



Open government: connecting vision and voice

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Abstract

The term open government is often used to describe initiatives of putting government information on the Internet. This conceptualization is too restricted since open government is not only about openness in informational terms (*vision*) but also about openness in interactive terms (*voice*). On the basis of an analysis of 103 articles, this article provides insight into the concepts of openness, transparency and participation, their interactions, and the manner in which they have been discussed in the literature. This analysis shows the differences and similarities between economic, political science and legal perspectives on open government and argues that a multidisciplinary approach needs to be taken. The authors conclude that open government is much too important to leave it to the ‘techies’: scientists and practitioners with backgrounds in law, economics, political science and public administration should also get involved to build sound connections between vision and voice that facilitate active citizenship.

Points for practitioners

This article provides guidelines for the realization of open government: (1) design open government for synergistic or complementary relationships between transparency and participation, (2) design open government for a diverse population, (3) design open government for direct and indirect effects, (4) design open government acknowledging a variety in desirables and (5) design for continuous learning about effects and side-effects. The authors emphasize that a diversified approach to the design of open government will be more fruitful in the long run than merely understanding it in terms of making information publicly available.

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I. Open government: more than access to information

Over recent years, the term open government has become extremely popular among politicians and policy makers since it is expected to bring a broad variety of benefits such as efficiency, a reduction in corruption and increased government legitimacy. The European Union prominently features open government in the first articles of its foundational Treaty, and President Obama signed the Open Government Directive on his first day in office. The term ‘openness’ is easily bandied about but what do policy makers and scientists actually mean when they use it? In practice, the term open government is often used to describe initiatives of putting documents and government information on the Internet. New technologies drive open government and they are being used to facilitate access to information through, for example, the EU portal and opendata.gov in the US.¹ Website development seems to be at the heart of open government and ‘techies’ are taking the lead. These practices narrow down the meaning of open government since it is not only about the availability of information but also about interactions between government and citizens. Put differently: open government is not only about openness in informational terms but also about openness in interactive terms. Separate practices of access to information and access to decision-making arenas need to be connected in fruitful ways. How can that be done?²

In the academic literature, the two dimensions of openness (transparency and participation) are mostly considered separately. The literature on transparency revolves around terms such as freedom of information, Internet, active dissemination of information, access to document and usability of websites, whereas in the literature on participation one will find terms such as interactive policy-making, consultations, dialogue and stakeholder involvement. Curtin and Mendes (2011) refer to these components of open government as vision and voice. Citizens need information to *see* what is going on inside government and participation to *voice* their opinions about this. The crucial question for vision is: what is being made visible? The literature discusses, among other things, the nature and scope of transparency, the usefulness of information, and the timing of the release of documents. The central question for voice is: whose voice is heard? Empirical and theoretical analyses focus on inequalities in access to participation meetings. Vision and voice come together in the idea of informed debate: participants can voice their opinions on the basis of knowledge about decision-making processes.

The link between vision and voice may seem self-evident but is rarely explored in the literature. Sometimes, in research into government transparency the question is raised whether information is actually used to strengthen participation, but generally this does not feature prominently in the debate. Likewise, some of the research into participation does pay attention to the question whether citizens have been

informed properly and can have access to the information they need to participate but, again, this is the exception rather than the rule. Although openness is widely propagated by political leaders and in policy documents, the academic discourse is only beginning to focus on this concept as a whole. Noveck (2009) presents an interesting – and very techno-optimistic – plea for ‘wiki government’ and connects access to information to new forms of citizen participation. She argues that technology will help to overcome limitations to both transparency and participation and thus will facilitate open government. Similarly, Lathrop and Ruma (2010a) edited a rich volume with a broad range of (mostly techno-optimistic) papers about the value of technology for open government, in the sense of both transparency and participation. These perspectives are strong and provocative but consist of general assertions not yet founded in empirical study. Our argument builds upon these salient analyses and grounds them in a thorough review of the literature on transparency and participation to provide a conceptual framework for studying and developing open government.

The aim of this article is to provide more insight into the concepts of openness, transparency and participation, and their interactions, and the manner in which they have been discussed in the literature. We map the variety in positions and, consequently, we aim to contribute more conceptual precision in the way that the concepts of openness, transparency and participation are used in future debate. The precision is needed to develop forms of open government that actually contribute to a stronger democracy and more active citizenship (Barber, 1984). The central question of our contribution is: what can we learn from the literature on transparency and participation for the realization of open government? We acknowledge the importance of studying practices of transparency and participation from a multidisciplinary perspective and we believe that a more explicit conceptualization of open government is needed to facilitate a multidisciplinary exploration of it. Combining insights from legal, political, organizational and economic sciences will help to deepen our understanding and explain practices of open government and provide a more solid basis for the further realization of open government.

