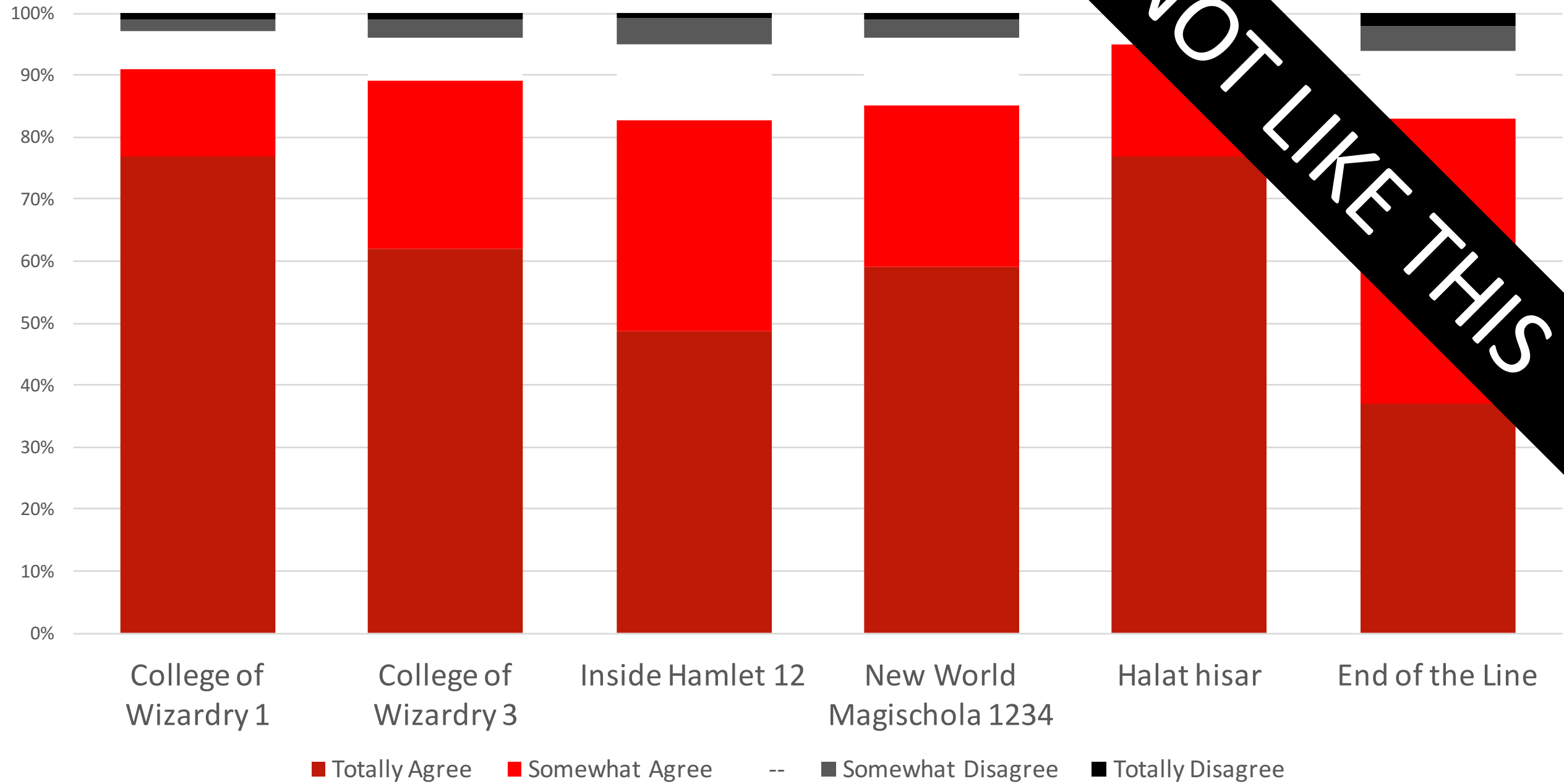# Raw data in larp surveys is not anonymous

Never hand out your raw data

In what year were you born?	What is your current country of permanent residence?	Do you identify as...?	Which of the following best describes your larping experience?	Character type	Your house?	Year?	Path?	I received enough material for my character from the organizers.	Well-preparing players inspired me before the game.	I felt ready to play when the game started.	I would have needed character relationship workshops in Czocha before the game.
1978	Finland	Male	Decade	Student	Faust	Senior	Auror	3	3	1	5

How to Use It?

