Utilization Cases of Open Data Albania

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Abstract. In this paper, we describe Open Data Albania (ODA) project and concrete cases of open data utilization. ODA aims at providing open datasets of valuable information which can be structured, analyzed and presented in different forms leading to intuitive knowledge representations. Besides the datasets, the project has also produced analytical studies based on the data and insightful visualizations to make the knowledge understandable and easy to utilize by different communities.

The platform where the data is published online is the most prominent one for open data in Albania and very popular between the journalists, who are continuously using data from ODA to provide the public with information on different social-economic aspects. In many cases, the project has been used in direct advocacy initiatives. In this paper, we described a set of cases where the data is utilized by different groups, such as government institutions, NGOs, media, and academia.

1 Open Data Albania Project

Open Data Albania (ODA) is an ongoing project implemented by the Albanian Institute of Science, which is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization established in 2011 Albania. The mission of AIS is to promote research activities that offer solutions to socio-economic problems, increase transparency and strengthen civic engagement.

Since its beginning and continuing in the present year, the institute has successfully executed Open Data Albania as its most prominent project on transparency through Open Data usability in the country. It has accomplished to publish hundreds of datasets in open data formats, deliver more than 300 analyses and studies on socio-economic topics, and launch numerous activities with the goal of creating an Open Data movement. Journalists, students, and civil society activists not only have profited from it, but also became part of the activities establishing in this way a form of eParticipation network. Through its various projects aimed at openness, transparency, accountability, and citizen participation, AIS has provided the public with:

- Open data sets, research studies and analyses published in the Open Data Albania[2] platform [1, 2]
- Increased accountability through information about how taxpayers' money are collected and spent via a Tax Calculator[3]

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[2] http://open.data.al

- Information about the clients of every state institution through [Treasury Monitoring](http://spending.data.al/en/treasury/index)[4] including total amounts of expenditures, and transactions
- Information and increased understanding of electoral spending processes through the [Electoral Spending Albania](http://open.data.al/sq/lajme/kat/kid/82/titulli/Shpenzime%20Elektorale%202013)[5] project
- Tools for easier analysis and verification of the amendments to the annual state budget through [Money Mapping](http://spending.data.al/en/openspending/treemap#year:2013/lang:en/budgettype:plan)[6]

The main concern on the reusability of public data in Albania is the presentation of datasets from the public offices. Data, statistics and other primary content are rarely found in a reusable format that could be stored and analyzed. During the implementation the ODA project, additional work is performed in many cases to extract data from public reports. The sources for the media are primary institutions (Government, Ministries etc.), Albanian secondary public institutions (Municipalities, Local Government Institutions, etc.) and foreign organizations such as OSCE, UNICEF, UNDP, USAID, etc.

1.1 Open Spending Albania

Open Spending Albania is a subproject of ODA, which has established a platform [7]consisting of five new applications, which provide information through some user-friendly tools. These applications include: MoneyMapping, DailyBread, Fund Diversion, Economic Damage, and State Treasury Monitoring. The Albanian public is empowered through this platform with exhaustive information about everything related with their tax and public money. This platform has already had a very positive impact even on social and political processes, like participatory budgeting and accountability.

Thanks to several years of work and coordination among the civil society and the public administration in the framework of OGP, Open Data Albania managed to develop an application for monitoring the state treasury. During 2012 and 2013, AIS collected carefully all the treasure transaction data. In order to access the data, which risked of being censured, ODA exercised public pressure through the media and organizations engaged in protecting the right to information. Finally, the Albanian state budget is open, and our application offers some information filters based on: how public administration spends the Money; where do the funds go; how much is paid for different services; how much Money specific companies receive from specific institutions over a certain period of time; how much Money was spent in a short period of time.

3 Open Data Utilization Cases

The data and articles of the Open Data Albania project are published in the Web platform, which is online since January 8th, 2011. The scope of ODA is *inclusive* and *multi-thematic*, releasing data and analyses from many sectors and branches of the economy

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[3] http://spending.data.al/en/openspending/dailybread
[4] http://spending.data.al/en/treasury/index
[5] http://open.data.al/sq/lajme/kat/kid/82/titulli/Shpenzime%20Elektorale%202013
[6] http://spending.data.al/en/openspending/treemap#year:2013/lang:en/budgettype:plan
[7] http://spending.data.al

extending to phenomena such as the poverty level, standard of living, the demographic trend, crime and social issues.

In order to disseminate the data and analytical findings, ODA has targeted the media, academia and the general public not only with the online platform, but also through various channels, such as workshops with journalists, activities (datathons, hackathons, workshops) with the academic community comprising lecturers and students, and various online social networks.

