



Editorial

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Abstract: *This special edition of the JeDEM focused on Open Government and Open Information brings together a set of papers that contributes to understanding about creating new levels of openness in government and about the related opportunities, challenges, and risks. Collectively the papers inform current thinking about the transformation of government, the challenges and risks of pursuing an openness agenda, and the influence of culture and politics on new technical developments.*

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Concepts and policies that emphasize the idea of openness in terms of open government, open data and open access, are being discussed world-wide with an eye toward their potential to transform the relationship between citizens and government. Opening up government data to respond to interests in greater accountability is seen as a foundational idea for the vitalisation of citizens' interest in politics, and for economic and scientific innovation. Creating new levels of openness in data, access, and processes of governing are expected to lead to more engagement and collaboration within public institutions and the development of respective tools and services.

This special edition of the JeDEM focused on Open Government and Open Information brings together a set of papers that contributes to understanding about creating new levels of openness in government and about the related opportunities, challenges, and risks. Collectively the papers inform current thinking about the transformation of government, the challenges and risks of pursuing an openness agenda, and the influence of culture and politics on new technical developments. They provide insight into the tensions between government data reuse and data protection, the need for political support and clear policies in open government implementation, open government platforms requirements, data retention requirements, and the emerging use of social media. The papers, outlined in more detail below address draw on a range of disciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives to address questions at the intersection of social sciences and technology.

Van der Sloot sets the stage for this special issue on open government, starting with a quote from Bismarck and asking whether people really sleep better if they do not know how sausages and policies are made. He discusses the potential of open government as leverage for transformation, particularly in terms of governmental information reuse. Van der Sloot analyzes the tensions between open government policies and privacy protection policies on the basis of the European legislation, mainly the **Public Sector Information Directive**, the Bern Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works and the **European Data Protection Directive**. His **legal analysis** leads him to conclude that there are fundamental tensions between government data reuse and data protection, and that radical solutions such as prohibition of data reuse or total release of data are not realistic in the European context. He proposes two alternative approaches:

- (i) anonymization, which he deems difficult to implement without making data more or less useless;
- (ii) personal privacy settings, where citizens could decide for themselves how their data could be reused.

After having learned more about the European directives, our readers will have a thorough review of “more or less” open government in the **Anglosphere**. Indeed Francoli discusses examples in Canada, the USA, the United Kingdom and Australia on the basis of a **reactive/proactive model** and in terms of costs, enforcement mechanisms, political support, etc. From the cases she observed she comes to the conclusions that there is a strong need for **political support** (or a so-called champion), as well as the need for clear guidelines or **policies** in order to successfully implement open government. Francoli also stresses that ICT can indeed facilitate the sharing of information but that open government extends beyond technology and that information management should be rethought thoroughly for our digital era.

Sandoval takes a radically different stance on openness of government, by looking at it as a house with a back-door (governments own data and keep them away from citizens) and a front-door (ICT are simple gatekeeping interfaces giving access to all public data). The originality of his **assessment model** lies in the fact that in-between these doors there is a black-box where **information flows** such as data-processing and decision-making are not accessible. He proposes a simple framework to assess different components of open government initiatives, which looks promising but has not been tested empirically yet. Sandoval furthermore looks at the literature on open government according to three directions: access to information, data stewardship and open data.

As mentioned above, ICT allow for easier access to information, but this is not the only contribution of the IT community to open government. Indeed Maier-Rabler and Huber draw on **patterns of thinking** from the **open source software** community that could be applied to **democratic innovation**. They look at generic societal trends such as moving away from passive reception of information through the television towards a more participatory communication and they try to see if this could apply to citizen participation. Maier-Rabler and Huber investigate these potential changes under the lens of **Public Value**, by analyzing connections between various types of stakeholders (such as “civic hackers”) and open data initiatives. They conclude that open data certainly support open citizen innovation, but that there is also a need for **open government platforms**, i.e. infrastructures provided by governments and supporting the emergence of bottom-up citizen initiatives.

It is probably impossible to discuss ICT and government without raising the subject of a Big Brother watching. Röllgen and Bug cover the topic of governmentality and surveillance by surveying the regulations on **data retention** in the UK and Germany. They use the idea of **physical** and **virtual open space** to define where the border between data protection and security might be situated. Röllgen and Bug also stress the importance of “veto players”, such as the German Chaos Computer Club who was asked for a statement on data retention by the German Parliament and the constitutional court, after a group of 35'000 Germans went all the way to the highest court in the country and fought successfully the implementation of the EU directive on data retention.

This issue on open government closes with a **project reflection** on WeGov. Wandhoefer presents the results of a survey that took place within this EU research project. Different types of end-user groups were presented with the initial WeGov eParticipation toolbox and gave their feedback. Furthermore semi-structured interviews were conducted with various members of parliament (in Germany and at the EU level) and their collaborators. The outcomes show that most decision-makers use social networks for public relations, as well as to monitor given topics of discussions. They indeed seemed interested in having **opinion analysis tools** applied to social networks, in addition to the traditional press summaries.

The range of open government related topics and the variety of views on open government presented here, from legal aspects to democratic process; from assessment models to open

platforms, provides new energy and depth to the ongoing debate on open government and open information.

Editors

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