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OPEN GOVERNMENT: KEY ISSUES IN LATVIA

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze key issues of open government in Latvia. A qualitative approach, the bibliometric analysis method, and the content analysis method were used in this research. Research data comes from the Scopus database, Web of Science, Semantic Scholar, Crossref, and Latvian government policy documents. This research has found 130 relevant articles, 4339 citations, 26 h-index, and 65 g-index, which shows that Latvian open government studies are of interest and have high impact and productivity. There are 1592 total link strengths, 524 occurrences, 180 topics, and 18 clusters in this study. Decision-making, public participation, government language, open data, information, government transparency, public administration, and communication are the topics that dominate. Meanwhile, current and potential research topics are public participation, civil dialogue, public information, wider participation, digital environment, promoting participation, youth participation, coordinational portal, organizing participation, and process participation. Currently, the Latvian government is focused on six of its 51 commitments. These commitments have great potential for creating a more open Latvia.

***Keyword**: Latvia, Open Government, Participation, Transparency*

ABSTRAKSI

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis isu-isu utama pemerintahan terbuka di Latvia. Pendekatan kualitatif, metode analisis bibliometrik, dan metode analisis konten digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Data penelitian berasal dari basis data Scopus, Web of Science, Semantic Scholar, Crossref, dan dokumen kebijakan pemerintah Latvia. Penelitian ini telah menemukan 130 artikel relevan, 4339 kutipan, 26 h-indeks, dan 65 g-indeks, yang menunjukkan bahwa studi pemerintahan terbuka Latvia menarik dan memiliki dampak dan produktivitas yang tinggi. Ada 1592 total kekuatan tautan, 524 kemunculan, 180 topik, dan 18 kluster dalam penelitian ini. Pengambilan keputusan, partisipasi publik, bahasa pemerintah, data terbuka, informasi, transparansi pemerintah, administrasi publik, dan komunikasi adalah topik yang mendominasi. Sementara itu, topik penelitian saat ini dan potensial adalah partisipasi publik, dialog sipil, informasi publik, partisipasi yang lebih luas, lingkungan digital, mempromosikan partisipasi, partisipasi pemuda, portal koordinasi, mengorganisir partisipasi, dan partisipasi proses. Saat ini, pemerintah Latvia berfokus pada enam dari 51 komitmennya. Komitmen ini memiliki potensi besar untuk menciptakan Latvia yang lebih terbuka.

Kata Kunci: Latvia, Pemerintah Terbuka, Partisipasi, Tranparansi

INTRODUCTION

Many people in various countries around the world have considered open government as a powerful tool for administrative reform and government transformation in the last decade (Afandi, Afandi, & Erdayani, 2022; Skrastiņa & Radzevičs, 2020). The origins of open government can be traced back to the Greek Athenian codification of law, but the Swedish Visigothic Code is considered the beginning of modern open government initiatives that pay attention to citizens' rights to information (Moon, 2020; Nikiforova, 2021b).

Open government is a trend in public management reform that aims to create transparent and collaborative government structures that are different from market-oriented and bureaucratic principles (Ingrams, 2020; Nikiforova, 2021a). Although the term open government is not new, various social contexts and developments in information and communication technologies have contributed to the way open government is conceptualized (Tai, 2021; Wirtz, Weyerer, & Rösch, 2019).

The definition of open government can be traced back to the Obama administration, which focused on the intensive use of information and communication technology to facilitate government transparency, citizen participation, and public collaboration (Ingrams, Piotrowski, & Berliner, 2020; Prastya, Misran, & Nurmandi, 2021). Open government has become an interesting agenda promoted by many governments since the 2000s. Open government can be said to be as important as New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s (Inga & Edgars, 2020; Moon, 2020). Currently, open government initiatives have been widely introduced not only in Western democracies but also in developing countries such as in Asia and Africa.

Open government has become an important strategy for administrative reform that has prompted many countries around the world to design and implement initiatives related to access to information, transparency, participation, and collaboration (Afandi, Afandi, Erdayani, & Afandi, 2023; Gil-Garcia, Gasco-Hernandez, & Pardo, 2020). Many governments have expanded open government; for example, Obama announced the Open Government Directive in 2009 and took a leading role in establishing the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multinational effort to promote open government worldwide (Afandi, Afandi, & Anugerah, 2023; Moon, 2020; Schmidthuber & Hilgers, 2021).

The Open Government Partnership is based on the idea that open government is more accessible, more responsive, and more accountable to citizens, and that improving the relationship between citizens and government has long-term and exponential benefits for all. OGP is a broad partnership that includes members at the national and local levels (Gao, Janssen, & Zhang, 2021). Currently, 77 countries and 106 local governments representing more than two billion people are members of OGP. Collectively, more than 4,000 commitments have been made globally (Erdayani, Afandi, & Afandi, 2023).

