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How to build local open government?!

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Keywords

Abstract/ Executive Summary:

From town/city halls, national governments to central government public agencies, governments are working on innovative solutions to the most stringent and pressing problems their citizens face. In doing so, governments are generating great things and creating institutions that focus on the future. Unfortunately, too often public servants focus on the performance of the current system, and reject experimentation and innovation. Resistance to change and getting out of comfort zone is still a 'painful' exercise across both developed and developing countries. However, it is today more than ever, that public sector requires reforms which are co-created and co-designed together with citizens who are going to be affected by those reforms. This opens up an entire new paradigm shift in the way central and local governments interact and engage with their citizens on the problems/issues/challenges.

Opening up governments, particularly at city level or local level is seen as a promising practice – given that the more local you go the easier is to implement/pilot/test reforms, is easier to engage with citizens, easier to partner with key stakeholders and get problems being 'owned' by the community.

Local open government is not an easy task: it is a change in culture of the public sector and current theories and practices of public administration indicate that public servants need new competencies and the capacity to play several roles. They are required to play the role of researchers (while planning, working with open data and evaluating the participation process), role of facilitators with good knowledge and experience of participative tools and citizen-centred approaches as well as to be ICT literate in order to be able to learn and interact with citizens in variety of new ways including via mobile and web. It is without any doubt that information technology is changing the relationship between citizens, politicians and public servants. And these changes are crucial … ICTs are creating a more networked society, enabling greater collaboration with citizens. All these have a wide-ranging impact on how public services are organized and delivered, and in turn, determine the quality of life of the regular citizens. Are local governments ready for becoming more open and transparent and engage with citizens in new ways?!

The main purpose of this paper is to present some already existent practices when it comes to local open governments particularly in Europe, look into the 'history' of open government, see how Open Government Partnership (OGP) member countries are going local with their open government commitments and analyse ways local governments could embrace the core values and principles of open government in practice.

1. How 'new' is the concept of 'open government'?!

The concepts of openness, transparency and accountability are not new: they take us back to the old times of the Athenian democracy[1] in which citizens and the community-at-large managed to have access to oversight of public goods and funds, as well as to the information about income of all public servants or public figures (including generals). It was the people who used to elect/chose their auditors, financial controllers of the treasury, and judges and this system of accountability was a complete contrast with nearly all other governments in the ancient times, which were known for being abusive, corrupt, lacked transparency and accountability and used their position and power for getting personal enrichment and benefits.

In England, the Magna Carta[2], which was signed in 1215, introduced the first standards of accountability in government by forcing King John to accept the basic principle according to which taxes should not be raised without first consulting his wealthy subjects – "Traditionally, the king had always consulted the barons before raising taxes (as they had to collect it) and demanding more men for military service (as they had to provide the men)[3]". So, it can be seen that some process of consultation existed in place, not necessarily involving the citizens directly but implied consultations with those who knew citizens' situation and their capacity to pay taxes.

Debates around open government also take us back to the time of the European Enlightenment – "a European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries; this period became critical, reforming, and eventually revolutionary. Locke and Jeremy Bentham in England, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Voltaire in France, and Thomas Jefferson in America all contributed to an evolving critique of the arbitrary, authoritarian state and to sketching the outline of a higher form of social organization, based on natural rights and functioning as a political democracy"[4].

For the past thirty years or so, the term 'open government' being formulated as alternate to 'Freedom of Information' and 'Access to Information", has been frequently mentioned by the British Government and parliamentary agendas as per Chapman and Hunt, 2006.