This contribution starts off by identifying the constitutive elements of open government and discussing the relationships between vision and voice. We then justify the manner in which we have selected a corpus of scientific articles that have enabled us to draw lessons about open government in general. On the basis of an analysis of these articles, we will articulate the general lessons we have drawn about how government works and how open government should be valued.

2. Open government as vision and voice

In the literature on access to information and in practical usage, openness and transparency are often used interchangeably (Bertot et al., 2010; Heald, 2006a: 25). Piotrowski (2007: 10), for example, states that ‘governmental transparency equates to open government’. Usually such statements are made in the context

of research that only addresses access to information, in which case it makes no analytical difference to distinguish between transparency and open government. Some authors do make an explicit distinction. Heald (2006a: 26), for example, conceptualizes openness as a characteristic of an organization, whereas transparency also requires external receptors capable of processing the information. Specific literature on access to government software and computer data uses the term ‘open code’ as a practice and transparency as the desirable end: open code provides in this view more transparency (Lessig, 1999: 224, 225).

The literature on decision-making, in turn, uses the term ‘openness’ to refer to access to decision-making arenas. Klijn et al. (2008), for example, refer to openness as wider access of other actors to management choices about complex projects. Beyers (2004: 213) uses the term ‘access’ to refer to access to decision-makers or lobbying. Openness is then equated with the possibility of accessing decision-makers and decision-making arenas. Much of the literature on lobbying is about gaining access to decision-making arenas (cf. van Schendelen, 2005). Access to decision-making arenas thus refers to both formal access in terms of processes of participation through meetings and hearings and also to informal access as discussed in the literature on lobbying.

These definitions, however, fail to acknowledge that openness can also refer to both open interactions *and* the availability of information to interested citizens. Weinberg (2010) finds a connection between the literature on transparency and access to information on the one hand and on political participation and access to decision-makers on the other, stressing that transparency is one component of openness and participation the other. Transparency is defined as being able to observe government decision-making processes, whereas participation refers to the opportunity to participate in these decision-making processes. Similarly, Lathrop and Ruma (2010b: xix) emphasize that open government means that citizens not only have access to information but they can also become participants in a meaningful way.

Building upon these conceptualizations, our definition of openness is as follows:

Openness of government is the extent to which citizens can monitor and influence government processes through access to government information and access to decision-making arenas.

Our definition – with monitoring and influencing as key citizen activities – thus incorporates both elements of transparency, which usually comes in the form of access to documents, as well as participation, which can take a variety of forms such as lobbying or consultations. Figure 1 clarifies the relation between transparency, participation and openness. In the remainder of this article, we will use the term ‘open government’ as the more encompassing term and ‘participation’ and ‘transparency’ when we refer to specific aspects of openness.³

The two main components of openness may sometimes overlap. Notices about public meetings and access to agendas and minutes of meetings can be regarded

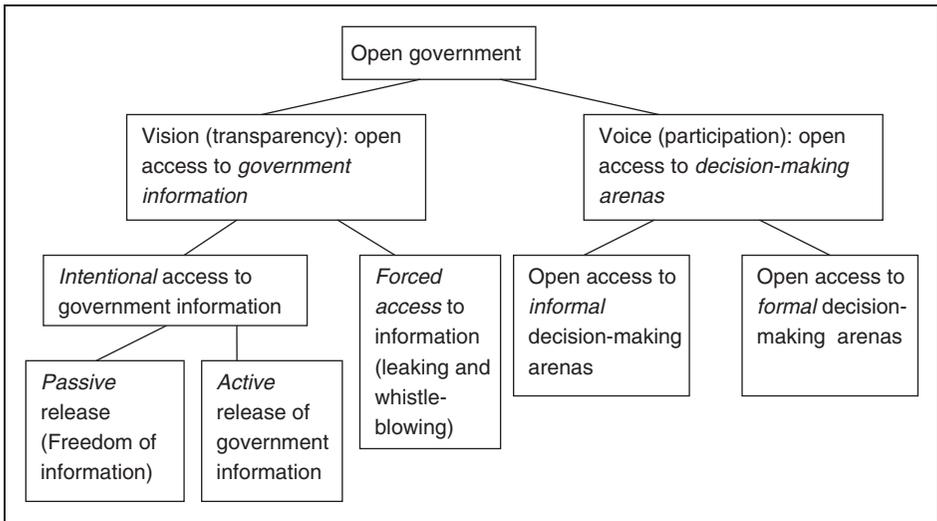


Figure 1. Vision and voice as dimensions of open government

as access to documents but at the same time this form of access strengthens access to decision-making arenas. The minutes of meetings are important documents but they are also important for access to decision-making arenas. The relation between the two components of openness is not straightforward.