This research focuses on open government in Latvia, a country located in the Baltic region, Northern Europe. Although not included in the initiating countries of OGP, Latvia has given its full support to this partnership through active participation since 2011, right when OGP was formed. Until now, Latvia has set fifty-one commitments to supporting open government in the country. This number is quite large compared to the commitments of the founding countries of OGP: South Africa 26, United States 148, Brazil 130, Philippines 75, Indonesia 149, United Kingdom 110, Mexico 87, and Norway 70. This research aims to analyze the key issues of open government in Latvia.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with bibliometric analysis and content analysis methods. Bibliometric analysis is a method for analyzing scientific literature in a particular field of knowledge or topic (Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, & Lim, 2021; Moral-Muñoz, Herrera-Viedma, Santisteban-Espejo, & Cobo, 2020). This method is used to identify trends and highlight critical insights generated from scientific literature (Gaviria-Marin, Merigó, & Baier-Fuentes, 2019; Kulsum et al., 2022). Meanwhile, content analysis is a method used to investigate and understand certain issues or topics by analyzing the contents of documents (Subedi, Nyamasvisva, & Pokharel, 2022; Wang & Shepherd, 2020).

In the bibliometric analysis, the data used was obtained from the Scopus, Web of Science, Semantic Scholar, and Crossref databases using

Publish or Perish with the keyword "open government Latvia". The data was saved in RIS format, selected using OpenRefine, and analyzed using VOSviewer to obtain a bibliometric map. Meanwhile, for content analysis, data comes from Latvian open government policy documents obtained from government websites. The data is categorized and interpreted to obtain the results of the Latvian open government policy analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, 130 relevant articles, 4339 citations, 139.97 citations per year, 33.38 citations per article, 26 h-index, and 65 g-index were found in the last 31 years. The first article was published in 1993, while the latest article was published in 2023. This shows that Latvian open government studies are in demand, have an impact, and have high productivity. The H-index and g-index are commonly used to measure the productivity and impact of published scientific articles. The difference is that the h-index is based on the number of articles produced and the number of citations received, while the g-index is calculated based on the distribution of citations and the average number of citations.

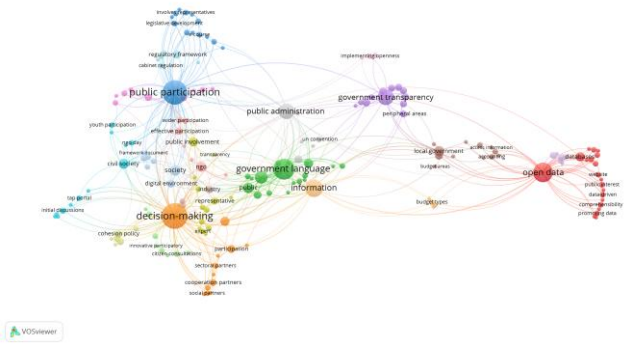

Figure 1. Network Visualization

The image above is formed from the article keywords used in this research. There are no duplicate items shown in the visualization above. Identical items that appeared in multiple articles were counted as a single item (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019). This visualization represents items with labels and circles. The size of the labels and circles is determined by their respective weights. The more often an item appears, the bigger the resulting label and circle. The lines between items represent links, while the location of each item shows the closeness of the relationship (Ham, Koo, & Lee, 2019; Lnenicka & Saxena, 2021). Item clusters can be seen in Figure 2, while the newest items can be seen in Figure 3.

In Figure 1, there are 1592 total link strengths and 524 occurrences. Decision-making (total link strength 121 and occurrences 40), public participation (total link strength 107 and occurrences 35), government language (total link strength 78 and occurrences 26), open data (total link strength 70 and occurrences 23), information (total link strength 55 and occurrences 18), government transparency (total link strength 48 and occurrences 16), public administration (total link strength 45 and occurrences 15), communication (total link strength 30 and occurrences 10), public (total link strength 21 and occurrences 7), and society (total link strength 20 and occurrences 6), are the list of topics that dominate in this study. These topics are the most widely used by researchers and are the main focus of Latvian open government studies.

