Open government data practices: Producing ‘open publics’ through civic hacking

Juliane Jarke, PhD.
My project

• Develop an understanding of open government data practices as performing associations across a multitude of heterogeneous entities such as information systems, government data, policies, open data advocates, NGOs, social workers, civil servants, system developers, code, journalists, apps, algorithms (and many more).

• Early stage of project.
Agenda

1) What is open government data?
2) Why do I look at open government data *practices*?
3) What is civic hacking and why is it interesting?
4) Thoughts/considerations on the production of open publics and civic hackers
1) Open government data

- ‘Open data is data that can be freely used, re-used and redistributed by anyone’ (Open Data Handbook, 2012)

- Based on
  - Freedom of Information Act (FoIA)
  - Transparency Act (TA)
1) Open government data

- Public data has significant potential for re-use in new products and services. Overall economic gains from opening up this resource could amount to € 40 billion a year in the EU;
- **Addressing societal challenges** – having more data openly available will help us discover new and innovative solutions;
- **Achieving efficiency gains** through sharing data inside and between public administrations;
- **Fostering participation** of citizens in political and social life and increasing transparency of government'.

Digital Agenda for Europe
Participating countries
Open Data Atlas

Zeige auf der Karte:

- Die Bundesländer mit
  Open Data Portalen
  in Deutschland

Hat kein Open Data Portal
Hat ein Open Data Portal

50% der Bundesländer
68% der Bevölkerung

16 Einträge
- Baden-Württemberg
- Bayern
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1) Open government data in Germany

(Status 12.12.2014) (Source: www.open-data-map.de)

Dr. Juliane Jarke – Email: jarke@uni-bremen.de at Data Power Conference – 22nd – 23rd June 2015, Sheffield, UK
1) Open government data in Germany

http://transparenz.hamburg.de/transparenzgesetz-hamburg/4377606/artikel-statistiken/

http://transparenz.hamburg.de
2) Open government data practices

• Data do not just exist but rather data are ‘generated’ (Manovich, Gitelman and Jackson 2013)
  • Despite familiar processes of data definition, data collection, data compiling, data storing, data processing, data mining and data visualization an important aspect in each of these processes are practices associated with the interpretation of data.
  • Gitelman and Jackson (2013) argue that “data need to be imagined as data to exist and function as such, and the imagination of data entails an interpretive base” (p.3, emphasis in original). This imagination of data is articulated “against the seamlessness of phenomena” (ibid).
2) Open government data *practices*

- "If practices are foregrounded there is no longer a single passive object in the middle, waiting to be seen from the point of view of seemingly endless series of perspectives. Instead, objects come into being – and disappear – with the practices in which they are manipulated" (Mol 2003, p.5).

- An object is not just ‘a thing, a material entity composed of more or less well-structured stuff’ (Star 2010, p.603) rather its **materiality is derived from action**. Objects are ‘a set of work arrangements that are at once material and processual’ (p.604).
2) Open government data *practices*

- Which actors are (not) engaged in the production and consumption of open government data?

- ✤ Example: Civic hacking
3) Civic hackers are

• ... anybody ‘who is willing to collaborate with others to create, build, and invent open source solutions using publicly released data, code and technology to solve challenges'\(^1\) relevant to their neighbourhoods, cities or states

• ... software developers, designers, journalists, data experts, visualisation experts, political activists

\(^1\) http://hackforchange.org/page/about
3) Civic Hacking: “Coding a better government”

source: Achim Tack
Stadt<entwickler />* bauen Digitale Werkzeuge für ihre Community
Bürger baut Stadt. (beta)
Finde geplante Bauvorhaben in deinem Kiez.

http://codefor.de/projekte/2011-12-31-buergerbautstadt.html
4) What publics and what civic engagement?

- “public connections” (Couldry et al., 2007)
  - The point of our research has been to ask people: what makes up their public world? How are they connected to that world? And how are media involved, or not, in sustaining that connection to a public world (as they understand it)?
  - as the constitutive element of the public sphere, and as the key empirical precondition of civic engagement

- “networked publics” (Baym and Boyd, 2012)
  - individuals are increasingly interconnected with each other
  - the ways in which technology structures them introduces distinct affordances that shape how people engage with these environments

- “calculated publics” (Gillespie, 2014)
  - how the algorithmic presentation of publics back to themselves shape a public's sense of itself, and who is best positioned to benefit from that knowledge
  - “when the data is us, what should we make of the associations that algorithms claim to identify about us as a society -- that we did not know, or perhaps did not want to know?”
4) Producing open publics and civic hackers

- Public as a group of people to which information is made available
  - Different publics for administrations and activists?
  - The public is ‘othered’, the citizen is always somebody else (not the hacker, not the civil servant)
  - Looking for ‘real life problems’

T*: Which problems would the city of Hamburg like to be resolved?
U*: What do you mean by ‘the city of Hamburg’?
T*: I know there are over 60 ministries...
(T in conversation with a civil servant)

T*: What do you like in the city and what bothers you?
(T to participants of coding event)
4) Producing open publics and civic hackers

The playground desert app was very interesting; in particular for the South of Hamburg. But then, this may be because the most active mapper live and work in central Hamburg.

(A*, CodeForHamburg)
4) Producing open publics and civic hackers

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(A*, CodeForHamburg)

- Reflective accounts about hacking activities and the fact that data construct rather than represent reality. The construction of this reality is also understood to take place in very situated practices (and contexts).
4) What is open data and for who?

- Does open data need to be machine readable?
  - Machine readable, raw data vs. selective, processed publication (e.g. reports as PDF)
- Openness is performative as it depends on the skills and expertise of the data user.
  - Technical dimension (e.g. openness for algorithms, scraper)
  - Thematic dimension (e.g. understanding the context in which data was produced, but also the context of its potential use – design implications)

We are not the public.

(B*, CodeForHamburg)
4) CodeForGermany... Organising expertise

- Data teams need to be interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary, yet there is a big issue about organising these.
- Participation in activities already requires technical expertise to know when and where people are meeting. Who is coming and what their interests are.
- Negotiate in different collaborative spaces: Slack, Etherpad, Meetups.

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Dr. Juliane Jarke – Email: jarke@uni-bremen.de at Data Power Conference – 22nd – 23rd June 2015, Sheffield, UK
Thank you.

• History of open government data practices

• How does civic hacking
  • (aim to) accomplish social benefits through technical means?
  • perform ‘open government data’?
  • perform ‘open publics’ and ‘open government’?

source: Stanley Zheng
References


