"Data Is the Resource of the 21ˢᵗ Century"

BACKGROUND

THROUGH THE "OPEN GOVERNMENT DATA" INITIATIVE, THE CITY OF VIENNA AIMS TO BECOME AN OPEN, INNOVATIVE AND PARTICIPATORY CITY, IN THIS WAY CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION.

But let's look at things one at a time: the "open government" project – i.e., opening both government and administration to citizens and the business community – was part of the program adopted in 2010 by the Social Democratic/Green government of the City of Vienna. One year after adopting this program, the OGD initiative laid the basis for an open government. "Open Government Data" stands for open administrative data, and hence for those data volumes of the public sector that are provided in the public interest as an aspect of open government, without any restriction and for free use, dissemination, and further utilization. This is to increase data transparency and improve cooperation between administration, politics, and the population. After the establishment of the Open Government Competence Center Vienna, the OGD portal was launched (open.wien.gv.at) – in fact, Vienna was the first city in the German-speaking region to operate such a portal. "The objectives of the OGD initiative are transparency, cooperation, participation, the promotion of the economy by means of open data as well as a paradigm shift towards an open administration that makes full use of the knowledge accumulated by the two million minds that make up this city", as Brigitte Lutz, spokeswoman of the OGD initiative of the City of Vienna, succinctly puts it.

ACCESSIBLE DATA, SHARED KNOWLEDGE

And what data are we talking about? "We publish data that is used or ▶

Did you know that Vienna's public transport provider Wiener Linien operates 2,031 stops, that the Austrian capital boasts 19,885 hectares (49,136 acres) of green zones, that its water quality is measured at 28 bathing spots, and that the city contains 282,313 buildings, 12,838 fire hydrants, and 167 kiosks and hot-sausage stands? Bet you didn't! Yet this is only a small fraction of the facts that can be gleaned, made use of and visualized from currently over 300 available datasets. These datasets are the outcome of the "Open Government Data" (OGD) initiative of the City of Vienna.

The "Datenwaben" online portal aims to visualize the contents of the so far 300 datasets of the "Open Government Data" initiative in an easy-to-understand manner.

processed by the municipal administration to handle its assigned tasks. This means that the datasets made accessible for Open Government Data are datasets that are available anyway and may be classified as 'public'." To generate common, universally shared knowledge, authorities and administrative units are to disclose not only their raw data, but also the information and works based on this for the benefit of all users. Freely accessible data can thus serve as an instrument to open up contents, structures, sequences and decision-making processes, and influence them in the long term. If this data is proactively provided by the competent authorities in structured and machine-readable formats, it can be browsed, searched, filtered, edited, reviewed, and processed further. Concretely, this includes statistics, geodata, maps, plans, environmental and weather data, material relating to parliaments, ministries or authorities, household data, laws, ordinances, statutes, reports, and other publications.

Two examples: geodata publications, e.g., use the geodata infrastructure of the City of Vienna, while statistical data is provided by the Statistics and Analysis Division of the City of Vienna. The provision of this data has made it possible to produce over 190 software applications, mobile apps and visualizations so far. "Freely accessible, free-of-charge data benefits the economy and young enterprises, but also research and teaching – and, ultimately, all citizens and visitors to Vienna,", Lutz states. This data stock excludes those datasets of the public sector that must be kept confidential as well as personal data or data that comprises trade and business secrets.

The opportunities created by the OGD initiative for the city and the people who live and work here are obvious, Lutz comments, "Providing access that is clearly simplified as compared to past distribution models enlarges the circle of data and service users – and this results in the data and services offered being much more widely known, which boosts the value creation chain. OGD contributes to innovations and strengthens Vienna's position as a business hub." In its turn, this generates opportunities for the administration: administrative procedures become more transparent, while red tape is cut, and data of other authorities can be tapped into for use. All this promotes a better dialog with citizens, which fosters the democratization of knowledge and information.

A CULTURE CHANGE FOR GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

According to the staff in charge of the OGD initiative, the era of open government data confronts both governments and administrations with a fundamental paradigm shift that is characterized by three dimensions. The first dimension concerns the concept of data openness and data secrecy: instead of considering everything confidential that is not expressly classified as public, all data that is not expressly classified as confidential must be publicly accessible. The second dimension relates to the extent, mode and moment of data publication: instead of having individual authorities determine these aspects on their own and often enabling data transfers only in response to a specific request, all data not subject to justified data protection or security restrictions should be published proactively, completely, and promptly. The third dimension involves the rights of using the data published: instead of merely disclosing published data for private viewing, this data should become generally usable without restrictions and free of charge by anybody and for any purpose, including commercial applications. This paradigm shift symbolizes a fundamental culture change for government and administration. Instead of the confidentiality principles applied in the past, openness and transparency would become everyday practice, strengthening citizens' rights of democratic control. Where data, information and knowledge are made accessible to all citizens, the transition towards a knowledge society becomes possible.

And what's the next step? According to Brigitte Lutz, the ongoing clearance and publication of data troves will be continued with a particular focus on issues such as health and finance, while also offering greater possibilities of participation. "Data is the resource of the 21st century – this is about disclosing the data troves of the City of Vienna and about establishing a data ecosystem in Vienna", as she describes the central concern of the Open Government Data initiative. ✴

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Spokeswoman of the OGD initiative of the City of Vienna