

Chapter 26

The Development of Open Government Data in Austria

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ABSTRACT

Open Government Data has become an integral part for European governments at all federal levels. However, varying jurisdictions and government structures have also contributed to different operational models. The UK is pursuing a more central approach, expressing political will through its prime minister and with the ODI providing the technical and organisational framework. Austria is a much more federated country, yet also on the edge of OGD. This chapter presents the inception of OGD in Austria, the informal approach of OGD consensus finding, OGD specifications, organisational setting, and harmonisation approaches in the DACH and pan-European region.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Open Government Data (OGD) in Austria has its origins in the digital administration of federal law in Austria (Rechtsinformationssystem, RIS). This system became one of the first large-scale ICT projects in administration providing complete, unabridged information for everybody. The origins of the RIS go back to 1973. At this time information technology (IT) was exclusively used as a tool to help the governmental

system to deal with its paperwork, but since then much has changed. Administering data without technical support is nowadays inconceivable. Nowadays “RIS is an excellent open-access official government website managed by the Austrian Federal Chancellery that provides comprehensive access not only to national laws, but also to European community law, and the judicature of high courts, commissions and tribunals” (“IALL 2013 Website Award Winner,” 2013). As of 2004, basic project information has been online and since

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April 2012 all the legal information has been universally accessible as OGD. A year after RIS was released as OGD, five software applications were implemented based on information obtained from the database. Today, Austria's OGD portal www.data.gv.at presents among more than 1,400 data sets. However, raw data is only useful for a tiny fraction of the society: it's the reusable information which can be intelligently combined and presented using electronic devices (Open Knowledge Foundation, 2012).

Before delving into the history of OGD in Austria and processes in place, it is important to distinguish between data and metadata portals. The primary function of a data portal is storing data and administering the corresponding metadata. Data portals can evaluate the contents of data and are able to link them to specific matters. The main task of metadata portals is to provide a service to interconnect these individual data portals (Braunschweig, Eberius, Thiele, & Lehner, 2012, sec. 4.1). The uniform description of data at every data portal supports the creation of a central administration portal.

CONCEPT OF OPEN GOVERNMENT DATA

Open Data permits third party to use someone's data freely. When this service is provided by the government or the bureaucratic system, it is called Open Government Data. OGD is non-personal information which might be used to leverage public welfare, to tackle large-scale societal challenges or for personal economic interests. The goal of this process is to conceive the government as a platform of useable information for its citizens (Lucke, von & Geiger, 2010).

The goal of Open Government Data is to strengthen democracy and to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of different types of administrative processes (Office of the President

of the United States, 2012). In this respect, the level of participation is important. Participation means incorporating people's interests and respective knowledge in the bureaucratic process. All of these means – from open information to the actual vote – should simplify complex matters, so that a vast majority of citizens are able to understand and follow the decision making process (Janssen, Charalabidis, & Zuiderwijk, 2012). Decisions based on Open Data should yield better results and should be better understood by the people who are affected by these decisions.

COOPERATION OGD AUSTRIA

The federal co-operation on E-Government issues in Austria has a long history and goes beyond legal obligations between the state, provinces, cities and municipalities. The platform "Digital Austria" (<http://www.digitales.oesterreich.gv.at/>) was specifically created to coordinate the co-operation of E-Government affairs between these administrative entities. This formal structure was successful in working out specifications in the area of E-Government. However, when incepting the OGD process in Austria, concerns about the relatively inflexible structure of the E-Government processes resulting from a hierarchical system were raised. Open Government initiatives are often bottom-up and difficulties are solved in a cooperative working process, sometimes lacking political legitimation (Teorell, 2006, p. 789).

On July 13th 2011 the Austrian Chancellery and the cities Vienna, Linz, Salzburg, and Graz established the open-ended "Cooperation OGD Austria." Involved in the process were the "Open Knowledge Forum Austria (OKFN-AT)," a precursor to the Open Knowledge Foundation Chapter Austria, "Danube-University Krems" (Center of E-Governance) and the "open3.at" association. The cooperation OGD Austria represents the federal, regional, urban and municipality interests

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