3.1 Media

AIS has established a close and high-quality collaboration with the media inside and outside the country. The data published by ODA are referred in the front pages of newspapers and headlines of news editions. Every domestic media organization has published or quoted at least once the reports released in the Open Data Albania or Spending Data Albania platforms. The work of ODA has continuously enriched with arguments and recommendations many public debates in radio and television. The data have also been reflected in the international media, particularly in those with broader audience in the Western Balkans, e.g. Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). The moderators of the public debate or public information channels regularly voice their request for more information and findings to be delivered in the form of reports.

3.1 Government Institutions

The data and respective analytical articles released by ODA have been used by the parliamentary committees to drive legal changes on education and health. In April 2012, ODA released data related to 580 institutions of private primary education. Simple visualizations highlighted that 35 of these institutions were operating without proper licensing. Based on such data, later also disseminated in the media, the parliamentary committee for education called in a special assembly the Albanian Vice-minister of Education at that time. The result of many discussions and work of the committee resulted in the identification of the problem with the law for licensing the educational institutes in Albania and the establishment of amendments to the law.

3.2 Non-government Organizations

ODA has provided support to individuals or NGOs involved in advocacy by releasing datasets and factual knowledge to challenge commonly accepted facts in various policy fields. Among others, the following NGOs have used ODA indicators in their civil actions:

Case 1. The Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation on their 2011 report to OSCE/ODIHR Albania entitled "The two-month expedition of reconciliation missionaries during the election campaign of Local Elections in Albania" quote indicators pub-

lished by Open Data Albania on certain decisions reached by the Albanian Courts in cases of murder motivated by blood feuds. The report quotes also other indicators from our project in relation to justice and social issues.

Case 2. ODA has continuously released datasets related to infant mortality rates in Albania, comparing those to the data from other countries in the region. The data and related articles were further published in the written and online media in Albania. This incentivized citizens' reaction and initiated civic movements. In March 2011, the Eurosocialist Youth´s Forum in cooperation with the union of the students of the Faculty of Medicine organized a protest in front of the building of the prime minister. After this protest, the Albanian Ministry of Health and Albanian Institute of Statistics INSTAT were not publishing anymore data on infant mortality rates. An NGO in Albania, Res Publika, driven by the team of ODA initiated a legal process, demanding the Ministry of Health to fulfill its legal duty of information access related to the activity of the institution and the public health.

Case 3. The Bureau of Consumer Protection[8] driven by the datasets published by ODA on the Cereal Price Index has organized a round table with the Coalition for the Consumers Protection, which is a union of more than 35 NGOs. The meeting was held on March 4th 2011 and a set of proposals were created and addressed to the Government of Albania. We are following with interest the proposal entitled „Request for publication of governmental statistical data on the price index of cereals, fuels and oil". Datasets and articles published by ODA were used as examples during this round table.

Case 4. The Foundation for Economic Freedom (Albanian: Fondacioni per Liri Ekonomike) organized in 2011 a presentation themed "Open Data Albania – Corruption in Statistics" with an audience of the Network of Young Academics. The audience was composed mainly by professors in the economic and social sciences faculties in different Albanian Universities. The event took place in the European University of Tirana and one of the team members of ODA has referred on the methodology and the characteristics of Open Data.

Case 5. The Club of Journalists for Healthcare[9] has organized two conferences in 2010 and 2011 requesting transparency on healthcare reforms in Albania. They have consistently used data released by ODA in their actions for more transparency in the healthcare sector. The indicators and visualizations published by ODA were published on several occasions in their website and their newspaper "Shendeti" (Health). Based on the data published by ODA related to the healthcare budget, journalists of this union interviewed the former Albanian Minister of Healthcare, Mr. Petri Vasili, and other policy decision-makers requesting more attention to this sector, as well as a higher budget and finances.

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[8] http://www.konsumatori.org

[9] http://www.kgsh.org

3.4 Academia

Open Data Albania has been referred in scientific works from students of different universities in Albania. At least four master´s theses have been based on the data and statistical indicators released by ODA. The datasets have also been used in students' hackathons that have been yearly organized by AIS under topics of open data utilization.

4. Summary

In this position paper, we described the work done in the project Open Data Albania to provide open datasets of valuable information which can be structured, analyzed and presented in different forms leading to intuitive knowledge representation. Besides the datasets, the project has also produced analytical studies based on the datasets and insightful visualization to make the knowledge understandable and easy to utilize be different communities.

The platform where the data is published online is the most prominent one in Albania and very popular between the journalists, who are constantly using information from ODA to provide the public with information on different social-economic aspects. In many cases, the project has been used in direct advocacy against the government. In this paper, we described a set of cases when the data is utilized by different groups, such as government institutions, NGOs, and academia.

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