Open government has been mentioned in the Open Government Principle: applying the right to know under Constitution (October, 1957). The George Washington Law Review – "both

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[1] http://www.democracyweb.org/accountability/history.php
[2] Great Charter
[3] http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/magna_carta.htm
[4] http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/188441/Enlightenment

major parties in recent platforms have promised to free government information pertaining to the national government"[5]; (Joseph W, Thomas – 1974-1975) describes Open Government as "open to public scrutiny the decision processes of the federal government" in the "Open Government Laws: An Insider's View[6]";

Carl Popper (1961)[7] used to make references to social institutions which needed be recognized as man-made, and about the fact that it is up to people not to sit back and leave the entire responsibility for ruling the world to human or superhuman authority. On the contrary, they have to be ready to share the burden of responsibility for identifying problems and solutions to them and co-create policies that are going to affect them, thus, building an open society. Piotrowski (2007) on the other hand, states that the desire for an open government is driven by the notion that, as taxpayers, citizens have the right to know what is being paid for and what is being paid in their stead.[8]

The well-known philanthropist George Soros (2014),[9] used to reflect on a societal conceptual framework which according to him is based on two principles: fallibility and reflexivity – both might be well in line with the type of thinking citizens need in for building in place an open government.

While several references are out there on the principles of open government which may well take us to the times of philosophical legislators of antiquity and up to today's global leaders, it is important to analyse what does this term stand for today, as of 2014. So, **"**Open Government" is seen and perceived by many today rather as a "revolution", as a transformation, a kind of metamorphosis of government – citizens' relationship, driven by agents of change and open minded reformers who are in turn, guided by the core principles of transparency, accountability, openness, collaboration and innovation. Open government is seen as a platform for improving government capacity and public administration reforms (OECD, 2011). The OECD also defines open government as 'the transparency of government actions, the accessibility of government services and information and the responsiveness of government to new ideas, demands and needs."

This is especially relevant given the nature of the changes that took place in the public administration during the last twenty years or so: these changes have completely re-arranged

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[5] http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/gwlr26&div=10&id=&page=
[6] http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/nclr53&div=22&id=&page=
[7] http://www.inf.fu-berlin.de/lehre/WS06/pmo/eng/Popper-OpenSociety.pdf
[8] Advancing excellence and public trust in government, edited by Caleb M. Clark
[9] http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1350178X.2013.859415#.UtWaNNIW2eE

the geo-political agenda and socio-economic medium as well. While just few decades ago the "State" and central government in general, have been seen by the citizenry as being necessary engines for growth, innovation, development, progress – these tendencies have slowly but steadily changed recently and the governments are being rather portrayed more and more often in negative terms. Humanity has been witnessing the un-precedential levels of corruption in several countries around the globe, lack of transparency and accountability, lack of citizen engagement in decision-making processes, and with the latest economic recession waves – all have greatly challenged the role, scope and size of the public sector. That role has also changed given the continuously increasing citizens' demand for openness, control over important policy issues, and their stronger voice in the reforms' agenda both domestically and internationally.

On one hand, the idea of "open government" draws partly from the philosophy and methodology of the "open source" programming movement[10] and recent developments around the theory of open source governance, which advocates for the application of free software and which, as a movement aims at promoting democratic principles by enabling interested citizens to get more directly involved in the legislative process. "Just as open source software allows users to change and contribute to the source code of their software," according to Lathrop and Ruma, "open government now means government where citizens not only have access to information, documents, and proceedings, but can also become participants in a meaningful way". Why this is relevant to the open government debate, it is because the main characteristics of the open source movement *are transparency, participation, and collaboration*.

In line with the above, the *"Vision for public services"* by the European Commission[11] clearly states that "opening up and sharing assets - making data, services and decisions open - enables collaboration and increases bottom-up, participative forms of service design, production and delivery. The kind of public sector organisation that is at the heart of this transformation is *open government*, based on the principles of *collaboration, transparency and participation* and functioning within an open governance framework".