We would like to distinguish three types of relationship between the components. In the ideal of open government, there is a *synergistic relationship* between transparency and participation: transparency ensures that the public gets access to information about the government and participation provides the public with access to that same government. Various reinforcing patterns can be distinguished. For example, for effective participation to be possible, a minimum standard of transparency is required. Noveck (2009: 121) argues that private individuals can only seek to influence policy decisions if they know which decisions are being made. In reverse, transparency may result from the process of participating (Best, 2002: 105; Piotrowski and Borry, 2010: 163). One could argue that access to information is a precondition for access to decision-making arenas since one has to know when and where a meeting will take place and which issues will be discussed to have access to the meeting. Conversely, access to decision-making arenas may be a precondition for access to documents since certain documents may be handed out at a meeting.

Another type of interaction between vision and voice may be in a *complementary relationship*. The basic idea here is that active citizenship can sometimes be realized through transparency and under different conditions through participation. Welch (2010) suggests that participation may be more important in the initial stages of the policy cycle whereas transparency may become more relevant in the

implementation of policies. Citizens want to participate to influence policies and monitor the implementation of these policies through open access to information.

The relationship between vision and voice does not have to be a reinforcing one: under certain conditions transparency and participation may have a negative impact on each other; we can then speak of an *undermining relationship*. An example is transparency of (expert) consultations. The degree of openness in terms of the exchange of arguments may be limited by transparency. Participants may be reluctant to be open about their positions because this could lead to negative reactions from outsiders.

These three types of relationship can help to develop open government in practice. The idea of a synergistic relationship seems to underlie most policy plans: governments seem to assume that transparency and participation will have a positive effect on each other. A more nuanced approach takes on board the fact that, under certain conditions, vision and voice may not be in synergy but rather be complementary or even undermine one another. The latter relationship in particular needs careful consideration in order to prevent negative outcomes.

3. Learning from the literature

With a view to enhancing our understanding of openness, transparency and participation we analyze the literature on the basis of the following research questions:

1. *How can we understand the effects of open government?* We will focus our analysis on two (interrelated) key assumptions about open government: (1) citizens use the opportunities for accessing information and decision-making arenas and (2) open government has an effect through these patterns of use.
2. *How can we assess the effects of open government?* Although various politicians highlight that transparent government is good, we need to analyze it more specifically to understand the normative implications of vision and voice. We will analyze both the desirable effects and the undesirable side-effects.

We surveyed the literature initially in order to select a broad sample of both theoretical and empirical publications and our corpus consists of 103 publications from over 50 academic journals. Each of these publications has a different focus and links into one or more of the conceptual subcomponents that make up open government (passive access to information, active dissemination, forced access to information, formal and informal access to decision-making). The search was carried out via a number of online search engines, using various related key terms. In addition, often-cited articles were included in the literature corpus using the snowballing method. A small number of newer academic journals were systematically checked for relevant literature. Finally, a number of articles were drawn to our attention by colleagues.

Although over half of the corpus ($N=103$) consists of publications from the United States (35) and the United Kingdom (23), the remainder of the corpus

is composed of publications from a large number of other countries. In total, publications from 18 – mostly European – countries were included in the corpus. Most publications selected for the corpus are academic journal articles (79) or academic book chapters (5). In order to attain a broad set of conceptual approaches, among which were some from practitioners or other sources from outside academia, a number of other publications were also selected. These include working papers and conference papers (13), non-academic publications (3), and public lectures (2).

In terms of the number of years of publication some three-quarters of the selected publications were published during the course of the last decade, while only two publications we included were published before the 1990s. In part, this is due to our specific search for up to date and state of the art publications in the field. It is, however, also likely that the concepts of in particular transparency and open government have only squarely emerged over the course of the past 15 years or so.

In total, 19 publications in the corpus focused on participation, 56 publications on transparency, and 28 publications took a broader and more encompassing perspective. The search terms that we used in our literature review seem to correspond best with the body of literature on transparency. The number of publications on participation is more limited which is surprising since participation is considered to be a core topic in the study of the public sector. This seems to indicate that publications on participation are less frequently framed in terms of openness. The number of publications that deal with both transparency and participation is substantial and this indicates that this connection is already being made in a number of academic fields.

