

Does open data alone lead to open government?¹

by Aikaterini Yannoukakou²

Since the launch of “data.gov” in 2009 and “data.gov.uk” in 2010, there has been an intense discussion among politicians, public servants, academics, IT specialists and law specialists on open data and open government. Governments embraced open data as the new de facto revolution that will change the way of governing leading to a more open, transparent and participative government, thus democracy.

According to Open Knowledge Foundation open data is defined as “*data that can be freely used, reused and redistributed by anyone - subject only, at most, to the requirement to attribute and sharealike*”. However, this definition is not conclusive enough to qualify which data can be assign as open. For that reason, in 2007 the *Open Government Working Group* issued *eight* (8) principles with which open data should comply with. So the data must be complete, primary, timely, accessible, machine processable, non-discriminatory, non-proprietary, and license free.

The movement Open Government Data (OGD) demands greater transparency and liberation of data. Open government relies on the disclosure, accessibility and re-use of governmental information in any format available and by any means available. The core of open government is the data themselves. However, does the liberation of raw government data lead to open government? The main problem with OGD relies on the fact that they are released in various formats (i.e. csv, xml, pdf, excel), use different vocabularies and are accompanied by metadata of varying quality without adopting a uniform standardization prototype. This results into an inherent predicament for the access, re-use and combination of data from different sources in order to develop an application.

However, true open government –or in other words “democratic” government– requires a lot more than opening up data and leaving data somewhere on the Internet to be found. Open data is only an ingredient in the mix of open government siding with access to data, freedom of expression and press, right to information and re-use of public sector information.

So how can governments move from open data to open government? This paper’s objective is to denote under which circumstances the releasing of data can lead to open government and which is their relation with right to information, privacy and data protection, citizen engagement, records management and other cross cutting issues. Also, we will see how Linked Open Data can resolve the problems of access and re-use by facilitating the opening, linking, and reusing of data from heterogeneous sources. Finally, we will examine whether the Directive 2013/37E/EU and the Communication 2011/882/EC fill in the legislative void and enable the opening, access and re-used of public sector information.

¹ The title is inspired by the article “Why open data doesn’t mean open government?” by Eleanor Ross published in Guardian on December 2nd, 2015.

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