On an international scale organizations such as OECD (as already mentioned above), the UN,

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[10] http://www.ctg.albany.edu/publications/journals/dgo2011_opengov/dgo2011_opengov.pdf

[11] A vision for public services Draft version dated 13/06/2013, EUROPEAN COMMISSION Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology
- http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/vision-public-services

the World Bank and the Open Government Partnership (OGP)[12] have been specifically addressing this new paradigm of collaborative design and production of public policies and services, and thus, they managed to get most governments in the developed world embark on the path towards open government. On a European scale, the eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015[13] identifies core four political priorities, among which *empower citizens* and businesses, by supporting the transition of eGovernment into a new generation of open, flexible and collaborative seamless eGovernment services at local, regional, national and European level. The plan also recognises that social networking and collaborative tools enable users to play an active role in the design and production of public services. "There is clearly a need to move towards a more open model of design, production and delivery of online services, taking advantage of the possibility offered by collaboration between citizens, entrepreneurs and civil society. The combination of new technologies, open specifications, innovative architectures and the availability of public sector information can deliver greater value to citizens with fewer resources" – states the Action Plan.

The eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015 of the European Commission reminds us of the fact that both developed and developing countries are being impacted by an "information revolution", which gradually changes people's behaviour and learning patterns. Among the most important changes that citizens are witnessing today with the ICTs is this transformation of the methods of governance, of the relationship and communication between citizens and the Governments. The broad spectrum of online channels and platforms that have been created during the past years have determined the social networks and the media to directly influence the overall management of public decisions, resources, procurements, and citizen trust in Governments.

The above paragraphs made reference to e-Government, and it is important that a clarification note is made on *the main differences between e-government and open government*:

There is often a misinterpretation of the term 'open government' both by public servants and the broader public in general, especially in countries with e-government agendas which started their implementation long before any national efforts around open government. Many believe that open government stands for e-government or vice versa.

Open Government should be considered within the context of e-government and its possible

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implications for the future of public administration. Open Government blurs traditional distinctions between e-democracy and e-government by incorporating historically democratic practices which are today strongly enabled by the emerging technology, within both central and local administrative units. *Transparency, participation, and collaboration* are the key functions of the democratic practices and embedding them in the public sector is instrumental for both administrative action and decision making.

The term "e-government" is a generic term for web-based services from agencies of local, state and federal or central government. In e-government, the government uses information technology and particularly the Internet to both support and strengthen government operations and improve its service delivery. The interaction may be in the form of obtaining information, filings, or making payments and a host of other activities via the World Wide Web (Sharma & Gupta, 2003, Sharma, 2004, Sharma 2006).

World Bank uses the following definition of e-government (AOEMA[14] report): "E-Government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions."

United Nations (www.unpan.org) definition (AOEMA report): "E-government is defined as utilizing the Internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to citizens."

While there are several other definitions of e-government which may vary widely, there is a common theme and mainly e-government involves using information technology, and especially the Internet, to improve the delivery of government services to citizens, businesses, and other government agencies. E-government enables citizens to interact and receive services from the ***federal, state or local governments*** twenty four hours a day, seven days a week.

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[14] Asia Oceania Electronic Marketplace Association, AOEMA report

2. The core pillars on a local open government

How can one achieve openness, transparency, participation and innovation at the local level? What should local governments do in order to become more citizen-centric and open?!

While the European Commission has an ambitious eGovernment Action Plan for 2011-2015 as mentioned in the first part of this paper, there were some concerns expressed by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CERM) back in February 2011, particularly on the fact that local and regional level authorities have not been involved in the drafting of this document and are hardly mentioned in the action plan. CEMR expressed at that point its readiness and willingness to contribute to the implementation of this action plan and acknowledged the fact that most of these actions will not be successfully realised without the active involvement of the local and regional level authorities[15].

Indeed, this example is a clear illustration of the fact that direct engagement of local and regional authorities is key for achieving the goals of the ambitious action plans like the one focusing on eGovernment for years 2011-2015. And this is relevant for any sector be it education, health or road infrastructure.