The different conceptualizations were analyzed for the different disciplines to find out whether certain disciplines have a bias in favor of certain conceptualizations (Table 1).

The table shows that transparency is an important issue in law, public administration, economics and commerce. We found a substantial number of publications on participation in most academic fields. The legal sciences were the notable

Table 1. Contributions to each conceptual perspective per academic discipline ($N = 103$)

	Transparency	Participation	Both
Political science (26)	50%	11.5%	38.5%
Legal science (13)	76.9%	0%	23.1%
Public administration (16)	62.5%	25%	12.5%
Economics and commerce (7)	71.4%	28.6%	0%
Other academic department (23)	39.1%	34.8%	26.1%
Academic publications written by non-academics (15)	53.3%	6.6%	40%
Unknown (3)	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%

exception: there is a strong body of literature on transparency but limited attention for participation. We believe that this seemingly limited literature on participation in legal science is explained by the fact that participation in classical legal studies is almost always referred to as the ‘right to be heard’. Since participation in rulemaking has, traditionally, been restricted to specific policy fields, it tends to be analyzed not in terms of general approaches to the theme of participation, but in analyses of the procedures where participation is provided for – generally in legislation in specific policy fields. It was beyond the scope of our study to include the significant existing literature on the right to be heard because that would have involved making substantive parallels with the manner in which other disciplines conceptualized it. In political science we find the highest percentage of publications with a broad conceptualization of openness. Public administration shows a surprisingly low number of publications based on a broad conceptualization.

Despite its substantial size, the corpus selected for this article is certainly not exhaustive. Certain measures were, however, taken to assure its diversity and inclusiveness. Including publications from various countries and disciplinary backgrounds, using various operational definitions, we feel that the corpus does indeed go a long way towards providing a representative picture of possible conceptualizations around the theme of open government.

4. Understanding the effects of open government

4.1. Diverse users

What is the role of users in vision and voice? Some governments claim that they have opened up if they have put thousands of documents on the Internet. But is that open government? Or does government only become really open if citizens start using the information? For David Heald (2006a), openness refers to the availability of information and transparency is also about users who are capable of processing the information. Most publications, however, do not make this strict distinction. In both the literature on transparency and the literature on participation, a distinction can be made between the publications that include the use of information in the definition, and those that do not.

The data in Table 2 show that users are included in the conceptualizations in a majority of all publications in our corpus (56.3 percent). We found a marked divergence between the transparency and participation literature in this respect: users are included in 50 percent of the publications on transparency and in nearly 90 percent of the publications on participation. This is perhaps unsurprising as participation, more than transparency, is a strongly relational concept. Transparency is more often conceptualized as a feature of government (organizations). The great majority of publications on participation provide a discussion of the types of users that (are likely to) participate. The literature that deals with both aspects of openness has the lowest inclusion of users in their conceptualizations

Table 2. User inclusion in conceptual definitions ($N = 103$)

Conceptual perspective	Availability	Both availability and use
Transparency (56)	50%	50%
Participation (19)	10.5%	89.5%
Both (28)	53.6%	46.4%
Total (103)	43.7%	56.3%

(46.4 percent). This seems to indicate that this literature highlights openness as a feature of government and not as a relational concept.

Communication science teaches us that conceptualizing the users as an amorphous mass – ‘the citizens’ – is not helpful. One should acknowledge that there is a diverse group of individual and organized users with varied capacities and interests. Vision and voice are never created equally for this group since some may be able to make better use of opportunities than others. Governments may be tempted to design open government for a ‘general user’ and miss the effects this has on the various user groups. Some users may need access to full datasets to be able to carry out their own analyses; others may be served better by presenting data in an easily accessible format. Open government needs to be based on a communication strategy tailored to the field of (potential) users.

In terms of the relationship between vision and voice, a government communication strategy should aim to create either a synergistic relationship – citizens who want to participate receive the information they need in time – or a complementary relationship – providing citizens who do not have the opportunities for voice with the opportunities to monitor processes of participation. An undermining relationship between vision and voice needs to be avoided by timing and shaping transparency and participation. A clear strategy of the anonymity of public reports on participation may be important to avoid a negative effect of transparency on participation.

