JeDEM Issue 17 (1): i-ii, 2025
ISSN 2075-9517
http://www.jedem.org

Editorial - Volume 17, Issue 1

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Welcome to Issue 17, Volume 1 of JeDEM, eJournal of eDemocracy and Open Government. With particular emphasis on citizen engagement, transparency, and accountability, this ongoing issue contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities of open government policies, digital governance applications and services, and e-participation initiatives.

We begin this issue with an examination of how the open government movement intersects with the ideals of liberal democracy. Although having the potential to address challenges like populism, democratic backsliding, and political polarisation, open government policies can have unintended consequences, such as superficial transparency and digital divides. Employing natural language processing techniques, Lee-Geiller et al. analyse open government policy documents from 75 Open Government Partnership member countries. The authors uncover a shift away from neoliberal models of governance towards more inclusive and participatory frameworks through policies that seek to advance innovation and citizen participation. Lee-Geiller et al., conclude by calling for further studies to explore the actual impact of such policies on democratic practices.

On this note, we proceed to an analysis of digital governance applications, particularly how citizen-centric tools are being integrated into governance. Navaratna et al. map out the evolution of digital governance from traditional public management to citizen-centric e-governance, emphasising challenges like usability, trust, and inadequate integration of citizen feedback. Exploring the potential of leveraging AI and sentiment analysis for citizen-driven app development, the authors assess ten applications using 15 self-declaration parameters and sentiment analysis algorithms using VADER and RoBERTa techniques, with data sourced from the Google Play Store. Their findings reveal discrepancies between developers' claims and user experiences, particularly in data handling, sharing, and user data deletion.

Having glimpsed at open government policies on the macro level and the potential of digital tools to drive open government, we now turn to Thapaliya et al. mixed-methods study on e-government services in improving public service delivery. Assessing the efficiency, transparency, and user satisfaction of the Electronic Building Permit System in Kathmandu, the study identifies ease of access, service quality and efficiency instrumental to establishing user trust and engagement with digital

platforms. However, challenges in user participation, such as digital literacy, and system accessibility, such as connectivity issues remain. Future studies should track changes in user perceptions and the long-term effectiveness of e-government services.

We continue this issue with two studies on e-participation. Molobela investigates the potential and challenges of e-participation platforms within South Africa. Although these platforms have the ability to enhance citizen engagement, transparency, and accountability, barriers such as inadequate digital infrastructure, high mobile data costs, and limited digital literacy hamper progress. Disparities between urban and rural municipalities are especially pronounced and contribute to a persistent digital divide. To address these challenges, Molobela recommends conducting digital gap assessments, partnering with network providers to establish affordable public Wi-Fi, integrating social media with traditional communication, and prioritising awareness of e-participation platforms.

In a systematic literature review, Ietto et al. review stakeholder objectives and evaluation approaches of municipal e-participation initiatives. Through analysing empirical cases, the authors develop a typology of categories and evaluation methods. They identify gaps in current e-participation evaluation frameworks and propose a comprehensive framework that aligns evaluation methods with stakeholder objectives, emphasising the importance of diverse categories, integration of benchmarks and evidence-based methods. Ietto et al. suggest that future research could expand to include other stakeholders, like specific business partners or additional local government bodies.

Finally, in keeping with JeDEM's recurring focus on elections, we conclude this issue with a sentiment analysis of the 2021 local government election campaign. Matloga et al. evaluate Twitter posts on four political parties using, as in the study by Navaratna et al., VADER and RoBERTa techniques, in addition to TextBlob. Furthermore, the authors use the K-Means method to distinguish between human and bot-generated tweets. OpenAI GPT aids in dataset labelling and handling class imbalance. Findings show significant sentiment variation over time, with RoBERTa providing the most accurate results. Most tweets were from real users, while bot-generated tweets were fewer but predominantly negative. The study offers insights into political campaign strategies based on public sentiment trends.

These studies reveal the complexities of digital governance and citizen engagement, balancing innovation with persistent challenges. By reflecting on both progress and gaps, they offer insights grounded in real-world experiences, encouraging deeper inquiry and practical approaches to more transparent, inclusive governance