Achieving an open government is possible only via active involvement of the government at all levels, through 'infusing' open government practices, re-thinking the way the public sector engages with the public and putting emphasis on new types of competencies for civil servants. Departing from this standpoint, an open local government co-innovates, co-creates and co-designs policies, services, tools and solutions with everyone, but especially with its citizens. An open local government does also share resources that were previously inaccessible, harnesses the potential of collaboration and of the technological innovations and becomes a vital component of the social ecosystem. Open data and information disclosure are core features of transparency and accountability, and helps, in turn, build trust in local administrations. Open participation of the citizens at the local level and their open engagement allow them to be part of the activities of the local government and thus, bring additional value to the public sector reforms, innovations, others. Open decision making processes can empower citizens participate in policy-making, and if this practice is embedded within wider governance that will lead to significant changes across all public sector activities, processes and structures.

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[15] http://www.ccre.org/docs/CEMR_policy_paper_eGovernmentActionPlan.EN.pdf - CEMR opinion on the European eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015 Harnessing ICT to promote smart, sustainable & innovative Government COM(2010) 743

Below, is an illustration of the key pillars of Open Government, which are relevant for any state/central/federal or local government:
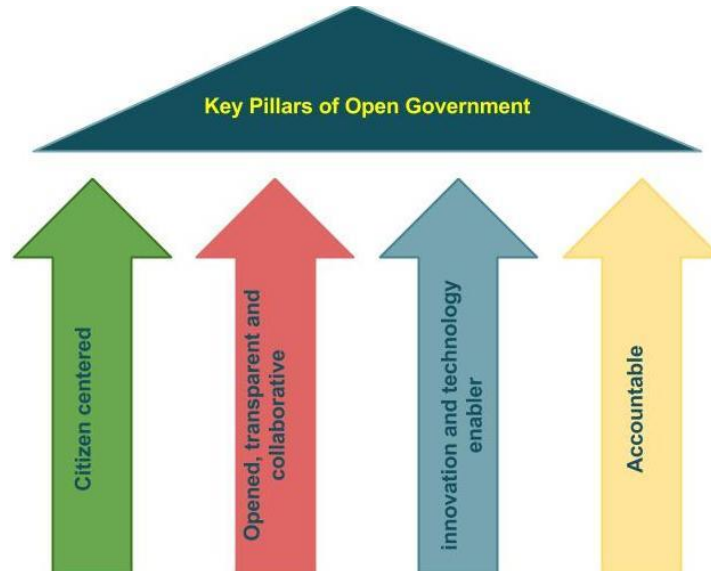

Figure 1 Key pillars of Open Government

Let's reflect on these key pillars and what kind of changes are being generated at the local level if these core principles/pillars are properly implemented:

1) One of the first and most important pillars of a local open government is being ***citizen-centred:*** and it refers to any local services, reforms or strategies, projects, initiatives, others. This core principle acknowledges and recognizes that governments have the responsibility to serve the needs of the citizens they represent as best they can, and in a way that whatever reforms or services are at stake – they are meaningful to each citizen. Service innovation is already happening and citizens ought to be engaged directly by the Government to try new things. Even if Governments are increasingly aware of the need to make their online services for example, more user-friendly, however, they still focus mostly on making those services available not necessarily departing from specific needs and demands of their citizens. This leaves ample room for significant improvement in areas such as transparency and accountability and lack of progress in these areas can reduce citizens' trust in online public services and even impede their use.

2) ***Transparency*** is another important pillar of an open local government and transparency is also an indicator of the extent to which governments are able to deliver on their responsibilities and commitments and are transparent about their own performance, the service delivery process and when it comes to the e-services, the