4.2. *Diverse effects*

The discussion about the use of government information forms a prelude to the discussion about effects. Can opportunities that are not being used still have effects? The literature indicates that effects can be brought about either directly by openness, or via an intermediary process. The direct avenue indicates that government organizations and officials will change their behavior directly when practices are opened up (Meijer, 2007). Officials may anticipate that members of the public may be watching them – regardless of whether they actually do so or not – and for example tend to behave less corruptly when information about donations from organizations and lobbyists is publicly available (Bertot et al., 2010). The indirect avenue maintains that openness equips the public with instruments

Table 3. Mechanisms ($N = 103$)

	Direct positive effect	Indirect positive effect	No mechanism mentioned
Transparency (56)	50%	82%	7%
Participation (19)	79%	94%	11%
Both (28)	64%	93%	0%
Total (103)	59%	83%	6%

that will only produce effects when these are actually used. For instance, lobby registers may have no effects on practices unless citizens start raising concerns about unequal access to lobby circuits. Do we find both avenues in the literature? The results are presented in Table 3. The effects and perspectives come in various constellations and do not therefore add up to 100 percent.

Overall, the most frequently cited positive effect is indirect: 83 percent of the articles mention such an effect in some way. Such indirect effects may be of a rational-actor type of character, where full information is seen to enhance rational behavior and facilitates participation. Direct effects are also mentioned in a majority of the articles (59 percent) but not as frequently as the indirect effects. More publications stipulate that openness has an effect through the activation of stakeholders.

These findings highlight that the optimization of open government should not be carried out on the basis of a simple opportunities-use-effects model. Governments should acknowledge that direct effects may take place. Corruption may be reduced simply by the fact that officials have to put information about their contacts and financial benefits on the Internet. Even if nobody accesses this public information, the public nature of it may still thwart corruption. This means that governments can pursue different objectives with open government: it can be optimized in terms of its use by citizens and stakeholders or in terms of its effects on government. These two may but do not have to be related.

The direct and indirect effects of open government complicate the analysis of synergistic, complementary and undermining relationships between transparency and participation. Access to information may facilitate participation but at the same time access to information may lead to risk-averse behavior within government. Conversely, the mere fact that citizens are allowed to participate may in fact directly lead to more transparency. We should understand the effects of open government as resulting from synergistic, complementary and undermining relationships resulting from direct and indirect avenues. The effects need to be studied from various angles with the overall aims of establishing the effects of various open government arrangements. This, of course, raises the question of which positive effects are to be attained. This question is addressed in the next section.

5. Assessing effects of open government

5.1. Positive effects

How do we know if open government delivers? Normative stances taken on open government can first be distinguished in two categories (Heald, 2006b). In the first category, characteristics of open government are of an intrinsic worth with a substantial value whereas, in a second category, open government is argued to be important for its various functions as an instrumental value. Put simply, the distinction made here is one between open government as an end in itself or as a means to other ends (Heald, 2006b). Table 4 sheds light on which assumptions are generally made according to the conceptual perspective.

It can be observed that transparency is, among all the perspectives, still the one where an intrinsic right is most frequently cited, independent from its functions (19.6 percent). This is generally framed within the right of access to information or freedom of information. The literature on participation pays slightly less attention to substantive considerations (15.8 percent). In this literature participation is regarded as a democratic right. The literature that discusses both aspects of openness pays least attention to substantive arguments (7.1 percent). This may indicate that the literature on openness is more instrumental in its nature than the literature on the two separate aspects.

Flanagan argues that although historically many scholars have emphasized the functional component of transparency, its substantive value has been 'perceived as so obvious that its protection has received relatively little attention' (2007: 596). The self-evident right to at least a minimum amount of transparency or participation may be the reason that most publications ignore it completely so as to focus on weighing it against other rights or theorizing the functions of open government within their own conception of democracy.

On the basis of a qualitative analysis, different types of functional reasoning can be distinguished. Based on the literature corpus, the following arguments can be made that are rooted within the three main disciplinary debates on open government:

In an *economic argument*, openness is seen as *a precondition for optimal markets*. Rational behavior can only be exerted if actors have access to information

Table 4. Normative basis of publication (N = 103)

Conceptual perspective	Substantive	Functional	Not mentioned
Transparency (56)	19.6%	78.6%	1.8%
Participation (19)	15.8%	73.7%	10.5%
Both (28)	7.1%	92.8%	0%
Total (103)	15.5%	81.6%	29.1%

(Crombez, 2003; Florini, 1998; Garcia Lorenzo, 2003). One example of optimization through openness is made with reference to decision-making processes: as actors come and go, the need for open and retraceable records is pivotal for such processes in the long run (Drew and Nyerges, 2004: 34). Hale furthermore observes that organizations that withhold important information are increasingly boycotted or campaigned against (2008: 77).