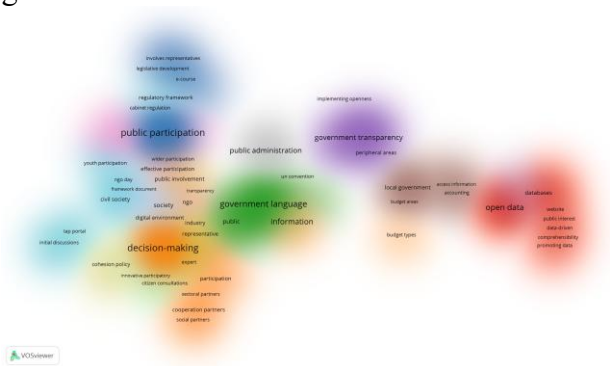

Figure 2. Density Visualization

One hundred and eighty topics were selected by the researchers in analyzing the Latvian open government. These topics are divided into eighteen clusters with varying numbers. This topic cluster is formed based on connecting lines between topics (Figure 1), so that each topic in the same cluster is very closely related. The topics in the first cluster are: access, comprehensibility, cross-sectoral, data collections, data-driven, databases, digital tools, disclosure information, explaining data, identifying data, MEPRD, open data, promoting data, public interest, societal problems, societal sectors, subordinate institutions, support tools, and websites.

Topics in the second cluster are: Active communication, communication, developing policies, document access, effective communication, explanation skills, government language, inclusive communication, information reports, institution's communication, language skills, legislation, open governance, oral communication, policy documents, and public. Topics in the third cluster are: coordination portal, e-course, e-learning, innovation laboratory, involvement representatives, legislative

development, national audit, non-governmental sector, organizing participation, process participation, public participation, thematic workshops, training content, and training developed.

The topics in the fourth cluster are: accountable, effective planning, expert, foundations, fund plan, investments implemented, monitoring, policy program, public involvement, representative, sustainable development, and transparency. The topics in the fifth cluster are: budget information, citizen involvement, citizens' councils, consultative activities, government transparency, inclusive citizenship, information system, budget participation, peripheral areas, strategic directions, and transparent operations.

The topics in the sixth cluster are: civil society, co-operation, deliberative discussions, educational seminars, industry organizes, initial discussions, NGO classification, NGO day, organization, organizations representing, TAP portal, and youth participation. The topics in the seventh cluster are: cooperation partners, CSO, decision-making, dialogue, industry representatives, ministry's work, participation, permanent dialogue, regular dialogue, representation, sectoral partners, and social partners.

The topics in the eighth cluster are: access information, accounting, administration institutions, binding rules, budget areas, existing data, government budgets, and government institutions, local government, publications, and remuneration. The topics in the ninth cluster are: communication activities, environmental responsibility, financial literacy, local authorities, participation type, participatory budgeting, promoting understanding, public information, regional authorities, and young people.

The topics in the tenth cluster are: citizen, digital platform, effective participation, industry dialogue, modern participation, NGO, participation, participation process, and wider participation. The topics in the eleventh cluster are: balanced decisions, citizen consultations, co-creation, deliberative, discuss decisions, general public, innovative participatory, and think tanks. The topics in the twelfth cluster are: active citizenship, civil dialogue, digital environment, empowerment, framework document, promoting participation, and society.

The topics in the thirteenth cluster are: association, cohesion policy, foundation, public hearing, responsibility, and responsibility. The topics in the fourteenth cluster are: available data, cooperation, data competitions, hackathons, promoting data, and publishing information. The topics in the fifteenth cluster are: cabinet regulation, development planning, operational issues, regulation, regulatory framework, and training events.

The topics in the sixteenth cluster are: budget funds, budget types, economic categories, information, public access, discussion platforms. The topics in the seventeenth cluster are: Industry, online consultation, sectoral policy, citizen participation, implementing openness, promoting openness. The topics in the eighteenth cluster are: regular exchanges, accessible, consultations, public administration, simple language, accessibility

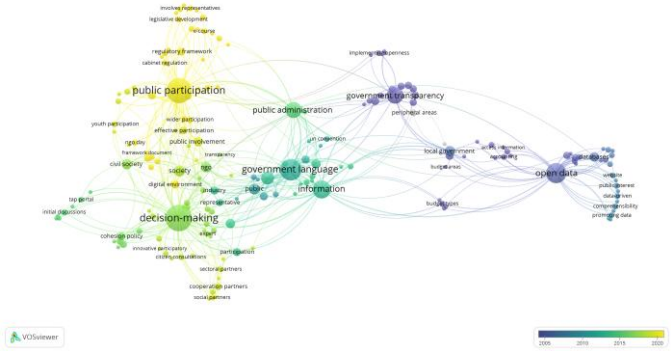

Figure 3. Overlay Visualization

The above visualization is identical to the network visualization (Figure 1), except for the color of each item. In this visualization, colors range from blue (the lowest score), green (the middle score), and yellow (the highest score). The darker the color of an item, the more it is left behind; conversely, the more yellow it is, the more attention it gets. Topics that are currently receiving attention include public participation, civil dialogue, public information, wider participation, digital environment, promoting participation, youth participation, coordinational portal, organizing participation, and process participation. These topics are current hot issues and allow for potential future research.