personal data involved. As per EU e-Government Report 2014[16] – "good governments are providing crucial information that citizens need when using online services, such as whether an application has been received, where it stands in the entire process, or what are the different steps in the process". It is interesting to note that the overall EU score was only 48% in the Transparency indicator, which is mainly due to insufficient information provided to users during delivery of e-Government services. However, the same report indicates that transparency level is somewhat higher when it comes to access to institutional information about the administrations or to information related to personal data involved in service delivery. Achieving fully opened and transparent public organizations and services will take some time. It is the transparency pillar that builds on the principles that citizens have a right to the information they need to inform themselves about public and political affairs, and to participate in the democratic processes in an informed way. Transparency is the foundation upon which both accountability and participation are built. Overall, it is transparency and citizen-centric approaches that ensure genuine means of engagement between citizens and the government (central or local) in policy and decision-making. This is always much more difficult in practice and there is still a strong resistance in the public sector at different levels (especially in countries with young democracies), however, it is vital that government acknowledges that engagement with the broader community is not just for the sake of a conversation, but it is rather a genuine partnership between political leaders and the people. This allows citizens respond more effectively to the very specific social and economic challenges and needs communities confront today. It is due to this type of policy solutions' approach that is essential in order to ensure relevance of the government solutions to real, day-by-day situations, and it is incremental to ensure a reasonable response time to emerging challenges and issues. It is with an open and transparent local government that citizens will start having more trust and ultimately will participate in policy development and in shaping the necessary reforms across different sectors.

3) As it can be seen from the "Key pillars of Open Government" scheme, **technology and innovation** is another pillar of the open local government. Indeed, technology can make public information more adaptable, empowering citizens to explore exciting new

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[16] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/eu-egovernment-report-2014-shows-usability-online-public-services-improving-not-fast

ways across many aspects of civic life. But technological enhancements or e-services (part of e-government agenda as standalone) will not resolve debates about the best priorities for citizens and enhancements to government services are no substitute for public accountability. So, e-government is one of the supporting elements of an open government, and there, where citizens have limited access to technology and innovation should still be able to enjoy the benefits of an open and accountable government. It is also important to mention that it is with this pillar where the government should play the role of the enabler, facilitator and assume the responsibility to ensure the opportunities are made available for both public and private innovation that adds value to government's services, open data and reforms across sectors. Society as a whole should be able to benefit from access to the data. Why is it so important? Because public sector information is not just to facilitate innovation in the public and private spheres, but also acts as an enabler for the individual citizens who are able to make better and informed decisions and choices. Finally, the need for sustainable access to all public sector information in the future is essential.

4) *Accountability* is another important pillar of an open local government: implementation of specific accountability tools is not easy and requires a broad range of political, institutional and social pre-conditions. Accountability can be defined as the obligation of the Government (central or local) to account for its actions. This often includes also politicians, diplomats, contractors, other stakeholders, who can be held accountable for the degree to which they obey the law and do not abuse their power; for the degree to which they serve the public interest and how they serve this interest (efficient, effective, fair, transparent). What citizens get in return is the right to information, right to quality and timely services and the obligation to fulfil their responsibilities as citizens. Upholding citizens' responsibilities is a vague and unclear concept still in many developing countries, particularly there where democracy is still in its nascent phase, and it will require much time, efforts and education in the years to come, particularly from the local governments.

3. Practical examples of local open government initiatives

The first and probably most important challenge for local governments that aim at embedding open government principles in their daily activities is how to ensure a **participatory consultation processes**, whom and how to engage in local policy making and "how to ensure an accurate representation of a variety of interests in society" (Pitkin, 1972, pp. 61–2). Some studies suggest that a consultation process is not representative (Marshall, Brent, 2005)[17].

Public consultations are generally not representative from the scientific point of view and this may skew policy deliberations in detrimental directions (Buss, Redburn, Guo 2006). Most public meetings are sparsely attended and those who show up often represent organized interests, certain institutions, have a certain agenda, and are far from representing the interests/views/positions of a broader community.