In a *political argument*, openness serves as a *precondition for political participation* by citizens and stakeholders. Quoting a 1962 *Harvard Law Review* article, Piotrowski and Borry (2010) highlight that open meetings provide public knowledge that is essential to a democratic process and indicate that government officials will be more responsive to the public when there is an opportunity for public participation at a meeting. They also stress that the public may be more understanding and willing to accept undesirable policy outcomes when they have a better understanding of complex and difficult decisions. Furthermore, political participation can improve the quality of decision-making when factual misconceptions are corrected by members of the public who may know more about a specific local issue.

In a *legal argument*, openness tends to be presented as a *precondition for administrative legality or the rule of law*. Without access to information (access to the file or even the computer 'code'), it will be very difficult to enable the citizens to control the legality of the administration and its actions (Lessig, 1999; O'Neill, 1998). In addition, openness of the legislative procedures and legal rights of access to documents may be viewed in their broader democratic context (e.g. Curtin and Meijers, 1995). The legal realm of participation was long restricted to the scope of the right to be heard covering only a very limited segment of administrative action: individual decision-making, i.e. procedures that are liable to culminate in a measure adversely affecting the person to whom it is addressed. The right to be heard is a requirement of the rule of law in judicial procedures and owes little to the democratic rationale of engaging the citizens in the activity of the administration and of bringing them closer to the exercise of power (Mendes, 2011). Gradually in many legal systems participation has been widened to include general administrative rulemaking but only where there is an explicit legislative framework, for example in the field of the environment (Lee, 2005) or of land planning. The legal literature reflects this incremental approach to participation in administrative rule making and there are some discussions on the need to codify.

In addition, two broad arguments are made in the literature that cut across the various disciplines:

Openness as an incentive for integrity. Some social and legal scientists indicate that openness is needed to curtail corruption (Bertot et al., 2010). Piotrowski and Borry (2010) stress that openness will deter misappropriations and conflicts of interest when the public can observe how public money is spent. In the literature on whistleblowing, a similar viewpoint is expressed: information is a basis of power, and power abuses can in turn be counterbalanced through the use of information

(Skivenes and Trygstad, 2010: 1079). Jubb moreover argues that disclosure of sensitive information is a 'very direct, unambiguous form of dissent' based on the ethical values of the whistleblowers. The whistleblowers seek to bring information out into the open, with the underlying idea of altering the course of perceived injustice (Jubb, 1999: 79). In general, a tendency exists in organizational sciences to view closedness as an example of 'hierarchic, introverted and risk-averse' behavior (Pasquier and Villeneuve, 2007: 157), while openness on the other hand is believed to go hand in hand with 'a high degree of integrity, transparency and responsibility' (Reid, in Pasquier and Villeneuve, 2007: 159; see also Roberts, 2004: 77; Stiglitz, 1999: 10).

Openness as a precondition for trust. Many papers suggest a direct connection between openness and trust. Wall, for example, argues that government proceedings should be 'publicly accessible and open to public criticism', since '[p]olitical decisions made behind closed doors or shrouded in mystery are destructive of public trust' (1996: 502).

This overview shows that the design of open government should not only acknowledge a variety in effects but also a variety in desirables. The argument that transparency is a goal in itself may be too simple but, conversely, the argument that there are direct causal relationships with effectiveness and legitimacy may also limit our understanding of open government. We propose that open government needs to be assessed on the basis of a multicriteria model encompassing both means and ends values. This multicriteria model should not be used to assess the effects of vision and voice separately but in conjunction with one another. The design of open government should be directed towards this variety of desirables.

5.3. Negative effects

Although many positive effects of openness are highlighted, various reasons are mentioned why openness should be limited. In fact, the literature increasingly focuses on the negative side-effects of openness such as a decrease in trust (O'Neill, 2002) or efficiency (Prat, 2005). When compared to the desiderata we discussed above, these arguments are, to some degree, the flip side of the coin. Compared to the variety of mechanism appraisals that we presented in the previous section, such downsides are cited relatively less frequently. In part, this may be due to the normative flavor of the dual concepts of transparency and participation. As an example, Piotrowski and Borry point out that '[o]pen meetings have been compared to motherhood: No one wants to be on the record as being against them' (2010: 163). Table 5 presents how frequently negative side-effects get mentioned in the literature corpus, and whether these effects are direct or indirect.