I had a great larp.

NOT LIKE THIS

Totally Agree   Somewhat Agree   --   Somewhat Disagree   Totally Disagree

College of Wizardry 1 | College of Wizardry 3 | Inside Hamlet 12 | New World Magischola 1234 | Halat hisar | End of the Line

College of Wizardry 1

Legend: Totally Agree — Somewhat Agree — -- — Somewhat Disagree — Totally Disagree

Categories:
- Women: I feel I missed all the action gameplay.
- Men: I feel I missed all the action gameplay.
- Women: I wanted to have more power and agency in the game.
- Men: I wanted to have more power and agency in the game.
- Women: My character was too central for other players' playing.
- Men: My character was too central for other players' playing.
- Women: I had too much to do.
- Men: I had too much to do.
- Women: I had too little to do in the game.
- Men: I had too little to do in the game.

Quick'n'dirty data is just that

- This is customer survey data, no general academic proof
- Concrete information for communication
- Ongoing safety practice evaluation
- Metatechnique evaluation

- Not great for theory formation!

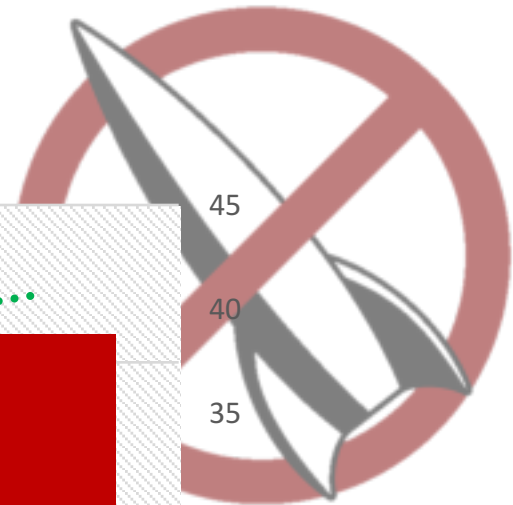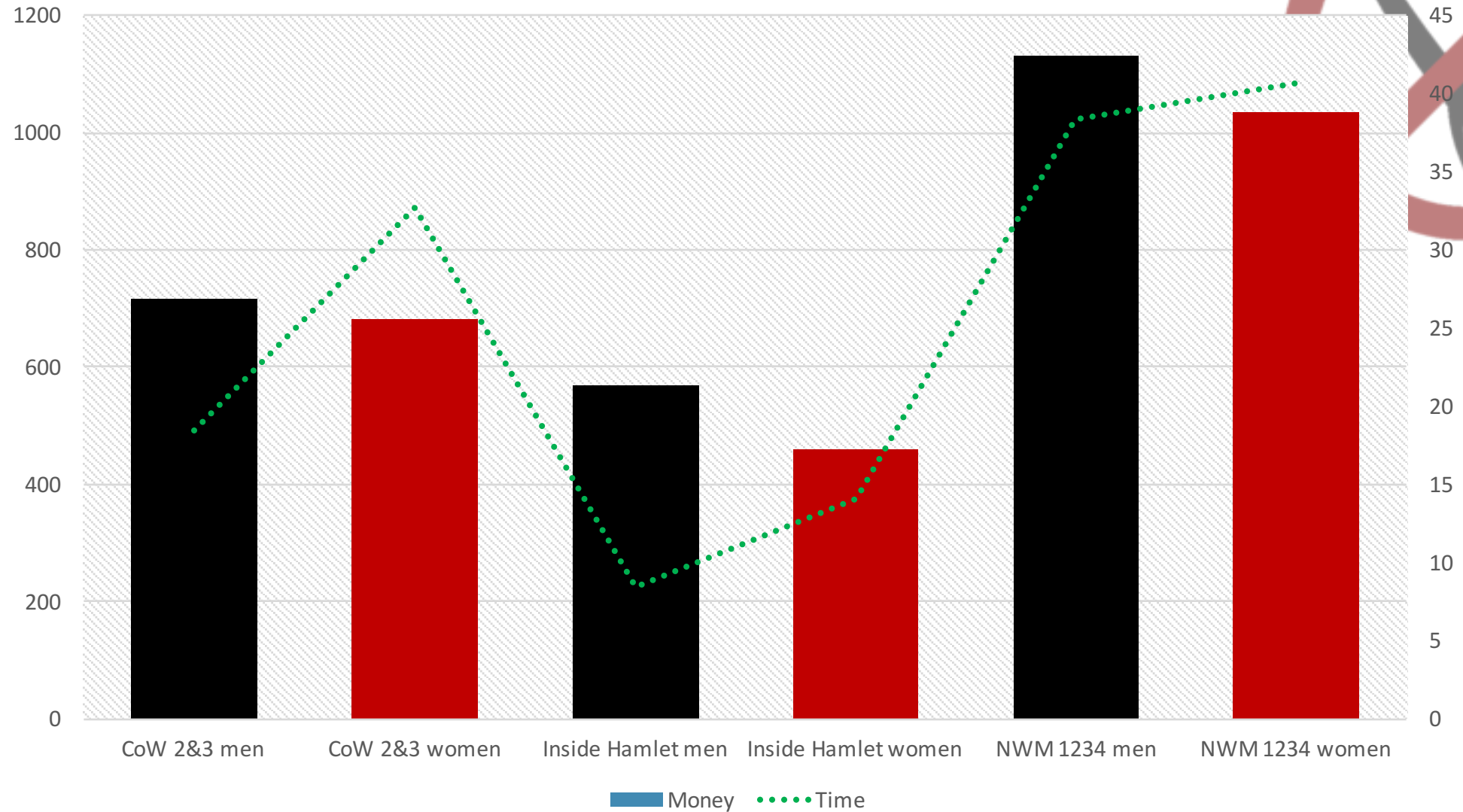# But we know all that without any surveys