That is why starting an *open policy making* via *open consultations* at local level is one of the important steps towards building a local open government: it is much easier to ensure a proper participation of all community members in a rather small community (town or even city). Local public administration 'comes' closer to its citizens and the level of engagement of both sides is much higher. The assumption that using ICTs to carry consultation is enough to get the broad spectrum of opinions and viewpoints is false. ICTs is not enough to engender participation: a process of engagement is necessary. It is a misleading assumption frequently made with regards to citizen engagement, be it ICT-enabled or not, that the simple creation of channels for citizens to interact with local government necessarily engenders citizen participation. This might be true in certain cases, but often, citizen engagement should be supported by other offline tools and practices. The right methodology also ensures a proper representativity in the consultation process. Another great advantage that a local open government would bring through such an approach would be generating a much clear understanding and ownership of the problems being consulted/addressed.

Throughout the past years, a number of European cities/municipalities have implemented/piloted participatory approaches to engaging citizens in decision-making processes, through challenging them to co-create and co-design local policies together with their local public authorities:

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17 Sociological Spectrum, Volume 25, Number 6, November-December 2005 , pp. 715-737(23)

Back in January 2010, the city of **Amsterdam** has launched a crowdsourcing pilot in which three local policy issues were presented as challenges18 and they were as follows:
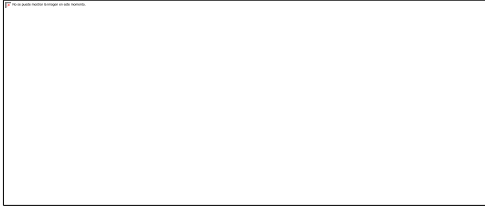
- How to solve the bike storage problem in Amsterdam in public space?
- How to redesign the Red Light District in order to combat criminalities and to attract new kind of business so that the district maintains its main erotic character?
- How to convince house owners not just to consume energy but also produce (What kind of business models/triggers can stimulate a sustainable consumer behavior by house owners?).

Local public authorities have received 100 ideas, and around 150 co-creation discussions between the crowd and policy makers. As a result, some of the ideas will be implemented in collaboration with the municipality. Thus, the result of this exercise shows that crowdsourcing is indeed an interesting user-driven tool which could be more often applied by the public sector, as it really stimulates interactions between citizens and their elected ones, brings more engagement around stringent public issues.

Another local open government driven initiative, based on the principles of transparency and accountability, in which open data has been at the core of it was initiated in **Berlin**[19]. Berlin is the first city in Germany that has opened and published public data. Several open data sets have been released since 2011 and a number of applications have been already developed based on those data. Municipal authorities of Berlin have acknowledged the fact that open data:

- Is a promising instrument not only for increasing transparency but also contributes to citizen's better understanding about public administration processes given that open data answers the citizens' demands for open governance and administration and supports civic participation.

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[18] http://opencities.net/node/22
[19] http://opencities.net/Berlin

- Open data is also seen as a driver of new innovative services and products. Those new applications do not only improve the citizens' urban life but also strengthen the economic power and competitiveness of local creative industries and other branches.

Bologna[20] is another European city engaged in "open cities" initiatives and it's local public authorities are in the process of conceptualizing Bologna as a Smart and sustainable City as part of the Metropolitan Strategic Plan and the 'Bologna Digital Agenda', whose main goals will be drawn up and shared according to a multi-stakeholder and participative methodology. Iperbole 2020, 'Tomorrow's civic network', will become a social and community-based "organism" which will make crowdsourcing and user-generated contents a backbone for the setting up of the new Administration's public policies and actions platform.

There are a number of other impressive examples of the efforts municipal authorities of cities such as Rome, Paris, Helsinki are putting in place in order to become more open, more smart cities and thus, be fully citizen centric. More about these initiatives can be found at opencities.net an initiative co-funded by the European Union.

Promising efforts around building local open government take place within the current *Open Government Partnership (OGP)* member countries[21]. OGP is an international platform for domestic reformers committed to making their governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens, and formally, only national governments are eligible to formally join this partnership. And as national governments are expected to elaborate National Action Plans on Open Government, they can, indeed, promote sub-national open government reforms that involve state and local governments as part of their commitments.   Thus, sub-national governments are encouraged to participate in national OGP efforts to explore the possibility of including local open government reforms in the OGP National Action Plan of the country.