Currently, the Latvian government is focusing on their six OGP commitments: strengthening the community participation framework; promoting opportunities for youth and NGO participation; strengthening dialogue with the community in the decision-making process; using clear and easy-to-understand language; increasing access to open data; and encouraging openness and citizen participation at the local level. This is a manifestation of Latvia's seriousness in supporting

open government in the country. These commitments have the potential for great results. Implementing this milestone could bring positive structural changes to dialogue between government and civil society that do not currently exist, encourage a shift in public participation towards more innovative practices, involve civil society in oversight, and increase access to information about participation.

In the absence of a formal framework for civil dialogue, achievements in developing a structured and institutionalized civil dialogue framework can significantly change civil society-government interactions. Its implementation will provide a permanent and well-resourced mechanism for civil society to provide organized input directly to decision-makers. A milestone for strengthening regular dialogue with non-governmental partners can be achieved through standardizing regulations on how government agencies interact with partners. Based on standard rules around participation, Latvia's achievement of its commitments led to the publication of participation guidelines and models that also reduced barriers to institutional understanding of innovative participation measures. This can help institutions understand why using modern methods of engagement is a good thing, including encouraging more resistant institutions to go beyond legitimate participatory boundaries, such as holding public consultations on final draft policies or using other innovative deliberative or participatory methods.

Classification of registered CSOs by field of activity can help agencies to identify CSOs that they may not have previously engaged with in relevant policy areas, and expand the circle of partners they can engage with in decision-making. Currently, such a list does not exist so these institutions often interact more closely with civil society organizations with which they already have good relations. Another milestone is the implementation of public engagement and transparency on investments financed within the framework of Latvia's COVID-19 recovery plan. The results of this activity can help overcome civil society's criticism regarding their non-involvement in the investment identification process so far. Ministries participating in the disbursement of these funds are encouraged to take more participatory steps. Encouraging and supporting supervisory activities will help civil society to carry out this function. The results of these activities could be enormous if their implementation leads to more information being available and accessible, civil society being able to assume watchdog functions, and institutions being able to interact with them.

Achievements related to training for public officials and civil society can help develop the knowledge and skills necessary to support the implementation of the participatory mechanisms and processes envisioned by the commitment in state institutions. These activities can help the successful implementation of other achievements and support a broader culture of participation. Transparency-related activities can also improve current practices. On the one hand, implementing improved public participation regulations can ensure that institutions publish information in a uniform, consistent and effective manner. Moreover, Latvia's commitment seeks to implement digital platforms to publish materials about public participation that can encourage and help maintain the knowledge and skills of public officials about public participation.

Changes that could also impact the obligation to involve citizens in the budget process and policy making are part of the reform of the Municipal Law. Currently, mechanisms such as participatory budgeting are ad hoc and limited to a few local governments. Participatory budgeting is a form of participation that is expected to be implemented by the city government. They are developing a joint platform to facilitate the implementation of participatory budgeting across local governments, as amendments to the Law on municipalities will require all municipalities to implement participatory budgeting.

If this were fully implemented across the city, relations between citizens and local government in developing local budgets and monitoring spending could improve. Latvia has attempted to implement the organization of citizens' councils in each municipality. Residents will be elected and held meetings to start a dialogue between them and the council. Although not mandated by the new law, introducing citizens' councils could formalize deeper and more sustained dialogue and engagement between citizens and local public administration as part of local government decision-making.

Implementing openness standards can significantly increase transparency between cities. Latvia's commitment could also lead to the development of guidelines and standards for local governments in reporting local budgets, which

could help standardize the way local budgets are reported. Common standards of transparency and practices adopted among local governments can make it easier for the public to monitor and compare the level of openness of local governments, which then allows the central government to provide targeted support to local governments that do not meet minimum standards. Monitoring these standards is important to ensure they are implemented effectively.

CONCLUSION

Latvian open government studies have been of interest, impact, and high productivity. This can be seen from 130 relevant articles, 4339 citations, 26 h-index, and 65 g-index. The topics that dominate are decision-making, public participation, government language, open data, information, government transparency, public administration, and communication. Meanwhile, the current and potential topics in the future are public participation, civil dialogue, public information, wider participation, digital environment, promoting participation, youth participation, coordinational portal, organizing participation, and process participation.

As a manifestation of their seriousness in supporting open government, Latvia has implemented fifty-one commitments, six of which are currently in focus. These commitments include: strengthening community participation frameworks; promote opportunities for youth and NGO participation; strengthening dialogue with the community in the decision-making process; use of clear and easy to understand language; increasing access to open data; and encourage openness and citizen participation at the local level. These commitments have great potential results in creating a more open Latvia. The researcher recommends to other researchers who focus on open government studies in Latvia to use this research as a basis for further studies. There needs to be intense collaboration between the Latvian government and researchers so that the implementation of open government can be optimal.

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