The table shows that overall, negative effects are mentioned far less frequently than positive effects. Thirty-eight percent of the articles do not make any reference to negative side-effects. Nevertheless, the majority of the publications in our corpus discuss direct and indirect negative effects. There is an interesting difference here

Table 5. Negative effects (N = 103)

Conceptual perspective	Direct negative effect	Indirect negative effect	No mechanism mentioned
Transparency (56)	50%	46%	34%
Participation (19)	16%	37%	53%
Both (28)	15%	36%	36%
Total (103)	44%	42%	38%

between the two bodies of literature: negative side-effects play a more important role in the literature on transparency than in the literature on participation. Participation is more often discussed in terms of whether desired effects are attained or not, but less frequently negative side-effects are mentioned. If both aspects are considered, there is also little attention to negative effects.

On the basis of a qualitative analysis of the corpus, we identified some patterns of alleged negative effects of openness, transparency and participation. These patterns can, again, be traced back to the three foundational disciplines of the field.

According to an *economic argument*, full information *may hamper rational behavior*. Some authors highlight that policy makers need a certain intimacy for the process of deliberating for policy making. Openness may make them risk adverse. This direct negative side-effect is often represented through principal-agent games. Prat (2005), for example, points out that all countries with open government legislation also have inbuilt requisites of closedness. The reason that is usually cited for this is that ‘some form of short-term secrecy, while the decision process is still ongoing’ is desirable (2005: 869; also De Fine Licht and Naurin, 2010: 10; Dror, 1999: 63).

In a *political argument*, public participation *may hamper public policy*. In the literature corpus, indirect perverse effects of openness are also cited. They are indirect in the sense that they originate within the public but affect the proper functioning of government. Stiglitz (1999: 18) highlights that when international organizations such as the World Bank would publicize all shortcomings in a financial restructuring project, these shortcomings could be exploited by third parties, while providing the aided country with a strong disincentive to seek assistance. National security is another oft-cited field that could allegedly suffer from excessive openness as the national interest could be endangered.

Following a *legal argument*, full transparency *can endanger the legal position of citizens or companies*. Public access to documents can be limited when these documents explicitly refer to personal details or provide sensitive information about companies or organizations. This is because it is recognized that openness may have negative effects on the right of individuals and organizations to privacy and protection of their vital commercial interests. A similar argument is presented that governments may have a right to privacy in the performance of public tasks, especially in the early ‘staging process’ of public policy (Murray, 2004).

In addition, some papers challenge the assertion that openness would lead to more *trust* in government. Fung and Weil (2010: 107) argue that transparency ‘may well produce conservative or even reactionary effects of delegitimizing government activity quite broadly as public disclosure feeds more and more stories of government waste, corruption, and failure’.

These arguments can be regarded as warnings against too much vision and voice. The general opinion seems to be that governments have to find the right balance (but there may be huge differences when it comes to the question of what the right balance is). Negative side-effects are important and one should not have a naïve image of open government. At the same time, the risk of negative side-effects should not stop governments from developing open government. How can this dilemma be dealt with? Some negative effects can be identified beforehand but others will only show up in the practices of open government. We would like to argue for a learning approach: governments should monitor the effects of open government carefully to identify negative side-effects. These monitoring reports can form the input for public and political debates about open government.

6. Creating connections between vision and voice

Our literature review shows that the research area of open government attracts the attention of a wide array of academic disciplines. In principle, multidisciplinary leads to a richer understanding of phenomena due to the multiplicity of viewpoints and research approaches that each discipline takes with it. The legal science perspective, for example, primarily takes laws, regulations, case law and, to some extent, evolving institutional and legal practices regarding openness as its focus. For a political scientist, in turn, it is interesting to see how openness results from power relations and results in changes in balances of power. Economic approaches will tend to focus on the contribution of openness to the functioning of (political) markets, while organizational and administrative scientists (and also information scientists) are mostly interested in the way transparency is organized. There is much relevant material available but the field is also highly fragmented.

The identification of transparency and participation as two building blocks of openness is our starting point for developing a sophisticated approach to a fragmented field of study (see also Noveck, 2009). Making a clear distinction between these three concepts can help us to develop a better understanding of changes in access to government information, access to decision-making and combined forms of access. The distinction between the components is important since we identified three patterns of relationship between vision and voice: a synergistic, a complementary and an undermining relationship. We used these distinctions to analyze the literature and to draw lessons.

What can we learn from the literature on transparency and participation for the realization of open government? The following guidelines have been formulated on the basis of our literature review and they can be understood as a reaction to naïve

assumptions about open government as being a government that creates a portal with access to all its documents.