"I felt attracted to another player afterwards, due to playing closely together."

(End of the Line, all men / all women.)
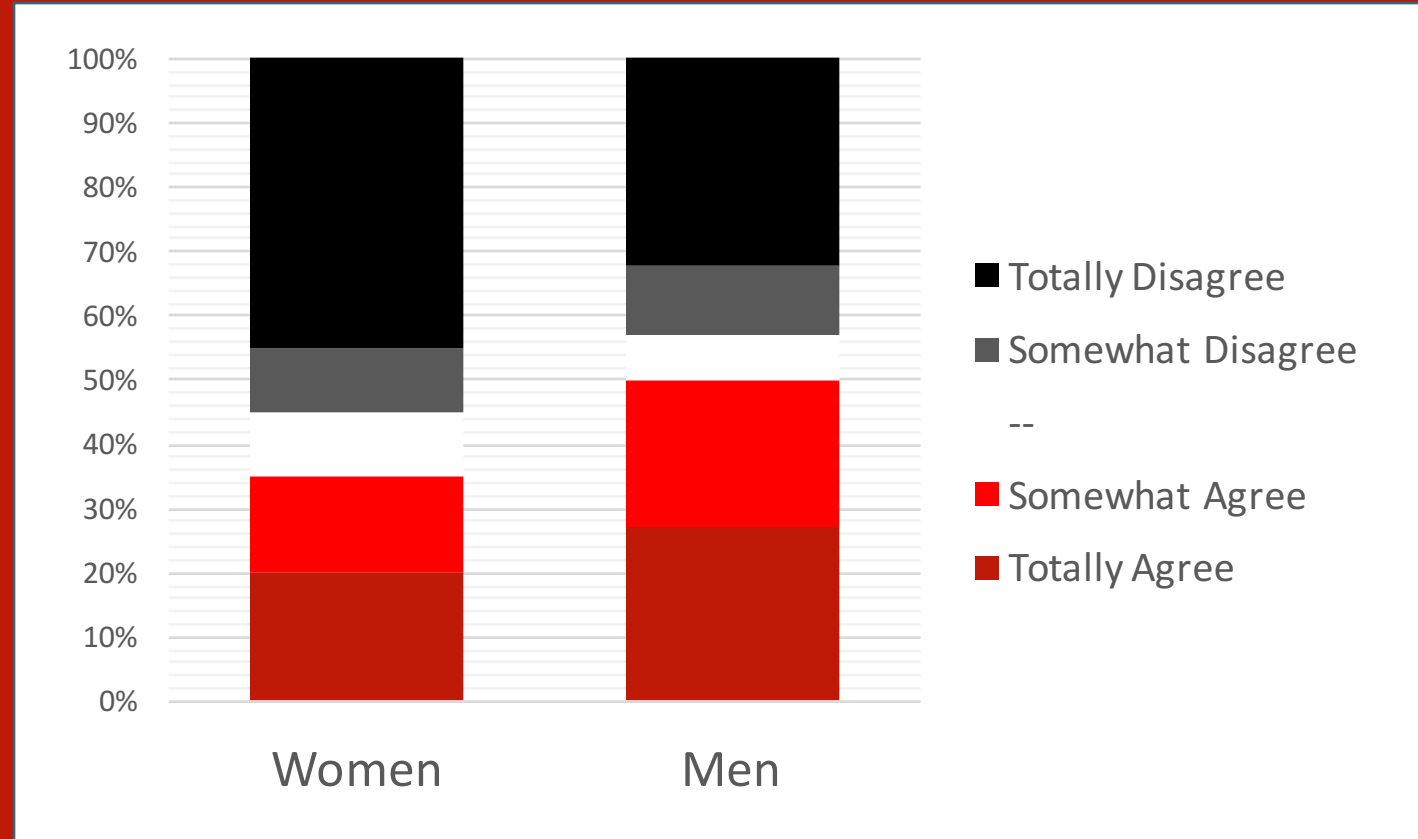
Average Money Spent on larp
Average Time Spent on Costuming & Props

