

Eyes Wide Shut? The G20 and Open Data

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Executive Summary

With digitisation on the agenda of the G20 Summit in Hamburg, this policy brief discusses G20 member countries' engagement with Open Data. It also examines the potential uses of Open Data as well as recommendations from business and civic society. It suggests how the commitments made by the G20 in Hamburg could be strengthened and assessed through the use of Open Data.

The Hateful Eight?

The concept of [Open Data](#) is that data is free – to use, re-use and re-distribute – the only restrictions being on the need for attribution and re-sharing. This includes the availability of high-quality machine-readable information which can be consulted and analysed by experts and laypeople alike. With the 2017 G20 Hamburg Summit taking place almost a decade since the [8 Principles of Open Data](#) were agreed in California, this is an appropriate time to reflect on the progress over the last ten years.

Knots Landing

“Shaping an Interconnected World” is the theme of the summit, suggesting a focus on the potential to utilise technology to

create closer and more unified global politics. This is further emphasised by the summit logo in the form of a reef knot, which becomes tighter as it is pulled. Open Data could go a long way to achieving this aim by providing a network of freely available datasets on governmental activity.

Open Season

As regards the role of Open Data in the context of the G20, there is pressure on governments to share information about what they do, which can be used and shared by anyone for any purpose. It is thought that the use of Open Data will help foster the democratic process. Governments that have committed to the Open Data movement, such as [Australia](#), have already made thousands of datasets available on their government website. The availability of large datasets produced by government enables business, academia and the general public to contribute to further understanding, and potentially the resolution, of global problems. Over 70 countries, including 13 G20 countries, have signed the [Open Government Partnership](#), which endorses the [Open Government Declaration](#). This Declaration is a commitment to providing information, including raw data, in a timely manner in order to foster greater

transparency and public participation in governmental activities. However, despite signing the Declaration, some countries, (including the host nation of this year's G20, Germany) have yet to put any action plans in place. [The Open Data Charter](#), currently signed by 17 national governments as well as the World Bank and IBM among others, defines 6 principles of 'the access to data and the release and reuse of data'. The focus of these principles appears to be the ability of Open Data to stimulate growth and innovation.

Default in Our Stars

The principles of Open Data can also play an important role in combating corruption. [The Anti-Corruption Open Data Principles](#) were agreed upon following the G20 Summit in Turkey in 2015. These principles aim to make data public in order to prevent corruption. Allowing data to be made publically available would create transparency within the political process ensuring continuous monitoring of contracts and trade deals. Any government could be held to account for its actions and criminal activity, such as bribery, could be deterred. The [Business 20](#), the official dialogue between the G20 and the global business community, recommends transparency for the regulation of trade and in the fight against corruption.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has drawn up [a compendium of good practices](#) at the request of the G20 ahead of the Hamburg Summit. The document

lays out plans to achieve the goal of "Open by Default". This refers to the act of releasing relevant government data in reusable formats with the only exceptions being in the interests of privacy and security. However, while the OECD celebrates the adoption of open data policies by member countries, there is continued pressure to do more.

[Transparency International](#) and the Web Foundation are calling for more action and claim that G20 countries have broken their commitment to publish data. They argue that not enough progress has been made as no country has released all their information and what information is available is difficult to find.

Revolutionary Road

As well as making data available there is also a necessity for governments to offer information on the benefits of Open Data to both its employees and the wider public. There is currently either a lack of awareness of open digital principles or misconceptions relating to personal data security. Much of the popular press on data and technology is related to these fears and does little to educate on the opportunities of "[the data revolution](#)". In order to make information available to the general public, who may not be able to read the raw data, it is becoming necessary for governments to adopt the use of embedded visualisation tools and [infomediaries](#) to interpret the data. It is thought that making government data open can increase people's engagement with the [political system](#) by involving them through the use of easy-to-read maps and graphs. On top of this there is

the need to make the data discoverable by all. [The World Bank](#) recommends the use of complete metadata to ensure the datasets can be found on the open web.

Open Water

The [Think 20](#), a collection of research groups and think tanks from G20 member countries, recommend the use of open data in political decision-making, particularly in the context of the multilateral process of the G20. This is of particular importance in the area of climate change where data on the use of water in agriculture could be used to achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). Similarly, there is the potential for Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to compare data on areas such as government expenditure and population distribution. This would allow NGOs such as [Oxfam](#) to combine direct aid initiatives with influence and advocacy. Oxfam itself is leading by example, having committed to being [transparent and accountable](#) by taking advantage of the opportunities of the digital revolution.

Little Big Planet

[Open Data for Development](#) aims to build a network of local government “Open Data ecosystems” that can be used in all areas of society to improve transparency and accountability. However, for Open Data to reach its potential, national governments and the international community must develop digital infrastructures and increase data re-use in order to create value. Big Data, that is the

use of computer analysis to identify trends and patterns in large data sets, can be harnessed to make the most of Open Data. There is huge potential for Big Data to contribute to and grow the body of world knowledge. For example, the use of Big Data on the movement of people could enable us to track migration. However, there is still a need for clear regulations and policies on the use of data, which the G20 is in a position to provide. The need to regulate Big Data and other emerging technologies is identified among the [Key Issues for Digital Transformation in the G20](#).

It’s Complicated

Promises are made during each summit but the extent to which each country complies with previous commitments is rarely acknowledged not least because they are expected to conduct their own internal audits and reporting. The external [compliance reporting](#) that is produced tends to be the result of an inefficient system that takes many man hours. The presence of detailed and regularly updated data on the areas agreed upon in the Leaders’ Declaration would ensure that compliance could be reviewed and analysed on a regular ongoing basis.

Open Road

The [Hamburg G20 Leaders’ Declaration](#) highlights the commitment of the member countries towards harnessing digital technologies, although there is little substance on how this will be achieved. The adoption of the G20 Roadmap for Digitisation suggests Open

Data will form some role in the “free flow of information” promised in the Declaration. There are no specific recommendations on the use of Open Data in any of the areas covered during the Hamburg Summit. However, the need for transparency is referred to in relation to the Global Forum on Steel, the global financial system, ICT security and climate change. The need for transparency in these diverse dimensions of governance shows the difference Open Data could make in many parts of the political process. There is also potential for Open Data to play a part in the cooperation required among the political, civic and business sectors. The call for countries to exchange information on tax cooperation and health systems suggests that Open Data principles need to be adopted.

Have I Got News For You?

At a time when misinformation and fake news regularly make the headlines there is an increasing need for the availability of clear, open information in all areas of political decision-making. Ultimately the default open agenda can only be achieved when the current culture has been challenged. The G20 leaders are in a perfect position to pursue the benefits to their societies of Open Data.

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