
some social risks of Open Data and Open
Government for transparency in politics

by

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Speaker introduction and disclosure

- Freelance writer, researcher, trainer (<http://mfioretti.com>)
 - Linux Journal Contributing Editor
 - Regular contributor of other (mostly FOSS-focused) online and printed magazines
 - Writes on these topics at <http://stop.zona-m.net>
 - Teaches in courses and seminars solutions to the problems discussed in this talk

(open) e-Government & Open Data have a huge potential

- **(open) e-Government** = massive usage of digital technologies to reduce costs and increase availability of all kinds of public services
- **Open Data** = Online publishing with open licenses and in open, software-processable formats, of PSI (Public Sector Information)
- (open) e-Government and Open Data can:
 - Greatly reduce costs of government and local Public Administrations
 - Create many opportunities for economic growth in the private sector
 - (above all) **greatly increase participation and transparency in politics**
- Everybody here already knows this, so let's look at some risks, instead...

A small personal experience from last June in Madrid...

- In Madrid, on June 8th 2010, there was a public sector strike against austerity plans, by people who didn't know that...



- ...almost in the same moment and place experts and activists from all Europe were advocating Open Data and massive reuse of PSI

Proyecto **aporta**
Reutilización de la Información del Sector Público

EPSI platform

Realising the Value of Public Sector Information
An open invitation for the Open Data and PSI re-use Communities

9 June 2010
Madrid, Spain

Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Trade
C/ Capitán Haya, 41 28071

psimeeting2010@aporta.es

- *Why is this a weird coincidence that should stimulate thinking?*
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Fact: Open/e-Government and Open Data destroy jobs

- FOSS, Open Data and Interoperability mean automation
=> less to do for public employees!
- Openness in Government means disintermediation, **participation** of all citizens, allowing them to do their part
=> less to do for public employees!
- **Consequence:** FOSS, Open Government and Data, if done right, destroy many jobs in what is today *one of the largest remaining providers of socially stabilizing, long-term employment in many countries*

For more on this read <http://stop.zona-m.net/active-citizens/are-citizens-ready-open-data-and-government>

Fact: Europe is in debt and strongly reducing public expenses

- *“Spending cuts loom across Europe, deficit hawks gain upper hand”*
- At least 8 European countries with public debt and deficit worst than required by EU's Growth and Stability pact in 2010
- *“With hundreds of billions of Euros pledged to stabilize the common currency, European leaders are forced to make major cutbacks at home.”*

Sources:

*Guardian.co.uk, www.guardian.co.uk/business/2010/jun/09/europe-public-spending-cuts-deficit
Debts and deficits in Europe, www.english.rfi.fr/europe/20100628-debts-and-deficits-europe
Europe Braces for Spending Cuts, <http://atlanticsentinel.com/2010/05/europe-braces-for-spending-cuts/>*

Fact: public services in Europe face huge pressure

- *“budget cuts are damaging social services across Europe”*
- *“In many other European countries persons with disabilities, their families and services are suffering... the cuts in social spending.”*

*Source:
e-Journal of Inclusion Europe, october 2010, www.inclusion-europe.org/einclude/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=648&Itemid=29*

Fact: Europe is getting older

- The population of the 25-member European Union (EU) in coming decades is set to become much older... **limiting economic growth and putting substantial upward pressure on public spending.**
- the number of people 65 and over relative to those between 15 and 64 is projected to **double to 54 percent by 2050**, meaning that the EU will move from having four persons of working age for every elderly citizen to only two

*Source: Can Europe Afford to Grow Old? G. Carone, D. Costello, September 2006
www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2006/09/carone.htm*

Fact: (functional) analphabetism is diffused in Europe

- Some figures to get an idea:
- (in 2008) *“only 20% of Italian adult population has the minimal, essential reading, writing and calculus skills to orient themselves in contemporary society”*
- Younger generations aren't necessarily in better shape in 2010:
 - ~70% 6th grade students in U.S. "exhibit misconceptions" about the equal sign
 - in Italy, correct answers to maths tests fall ~10% from 10 to 11-year old students
 - immigration won't make this problem smaller

Sources:

<http://eddyburg.it/article/articleview/10848/0/65>

<http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/WeirdNews/2010/08/10/14978931.html>

www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2010-08-11/quinta-elementare-inizia-divario-115837.shtml?uuid=AYxa0uFC

Fact: digital illiteracy in Europe is even bigger

- **March 2010:** *“an estimated 290 million people across [Europe are] still lacking access to and **basic skills** in information and communications technology”*
- Younger generations are not immune!
 - *“~25% of University students trust a website only because it is in the first page of results of their default search engine”*
 - *“Digital native” ONLY means “born when the Internet was already a household term”. It does NOT imply any real digital literacy!*

Sources:

Funding boost for Telecentre-Europe will aid Europe’s digital literacy,

<http://microsofteurope.eu/CaseStudies/Viewer/tabid/77/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/568/Funding-boost-for-Telecentre-Europe-will-aid-Europes-digital-literacy.aspx>
<http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/view/636>

Fact: e-Gov/Open Data need mass participation to work well

- Mere availability of FOSS and Open Data is enough to stimulate the economy, because it only takes **ONE** entrepreneur to start a business
- Participation to politics and usefulness of Open Data and e-government instead, are maximized only if there are:
 - (relatively easy to achieve) Effective laws
 - (much harder to achieve) **MANY** citizens **interested** in *personally* using Open Data and e-government to make decisions (e.g. when voting) and **able** to do it effectively!

Fact: e-Gov/Open Data need mass participation to work well

- **Examples:**

- Senior citizens who do have Internet access keep going to PA offices or vote without enough information because public Websites are too difficult to use **for them!**
- **(True story)** Public Administration puts online cadaster data and land claiming Web Forms (all in Open Formats, through Free Software)
 - people with broadband use those Web forms to legally get ownership of unclaimed parcels of land that had been for centuries the Commons property of some mountain village whose inhabitants don't even know that the Web forms exist

Summing it up: today, in Europe...

- There is **urgent and increasing need** for **more participation** and all kinds of mass public/social services, from education to healthcare and interactions with Public Administrations....
 - Just in the same moment when, for economics, demographic and other reasons, there is and will be **less and less money (and people?) every year** to provide those same services in the traditional way and...
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Summing it up: today, in Europe... (2)

- There is **urgent, increasing need, but no money**, for more participation and mass public/social services....
 - Just in the same moment when
 - open digital technologies **can** do a lot to solve this problem spending as little as possible
 - but most European citizens are **not** able to, or **not prepared to**, use those same technologies to their own advantage, or to defend their own interests and civil rights
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Conclusion: what do we do about this?

- e-Government and Public Data are one of the tools that may do a lot for Europe, but this will really happen only if:
 - They are implemented with FOSS and Open Standards, to maximize efficiency, reuse and access for all citizens
 - Most European citizens have both physical access to the Web **and** access to the right education
 - **Proposal: work together on mass education to Open Government**
*(did you notice that this talk gives **even more reasons** to do what Di Cosmo and Dowek suggested here this very morning!!!)*
 - **Questions/contacs?** Please write to marco@digifreedom.net
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