Editorial

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Welcome to this special issue of JeDEM focusing on "Open Government and the Open Government Partnership." The concept of open government has a long history and has become increasingly multifaceted in recent years. Early incarnations focused specifically on transparency measures with the term being used in countries such as the United States and Canada in reference to the establishment of freedom of information legislation. In 2009, this expanded in the United States when President Obama issued the Open Government Directive. While transparency continued to be a key component of open government under the directive, it became intimately tied to participation and collaboration.

The concept expanded again in 2011 with the establishment of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). Transparency, participation, and collaboration grew to include citizen empowerment, anti-corruption, and an emphasis on the use of new technology to strengthen government. The OGP has grown quickly in membership. It started with eight founding members in 2011. Today its membership includes 74 national level governments and 15 subnational governments.

The OGP has become an important initiative for domestic reformers committed to making their governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens. Over 150 government action plans for improving openness have been submitted to the OGP. These plans contain approximately 2800 commitments. However, an initiative of this scale, spanning many jurisdictions, administrative heritage and societal cultures has many challenges. Open government progresses at differing speeds. This variation in progress is clearly reflected in the submissions we received to this special issue.

The issue begins with a foreword by Sanjay Pradhan, the CEO of the OGP, and Munyema Hasan, Manager of the Knowledge, Learning, Innovation and Capacity Building Program at the OGP. They touch on some of the achievements that have been seen across OGP members and highlight continuing challenges. Among these is the need for additional research and evidence in a range of areas related to open government. Here, we see an appeal to academics and researchers to help fill this gap.

Following Pradhan and Hasan, Wilson (2017) takes up the issue of civic engagement across 61 OGP countries. His article "Looking Whos Talking: Assessing Civic Voice and Interaction in OGP Commitments" questions "How meaningful are OGP commitments to civic interaction in the context of accountable, transparent and responsive governance." Ultimately, he found little evidence that the OGP is leading to meaningful civic engagement outside of consultations held around the establishment of OGP action plans.

In "Intersection of Open Data and Freedom of Information practice in Nigeria" Mejabi et al (2017) present results from a survey in which several stakeholder groups connected to the online national budget of Nigeria were asked to respond to questions of awareness and use of open data and the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, which was established already in 2007 and predates Nigeria's involvement in the OGP. Poor usage of the FOIA in Nigeria to enforce the OGP accountability promise is influenced by factors such as non-compliance of the head of government and public institutions charged with supplying information on requests, and hesitation by many government MDAs in supplying the information requested for.

In the final research paper of this issue, Chatwin and Arku (2017) provide an in-depth analysis of the way in which definitions of open government have changed over time and in different contexts. They propose a framework for planning and evaluating open government reforms. Consideration of such frameworks is useful as OGP members move forward with future action plans and reflect on the impact of past commitments. As Chatwin and Arku note, there is limited research on the impact of reforms made under OGP commitments.

Finally, Korshun (2017) provides a reflection piece that escapes the localised view on a particular implementation of OGP principles and approaches the problem field from a theoretical information approach. Extrapolating from the political and administrative sphere in the Ukraine, she claims that participation in the OGP leads to rapid changes in the relationship between people and the state and that the society will inevitably be fully transparent in the future. She criticizes current information protection laws as difficult to observe. According to her, as it is already impossible to deny the use of personal information for business or social engineering purposes, its preservation would harm the entire legislative system and the state in whole. Starting from that assumption, she then starts to draft the contours of a fully transparent society. For her, open data serves as a "convincing argument for the rest of the world" that full openness will outweigh perceived drawbacks of possible reductions to the right to information privacy and lead towards the building of a fully open society.

This special issue of JeDEM contributes to the ongoing dialogue regarding the impact of OGP on the way that openness is unfolding worldwide. Issues related to the OGP process and the implementation of OGP commitments are raised as a means of what has worked well, or not so well as the case may be, in the first six years of OGP. Such critical analysis is vital to the question of *how can we collectively do better moving forward*? We hope that this issue scratches the surface in addressing the knowledge gap discussed by Pradhan and Hasan, and that it motivates continued research in this area.

About the Editors

Mary Francoli is an Associate Professor of Communication and Media Studies, at Carleton University. She holds a doctorate in Political Science from Western University and is currently a member of the International Expert Panel for the OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism. Her research looks at the relationship between digital media and issues related to politics and governance. While this is a large and diverse field, most of her research has focused on the way that digital media has impacted three broad areas: (1) citizen engagement and mobilization, (2) governance, and (3) access to information and data.

Johann Höchtl was a fellow at the Department of E-Governance of Danube University Krems for ten years. He is an Austrian open data advocate and has held workshops for multiple Austrian federal ministries to convey the benefits and risks of open government data. By appointment of the Austrian chancellery, he actively engaged in the standardisation of open data by contributing to the metadata formalisation of open government data where he was responsible for aligning the description envelope to the back then emerging DCAT-AP description and to define the meaning of metadata descriptions by assigning well-known and established semantic annotations. He created and operated an open data quality assessment tool which was continuously monitoring open data quality. At European Data forum 2016 he presented an improved public policy cycle of continuous evaluation to better account for data analytics advances in public policymaking. He is currently working for Austrian Chambers of Commerce as a data architect and to improve performance metrics dashboards.