- *UK Government*, for example, has made clear that it aims to become "the most open and transparent government in the world" [22]and as part of its 2013-2015 commitments on open government, those related directly to the local governments include issuing "a Local Authorities Data Transparency Code requiring local authorities to publish key

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[20] http://opencities.net/node/133

[21] http://www.opengovpartnership.org/countries

[22] http://www.opengovernment.org.uk/national-action-plan/national-action-plan-2013-15/

information and data. This will place more power into citizens' hands and make it easier for local people to contribute to the local decision making process and help shape public services".

- UK Government also implements an ambitious Open Policy Making platform which aims to increase the capacity of public servants on open policy making, by becoming more open to new ideas, working methods, insights, practices: https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/what-is-open-policy-making/

- Making local councils for transparent and accountable to local people is another ambitious commitment made by the Government of UK, the key issue being around the idea that citizens should be able to hold local councils accountable about the services they provide. https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/making-local-councils-more-transparent-and-accountable-to-local-people

- *Estonian Government*, in its Action Plan on Open Government for years 2014-2016[23] has included a commitment related to increasing transparency and understandability of the public funds, with the aim to prevent corruption by increasing public control over transaction partners of *local authorities* and persons related to these transactions. One of the specific activities in this regards relates to "Compiling the guidelines for local authorities for providing a concise overview of the local budget understandable to a citizen, in a manner similar to the State Budget Strategy and the state budget".

- *Sweden,* in its Action Plan on Open Government for years 2014-2016[24] has included a number of commitments related to local governments' engagement in the open government work, and more specifically Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, along with Government agencies such as Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation systems (VINNOVA) and The Swedish E-identification Board will contribute to the implementation of the commitment on "Putting citizens at the centre (eGovernment) of government administration reforms" which aims at open up administration in order to support innovation and participation, and increase operational quality and effectiveness.

These are just few examples of how national governments commit to apply the principles of open government at all levels, and in the years to come there will be more and more similar commitments made by other Governments. And there are a number of important challenges

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[23] http://www.opengovpartnership.org/estonia-second-action-plan-2014-2016

[24] http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sweden-action-plan-2014-16

that public administrations are already facing which is why adopting local open government reforms is crucial:

- The need to re-build citizens' trust in government and change perceptions, addressing increased expectations;

- Complexity of the issues both central and local governments will have to address due to the increasing pace of change;

- The need to use local resources effectively and a continuously changing environment;

- The need for innovative approaches in solving local problems;

- The need to position the citizen at the core of decision-making and policymaking processes, at the core of the development agenda.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

"Innovation involves taking risks and trying new ideas, which doesn't often come easy to government. But more and more leaders around the world are embracing the challenge," Michael R. Bloomberg, Philanthropist and Mayor of New York City from 2002-2013. Governments have been indeed responsible for some of the greatest innovations in modern history and it is with the government reformers and open minded public servants to continue these efforts as part of their administrations. Embedding open government principles in the work of a municipality, city, town, village … will create new opportunities and generate more trust and collaboration between all stakeholders. One of the important pillars of the Open Government *is being citizen-centered, and engage citizens in consultations, decision-making processes* and making sure that all ideas are being explored. In doing so, local public authorities have to be aware of the following:

- It is much easier to ensure a proper participation of all community members in a rather **small community**. Local public administrations can get much closer to their citizens and their level of engagement can be much higher.