- *Design open government for synergistic or complementary relationships between transparency and participation.* Open government consists of various subcomponents and governments should analyze how synergistic or complementary relationships between these components can be achieved. Synergy can be achieved when specific forms of transparency strengthen participation and participation leads to new forms of transparency. Transparency and participation may be complementary in different phases of the policy cycle. Governments should prevent undermining relationships by for example providing too much transparency about participatory meetings.
- *Design open government for a diverse population.* Open government is a relational issue and its design should fit patterns of (potential) use. The capacities and needs of users need to be analyzed and these analyses can form the basis for a rich communication strategy. This communication strategy needs to facilitate active citizenship in a diverse population. Just as this can result in a variation of opportunities for voice – from open meetings to e-mail feedback – it should also result in variation in the opportunities for vision – from full and complicated datasets to easy to use interfaces.
- *Design open government for direct and indirect effects.* Some researchers argue that openness does not have any effect if opportunities are not being used. This argument is too simple. Researchers should acknowledge that openness can have direct and indirect effects: opportunities for vision and voice may have effects even if nobody uses these opportunities. The fact that citizens can have access to information and decision-making may already influence government processes. The evaluation and subsequent optimization of open government should acknowledge the variety in effects and the various relationships between vision and voice.
- *Design open government acknowledging a variety in desirables.* Legal scientists tend to focus on substantive arguments for openness whereas social scientists are generally more interested in functional arguments. Some social scientists focus on issues of trust and legitimacy whereas others highlight efficiency and effectiveness. A multidisciplinary approach should acknowledge the variety in desirables. A substantive approach may lead to ignoring effects of openness whereas a functional approach may fail to acknowledge substantive reasoning about openness. Open government is to be designed and optimized for variety in desirables.
- *Design for continuous learning about effects and side-effects.* A variety of negative side-effects has been mentioned in the literature. Governments should acknowledge these side-effects and should not only analyze whether openness delivers its promise. The variety of insights from the literature can be used for a nuanced appreciation of the effects of openness. The risk of an undermining relationship between vision and voice needs to be acknowledged as a prerequisite to

designing more synergistic relations between transparency and participation. Governments should continuously learn about the effects and side-effects of open government so as to optimize its design.

These lessons form important building blocks for an agenda for empirical research into open government. This research will first need to be *descriptive* in the sense that empirical research can show to what extent we find synergistic, complementary and undermining relationships between transparency and participation and whether opportunities offered by open government are actually used by a diverse population. Second, this research needs to be *evaluative* by assessing the direct and indirect effects of open government in terms of desirables and perverse effects. Third, the research needs to be *prescriptive* in nature by developing learning processes for government which they can apply to develop forms of open government that maximize positive effects and minimize negative effects.

The integration of vision and voice is both challenging and promising. A diversified approach to the design and study of open government will be more fruitful than simply understanding it as the provision of public information. Open government is much too important to leave it to the 'techies': scientists and practitioners with a background in law, economics, political science and public administration should get involved and use their disciplinary knowledge to build sound connections between vision and voice that facilitate active citizenship.

Notes

1. Technology may facilitate open government but it also creates new issues. Lessig (1999) eloquently discusses the question whether government code should be open to enable public scrutiny. Lessig focuses our attention on the transparency of the machinery of government.
2. Open government also refers to the idea of facilitating new initiatives in society by providing open data to society. This could lead to new collaborations between societal actors and between government and society (Lathrop and Ruma, 2010a). Government could even be conceptualized as a 'platform' instead of an actor (O'Reilly, 2010). This line of thinking is important but not directly connected to theories about public control and democracy. We acknowledge the importance of this meaning of open government but focus our argument on the relation between open government and citizen influence on government.
3. To enhance our understanding of what open government is, one might also ask what open government is not. It seems obvious that the opposite of openness is secrecy. Government decision-making that is not open is carried out behind closed doors. Julia Black (1997: 476) states: '[Transparency] is contrasted with opaque policy measures, where it is hard to discover who takes the decisions, what they are, and who gains and who loses.' A more sophisticated analysis, however, shows that government behind closed doors is not necessarily secret to everybody: a selective group of actors takes part in the decision-making process. This indicates that openness and secrecy are at different

positions on a scale of openness: general openness refers to access to decision-making arenas or documents for the general public; secrecy refers to access to a selective group of actors (Pozen, 2010). In the governance literature (e.g., Klijn et al., 2008) closedness is mentioned as the opposite of openness. They define these dimensions as wide access to other actors or restricted access. Closedness has a more neutral meaning: secrecy refers to deliberately hiding something on the basis of bad intentions and can hence be regarded as a specific form of closedness. Nearly all governments employ forms of closedness (Prat, 2005).

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