Categories: CoW 2&3 men, CoW 2&3 women, Inside Hamlet men, Inside Hamlet women, NWM 1234 men, NWM 1234 women

Legend: Money, Time

Bonus!
Open Questions

Open Questions

Please take a moment with these questions -- this feedback is most important for the organizer team. But do note you can leave any question unanswered.

What were the best things in your larp?
Besides the castle, please!! :-)
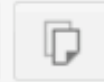
About 5 questions maximum

1. Best things
2. Improvements
3. Specific issues with ethics, safety, or mental well-being
4. Comments on novel designs and techniques

Case: College of Wizardry premiere

- 118 responses
- 9 open questions
- 29 000 words of answers
- "Castle" mentioned 145 times
- "What were the worst things in your larp?"
  - 14 pages of players utterly thrashing the game
  - Including people having just played their "best larp ever"

College of Wizardry was my best larp ever.
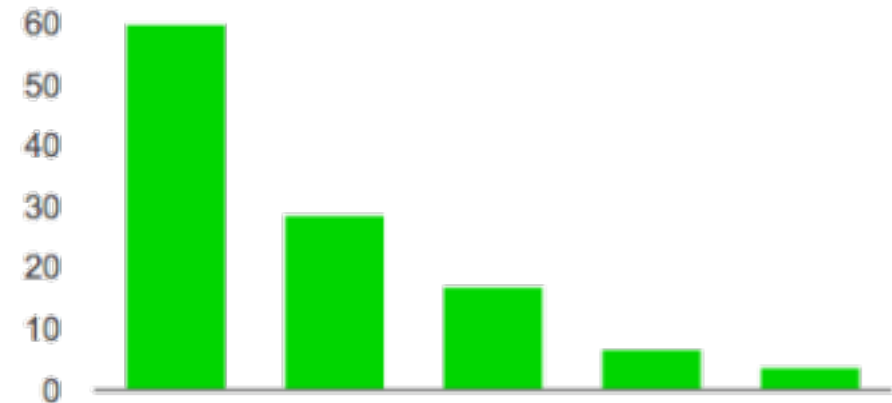
Discussion

You can do it!

- Have my cookbook!

- Have my survey items!
(They are tested, and we can compare results afterwards!)

- Have my Excel sheet!

- BUT don't overgeneralize!

  montola at iki fi

!!! KEINE !!!
RAKETENWISSENSCHAFT

Thank you for listening!

Questions, comments?