- ICTs are not enough to engender participation: a process of engagement is necessary. It is a misleading assumption frequently made with regards to citizen engagement, be it ICT-enabled or not, that the simple creation of channels for citizens to interact with government necessarily engenders citizen participation. This might be true in certain cases, but often, citizen engagement should be supported by different tools and instruments. The right methodology applied by the local public authorities will ensure a proper representativity in the consultation process and will provoke a greater understanding and ownership of the problems being consulted;

- **Research approach to local public consultation.** Local governments should carry proper consultation processes if they aim at becoming more open and participatory, which requires a very thorough planning of: a) objectives (defining the level and focus of consultations)[25], b) target groups (defining all groups that might have a stake in the consulted issue and number of citizens from each target group that should be consulted/involved), c) appropriate consultation methodology and tools (including at least 2 tools to reach the same target group) d) planning resources and partners

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[25] Inform, Consult, Engage, Collaborate or Empower – Source: The International Association for Public Participation

support e) planning a proper communication/ feedback strategy after the end of consultation process.

- **Multichannel consultation methodology.** In most of the cases a proper consultation methodology requires use of direct, mobile and internet strategies in order to reach/involve all target groups to ensure a proper representation (number of citizens from each target group). At the same time there is a continuous fusion of all online and offline tools which should be taken into consideration by local authorities while planning a consultation process.

- **Increase role of Social Media.** Local public authorities should not invest in development of additional platforms in case similar platforms already exist: for example social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter or Youtube became very popular during past years and it is most likely that citizens active in these media will migrate to other new similar platforms.

- **Cross-selling.** A similar approach is recommended for offline or mobile consultations: using existent call center services or community meetings/events to integrate additional consultation questions into existent processes.

- **Local authorities should partner with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).** In many cases, civil society organizations may engage/represent interests of marginalized groups and play the role of social intermediaries. They may organize consultation processes within their group/s and share a unified position on behalf of the group/s they represent. An additional advantage to involve CSOs is that they might have better expertize in planning and facilitation of public consultations.

- **Partner with Mass Media organizations.** It is crucial for local government representatives to involve mass media as a partner during the planning process to ensure the ownership of the process, planning of appropriate media tools and share of resources. Mass Media will contribute to significant increase of citizen participation and may deliver targeted messages to selected target groups.

- **Apply deliberative democracy tools where appropriate.** Mini-publics: citizens' juries, planning cells, consensus conferences and deliberative polls. While there are some important differences, all four models share significant design features: participants are selected using random sampling techniques; they are brought together for a period of between 2 to 5 days; independent facilitation aims to ensure fairness of proceedings; evidence is provided by expert witnesses who are then cross-examined by participants; citizens are given an opportunity to deliberate amongst themselves in

plenary and/or small group sessions before coming to decisions[26]. Online adaptations of the mini-publics have its limitations that should be taken into account.[27] They are not representative in the conventional sense of being a statistical mirror of society, but mini-publics can have 'some claim to representativeness' by ensuring that 'the diversity of social characteristics and plurality of initial points of view in the larger society are substantially present in the deliberating mini-public[28].

Practice of citizen engagement in different countries shows a low participation (Buss, Redburn, Guo 2006) due to lack of trust in government (be it central or local). This barrier might be felt right away or in repeated organization of participative processes. To overcome that, local public authorities should:

- **Plan and allocate resources to build the 'response capacity' of the local government**. At the end of any consultation process, citizens should receive feedback on their feedback, thus, knowing what views have been considered, what were not and why. The focus should be on the "returning citizens" – this is the best strategy to increase the number of citizens that are involved in the continuum of the consultation processes.

- **Ensure transparency of the process – "Where did my recommendations go"**. Citizens' input should be valued and made accessible online at all stages of the consultation process: planning, submission of input, processing of the input, informing about recommendations received and accepted, as well those which were not considered for finals, and why.

The above are just a few examples of challenges and possible solutions local governments could implement in their attempts to become more open, transparent and participatory. Each challenge requires a certain solution, certain approach. But what is most important are people behind those solutions – open-minded government reformers, design thinkers, visionary servants, innovators, critical thinkers – are the kind of government representatives one would need in order to be able to build an open government and high level political commitment to make this agenda real.

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