Supply-side Variants in the Supply of Open Data in South African Public Higher Education
Context

• Part of the Open Data in Developing Countries (ODDC) project
• Research team based at the University of Cape Town, South Africa
• In-progress research
Research: supply and demand of open data

- Citizens
- Funders
- Shareholders

Pressure

Gov

Supply

Research organisations

Public/private companies

Demand
Use
Impact

Virtuous cycle
Understanding and thinking through how we get from the ‘openness’ of data, to how this affects how and what people think, and consequently how they MIGHT act, is critical in whether ‘open’ actually has any additional impact.

Duncan Edwards, ‘The revolution will NOT be in Open Data’, 21 October 2013
http://blog.okfn.org/2013/10/21/the-revolution-will-not-be-in-open-data/#sthash.pl5SWLW9.dpuf
Research question

• Project research question:
  • What is the level of use and possible impact of open data in the governance of South African public universities?

• For this paper:
  • How is open data supplied in South African public university governance, and what does the flow of open data reveal about the dynamics of open data supply, demand, and the emerging impact on university governance?
Method

• Case study:
  Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) Open Data initiative
  www.chet.org.za/sahe-open-data/

• Two user groups:
  • University planners (institutional-level policy)
  • HES researchers (national policy)

• Sample
  • 6 of 23 public universities
  • 10-15 HES researchers

• Data collection: semi-structured interviews

• Interview with the responsible government department: DHET
Data flow in SA public HE
Observations

• 3 secondary data resources from a single government data resource:
  1. Open: DHET / government
  2. Open: CHET / NGO (intermediary)
  3. Closed: private company

• Marked differences between the two open data sources
  1. Government: granular, timely, context-free  ➔ Transparency  ➔ ???
  2. NGO: shaped, definitions, analytic tools, comparative  ➔ Improved decision-making
  3. Licensing inconsistencies

• Open access and alternative access channels
Conclusion

The form in which the open data is supplied is contingent on the specific theory on how open data might impact on governance:

- Intermediary provides shaped open data because it believes that in the form of a set of comparative performance indicators the data will be of the greatest use to university council members.
- Government department supplies timely, primary data in full* because any manipulation of the data runs counter to the objective of transparency sought through the provision of open data.
Post-script

• Policy/declarations/memberships as flaccid levers for change

• Presumed principles of transparency versus realities of capacity-constraints. Government director responsible for the HEMIS database:
  • ‘Data is on the website because it’s easier to direct users to the website, rather than extract and email the data.’
  • ‘Data is open [available] when we have a webmaster available.’
Thank you

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